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## The Bay State's brain drain

Once-steady flow of college students into Mass. is slowing

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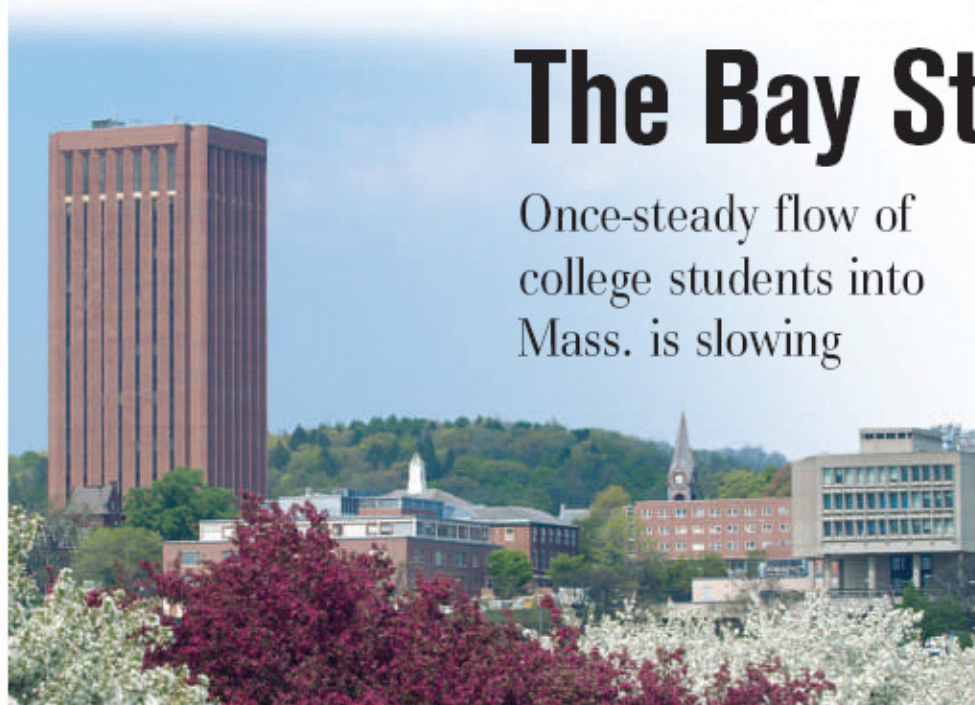
Massachusetts has long prided itself on being America's classroom, a state that attracts college students the way Florida attracts sun worshipers. But that pride rests on an increasingly shaky reality: Not only are fewer students coming here, but more of its sons and daughters are leaving for their diplomas.

No need to panic just yet. Massachusetts' net migration — students coming in, minus the students going out — was a healthy 4,678 in 2004, making it the sixth biggest net importer of students, after Pennsylvania, Florida, North Carolina, Washington, D.C., and Indiana. But less than a decade ago, the state was No. 1, netting twice as many students.

**Losing ground: University of Massachusetts-Amherst, part of a system that loses students to other states.**

That precipitous slippage is particularly worrisome because it coincided

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# MIGRATE: Massachusetts losing ground as a student hotbed

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with a boom in the number of high school graduates, in New England and the rest of the country. When that boom ends a few years from now, the situation could get ugly — not only for some struggling institutions, but for the region's economy.

"Obviously there's a war for talent going on in the country, and if you get somebody to come as a college student, you have a chance to keep them as a highly educated young adult. And that's the coin of the realm," said **Paul Grogan**, president and CEO of **The Boston Foundation**. "This is all we have — talented people and the kinds of institutions that draw them and train them. And if we start to lose out on this, we're in deep trouble."

The state's public colleges and universities have long lost more students to other state's public colleges than they have gained: In 2004, the public sector's net loss was 2,299, ranking it 46th out of the 50 states, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. But the state's much larger private sector, which has

traditionally accounted for the state's magnetism, is stumbling: The net for Massachusetts' private schools has dropped 27 percent since 1996, the biggest drop in the country.

Part of the explanation is simply demographic. More children are growing up in the Sun Belt and aren't inclined to travel thousands of miles — and endure snowy winters — to study here.

At the same time, some states have bolstered their public higher education systems, an investment that's beginning to show some real returns. State universities that were once safety schools are now attractive options, especially when the average price at public universities is \$12,127 a year, compared to \$29,026 at private universities. Some states, such as Georgia, even give out scholarships for students who stay close to home.

Of course, **Harvard University**, the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology** and **Tufts University** aren't hurting for students, and likely never will. But the drop in the state's net migration reflects weakness in the second- and third-tier schools.

"Because we have so many smaller,

private colleges in Massachusetts, those colleges are just going to wash away," said **Todd Hoffman**, a higher education marketing consultant in Wellesley.

Hoffman, who was hired by tourism officials and university leaders in Philadelphia in 2000 to promote that city to prospective students, said too many college leaders still believe Boston sells itself as the quintessential college town.

"The best way to lose your lead is to not stay in the public eye," he said. "I'd say the issue in Massachusetts is we don't feel enough pain."

Others, however, believe it will take significant public spending to arrest — if not reverse — the downward trend.

The lobby for Massachusetts' private colleges believes the answer is more financial aid for students who stay here. The top five net importers of students have all increased need-based aid to their students during the past five years, while Massachusetts decreased aid by 22 percent, said **Richard Doherty**, president and CEO of the **Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts**.

**Stephen Tocco**, who oversees the state's public sector as chairman of the **Massachusetts Board of Higher Education**, would prefer to focus on lowering tuition and fees at the University of Massachusetts. Tuition and fees at the

flagship Amherst campus are \$9,595, compared to a national average of \$5,491 in 2005-06.

"Those tuitions and fees have crept too high, and they're beginning to affect decisions," he said.

But Tocco said he isn't sure it's worthwhile to woo out-of-staters or convince native college-bound students to stay. He prefers to focus on Massachusetts residents who might not pursue a degree in the first place, because if they do, they would likely get it here — and stay in the state after graduation.

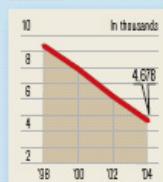
"We're not getting enough of them into the system," he said.

**University of Massachusetts President Jack Wilson** acknowledges that the five-campus system has yet to match the venerable reputations of public systems in North Carolina and Michigan, and none of its campuses have created the "buzz" of up-and-coming public institutions like the **University of California-San Diego**. But he believes other signs point toward a brighter future for UMass: Applications were up 12 percent this year, and SAT scores of applicants "are way up."

"The university is getting all the outstanding students we can possibly educate," he said.

## MASS. MIGRATION

Bay State's net of college freshmen



Source: Postsecondary Education Opportunity