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CompeteColumbus looks for ways to retain college students

CompeteColumbus, an economic development group, is launching an effort to persuade Central Ohio college students to stay in the region in response to a consultant's research showing that just 13 percent of area college students have interned in the region and 26 percent plan to leave after graduation.

CompeteColumbus was established three years ago by the [ColumbusChamber](#) and the [Columbus Partnership](#), a group of CEOs from the area's largest companies.

The group hired Collegia of Wellesley, Mass., on a two-year, \$100,000 contract to survey students at seven Central Ohio colleges as part of the organization's goal to boost tourism, entertainment and the arts. The research firm has helped cities such as Boston and Philadelphia market options for play and work through magazines and Web sites aimed at local college students.

Seventeen Northeast Ohio schools banded together in 2005 to hire Collegia, which created college360.org with events calendars, student discounts and internship listings.

Among survey results for Central Ohio released Wednesday:

- Thirty percent of respondents are Central Ohio natives; 54 percent are from elsewhere in Ohio.
- The students ranked Columbus high for its restaurants, shopping, diversity, racial tolerance and cultural offerings. They looked less favorably on internships, job prospects, affordability, public transportation and activities for people younger than 21.
- Thirty-one percent said they intend to stay in the region after graduating, while 43 percent were undecided.
- Of those planning to leave, half said they have better job prospects elsewhere. Other reasons to leave included graduate school and the desire to live in a bigger city.

Most responses were from students at [Ohio State University](#), [Columbus College of Art and Design](#) and [Otterbein College](#).

"Given the number of world-class companies with headquarters in the region, its very large and diverse college student population, and fantastic cultural and entertainment offerings, Columbus

has all the right ingredients necessary to become the Austin, Portland or Boulder of the Midwest," Collegia President Todd Hoffman said in a news release. "This should be the place new college graduates and ambitious young professionals flock to."

The executive committee of CompeteColumbus was to meet Thursday to consider whether and how to pursue the report's recommendations, such as fostering connections between students and businesses, and improving perceptions of the city.

The efforts by CompeteColumbus complement those of the ColumbusChamber, which hired its own consultant to advise city leaders on retaining young professionals and developed a Web site to help students find internships, spokeswoman Susan Merryman said. The internship tool could be incorporated into a college student Web site if CompeteColumbus decides to follow the Northeast Ohio example, she said.

"Our goal is to help our businesses find the work force they need," she said. "We have a very large pool of talent right in the community."

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