



## Don't Leave Us This Way



*LearnHere. LiveHere.*

*by Jonas Raab*

Philadelphia is a college town by any comparison, but, compare us with Boston, and we are not necessarily a town of college graduates. There are 83 colleges in the Philadelphia area with more than 300,000 students. Yet, only 29 percent of these who are from elsewhere choose to stay here after graduation. In Boston, that figure jumps to 42 percent. According to a recent survey conducted by the Knowledge Industry Partnership of Philadelphia titled "Should I Stay or Should I Go," only 29 percent of the adult workforce in the city has a college education, compared with the 40 percent average that appears in other competitive cities.

So what does Boston have that Philadelphia does not? Graduates go where they can find a job and where they feel at home. They want jobs and an active social life. Philadelphia has both, yet there seems to be a general disconnect between students at Philadelphia area colleges and the city. After all, Philadelphia keeps more than half of the graduates who are originally from the area. Those who are in touch with and know the city stay. By contrast, any visitor to Boston can note that students in general are in touch with the city.

Alex Popp, a 2003 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, now lives in Dallas. He says that in order for him to move back to the city he would "have to know more about different aspects of Philly." During his four years here, Alex, like many others, did not develop a direct connection with Philadelphia.

It is the existence of these separate worlds — the city and universities and colleges — that hurts Philadelphia. These worlds must be meshed into one.

## Why do we want them?

So what can recent graduates bring to the city that another group cannot, besides a youthful feel? While businesses attract youth, the flow also goes the other way. Decisions to establish offices often depend on an ample supply of knowledge capital in the region.

Young, educated people are also much more likely to start their businesses of their own.

Todd Hoffman, president of Collegia, a Boston-based company that helps connect colleges and communities, makes a good point: "The goal in Philly is not to create other people's workforce." We do not want to supply other cities with a vibrant young workforce, we want to keep them here.

In Boston, notes Hoffman, if you add up the revenue from businesses started by MIT graduates alone, you come up with a number that would rival Denmark as the 18th largest economy in the world.

## What do we have to offer?

Groups such as the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corp. (GPTMC) are making notable strides to bridge the gap between student and city. Several organizations in the public and private sectors have formed the Knowledge Industry Partnership (KIP). KIP is designed not only to retain graduates but to attract more students to Philadelphia-area colleges and get the students attached to the city while in school.

Under the umbrella of the "One Big Campus" program: Campus Visit, Campus Philly and Career Philly each help students connect with the city at different points in their college life. For example, Career Philly helps students get internships while at school that may lead to a job in the area, opening lines of communication between prospective employers and the graduate base.

According to a recent survey conducted by the Pennsylvania Economy League, 90 percent of employers said that they had hired interns. More than a convenience of financial security for graduating seniors, these internships-turned-jobs are helping students establish roots and build a new home.

## What more can be done?

The most important thing is to make sure that students know about the programs at their disposal. Most students I spoke to had never heard of them. As a recent college graduate myself, I hadn't.

Much is said about Philadelphia's many attributes in the arts, its efforts to lower the oppressive wage tax, its affordable rental properties and its more intimate size.

Annette Mattei of the Pennsylvania Economy League, a member of the KIP, has this to say on this issue: In Philly, "you're a big fish in a small lake."

This is certainly true. But like any other effort, this requires not only the resources but the means to reach the target audience. And of the many graduates interviewed for this piece, only one knew that Philadelphia had such efforts under way. What's more, many students come to Philadelphia expecting to leave. This is an obstacle for which a solution must be found.

The key is to make the students feel like Philadelphia is their home — that there is already a place and a community for them here. Using recent college graduates as active spokespeople, bringing some major players from regional companies to the table in a visible and consistent fashion, and using social Philadelphia as a backdrop would be a marked improvement over career or internship fairs and would draw students into the downtown area, where few have the courage to wander. If the key is community, let students feel that they are already a part of this community before they graduate.

## **How Boston Does It**

Boston has been able to retain non-native graduates. About 42 percent of non-native students at Boston area colleges choose Boston as the place to start their professional lives.

Todd Hoffman, president of Collegia, a Boston-based company that helps connect colleges and communities, has done a lot of work with colleges and students. Boston has "taken for granted the natural flow of students and graduates to the region," he says.

And what effect have the graduates in Boston had on the city?

Approximately 300 businesses have been started in Boston by MIT graduates, notes Hoffman. This equals half of all businesses founded by MIT graduates and includes companies such as Bose, IDG and Teradyne.

According to the "Should I Stay or Should I Go" regional survey conducted by the Knowledge Industry Partnership (KIP), if Philadelphia, like Boston, were to retain four out of every 10 non-native graduates, it would result in 2,400 additional "knowledge" (read: educated) workers each year.

## **Why is Boston so successful?**

"Part of it," Hoffman states, "is that [students] get involved with businesses during their academic career. This takes them off the playing field." This is extremely important.

For example, the founder of International Data Group (IDG), a technology media, research and event company based in Boston, is from Philadelphia, but left the area to found his business elsewhere.

Boston is also a lot smaller geographically than Philadelphia, but has many colleges crammed into this area. This makes the students much more visible. It pushes them off campus and into the streets, cafes, restaurants and bars. They become attached to Boston. The young atmosphere also helps attract more students and young professionals to the region. Young

people want to be around other young people. There is really no need to market Boston to them.

"Night life, music scene, it's built around that. Young people want to congregate. Urban areas have a very vibrant core," says Hoffman.

Not only does the influx of college students and graduates help Boston's economy, he says, but about \$300 million is injected each year from people who are just visiting Boston either for graduation or visiting colleges.

Boston students get connected to internships, they partner with professors to start businesses, and, most importantly, they stay after they graduate because they are already cemented to the city.

Hoffman is working with the KIP in Philadelphia to help Philly accomplish all that seems to come naturally to Boston.

"We have to lead students to a set of beliefs that this is where they want to be, that this is where the opportunities are, that they don't need to leave the region for quality of life," he says. "If they believe that to be true, they are more likely to stay."