

## Big cities pump out university grads: study

Urban residents earn degrees at higher rate than rural dwellers

**Andrew Thomson**

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In real estate as in higher education, location matters.

A new Statistics Canada report shows that the country's largest cities continue to collect university graduates at a higher rate compared to smaller rural areas. Cities have long attracted university graduates from outlying regions, but according to data gleaned from the 1996 and 2001 censuses, urban residents are earning post-secondary degrees at a higher rate than rural residents. In 2001, a young person from an urban centre was twice as likely to earn a degree as their rural counterpart.

An average of seven per cent of Canada's rural population had a university degree that year, compared to about 10 per cent in smaller urban areas, 15 per cent in larger cities, and 20 per cent in the country's largest metropolitan areas. According to the 2006 census, nearly 30 per cent of adults in Ottawa-Gatineau have a university degree.

"If you're in a large city, there's typically a lot of demand for specialized skills," said Mark Brown, an analyst with Statistics Canada, citing recent studies on the relationship between education and economic growth.

Research suggests that cities with a better-educated population experience stronger economic growth, and that a major factor in explaining wage disparities between urban and rural areas is the concentration of educated workers and investments in education.

Richard Florida, an urban expert at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, recently told the Citizen that "Ottawa is probably the most creative of Canada's metropolitan regions," rich in technology, tolerance, and talent.

"In many ways, it's like Washington, D.C.," Mr. Florida said. "It has not only the government and managerial work and consultancy, but it also has this very large high-tech sector. It has a large gay and lesbian community. It has a lot of immigrants and big ethnic communities. That gives it a little bit more energy."

His colleague, Kevin Stolarick, cautioned that advanced degrees are not enough to chart this type of knowledge economy.

"When you measure degree holders you don't get the Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Michael Dells of the world, because they all dropped out of college," Mr. Stolarick said yesterday from Toronto, where he is research director at the Rotman School's Martin Prosperity Institute.

Statistics Canada reports that imports from smaller rural and urban areas account for only eight per cent of new degree holders in larger cities. Still, Mr. Stolarick said such migration can mean significant losses for the communities left behind.

"It reminded me of the tremendous impact that losing even 50 people with university degrees can have on a place like Thunder Bay or Peterborough," he said.

"It's more than a drop in the bucket."

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