

Demographic Demise

The Declining Young Adult Population in New England

ROSS GITTELL

Young adult workers provide businesses with the dynamic labor force and fresh ideas they need to innovate and grow. With their contributions to cultural, intellectual and social life, young adults also make New England a vibrant and interesting place to live. And young families support local schools and demand a strong educational system. Yet New England is losing this young adult population.

Data recently made available by the U.S. Census American Community Survey suggest a troubled demographic profile for the New England states. The region's overall population has grown less than the U.S. average over the past 15 years, increasing by just 8 percent from 1990 to 2004, compared with 18 percent nationally. Though the region's growth lags the national average for all age levels, the most alarming change is in the 25- to-34-year-old group. The population of this cohort, which today we would consider "young adults," declined by nearly 25 percent in New England from 1990 to 2004. This compares with a national average decline of 7 percent and contrasts sharply with the significant growth of more than 10 percent in the young adult population in seven Mountain, Northwest and Southeast states over the same period.

All six New England states rank among the bottom 10 nationally in population change in this important group and all have lost one-fifth or more of their young adult populations. (See Figure 1.)

This loss of young adults has occurred throughout New England. Of the 67 counties in New England, every one except tiny Nantucket County in Massachusetts experienced some decline in the young adult cohort. (See Figure 2.)

The decline in New England's young adult population, and the nation's, can be attributed partly to the aging of the large baby boom population, those born between 1946 and 1964. In 1990, more than half of New England baby boomers were in the age 25-to-34 cohort. By 2004, these baby boomers were no longer young adults.

But why is the distribution of the young adult age cohort so unequal across regions—growing by 20 percent to 60 percent in some of the Mountain, Northwest and Southeastern States while declining at double-digit rates in New England?

The dramatic differences suggest that New England is not an "attractive" place to live and work for young adults, including many of the U.S. and foreign students

who continue to flock to the region for college. Indeed, while New England accounts for nearly 6 percent of U.S. full-time college enrollment, more than 6 percent of bachelor's degrees granted and more than 7 percent of graduate degrees granted, the region is home to just 4.5 percent of the nation's 25- to 34-year-olds—an even smaller share than its 4.7 percent of total U.S. population.

Figure 1
States with the Largest Percentage Gains and Declines in Young Adult Population

Rank	State	1990-2004 Percentage Change Ages 25-34	2004 Population Ages 25-34
1	Nevada	60%	354,894
2	Utah	45%	399,210
3	Arizona	31%	830,117
4	Idaho	21%	184,610
5	Colorado	17%	717,277
6	Georgia	16%	1,363,671
7	Oregon	12%	505,997
8	North Carolina	9%	1,241,888
9	Texas	8%	3,335,725
10	Tennessee	2%	828,111
United States		-7%	40,031,938
41	Rhode Island	-20%	139,077
42	Massachusetts	-20%	880,404
43	Maryland	-21%	710,846
44	North Dakota	-23%	80,531
45	Pennsylvania	-23%	1,471,113
46	Vermont	-27%	69,580
47	New Hampshire	-27%	148,953
48	Alaska	-28%	81,152
49	Maine	-29%	145,686
50	Connecticut	-30%	409,393

Figure 2
Bottom 10 New England Counties in Population Growth for Ages 25-34, 1990-2004

County Name	State	1990-2004 Percentage Change for Ages 25-34
Aroostook	Maine	-52%
Windham	Vt.	-41%
Newport	R.I.	-41%
Piscataquis	Maine	-40%
Bennington	Vt.	-38%
Rutland	Vt.	-38%
Rockingham	N.H.	-38%
Coos	N.H.	-38%
Windsor	Vt.	-37%
Sagadahoc	Maine	-36%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; <http://www.census.gov/popest/datasets.html>

To understand what's at stake, consider two recent University of New Hampshire graduates. Alexis Dascoulias graduated with a bachelor's degree in Theater Education in 1995 and is now a certified speech and drama teacher. She headed the Drama Department at the Dover, N.H., high school for seven years where she taught theatre arts, public speaking and English. Dascoulias is now the education director for the Seacoast Repertory Theatre's Portsmouth Academy of Performing Arts program. She has directed, produced, taught and performed throughout the Seacoast area. Eric Esposito, a 1999 graduate, is a founding principal of an online, customized marketing company in Manchester called SilverTech. He is responsible for all technology initiatives, including research and development, security, infrastructure management, custom application architecture and development and hosting. Esposito's company has donated more than \$500,000 in in-kind services to nonprofits and community groups. Prior to joining SilverTech, he designed and developed operating systems for NASA-funded projects as part of the CAT-SAT Satellite Project.

Dascoulias and Esposito exemplify the young adults who fill one-third of New England information technology, science, arts, design and entertainment industry jobs. Still, too many of their peers are slipping away from the region after earning their college degrees. In 2003,

the Boston Chamber of Commerce and the Boston Consulting Group surveyed more than 2,000 area college graduates and found that half of them leave the area after receiving their degrees. A recent University System of New Hampshire analysis of graduates yielded similar results.

In the Chamber survey, 80 percent of college graduates who left Boston indicated that they did not have strong ties to other areas but that the attractions and opportunities were greater elsewhere. Among specific reasons graduates leave, the report cites the quality of job opportunities, the connections between employers and soon-to-be graduates, the affordability of the region (particularly of housing), and the "experiences" offered in the region, including exposure to diversity and options for entertainment and socializing.

New England colleges and universities can act on several of these fronts, particularly on the connections between employers and soon-to-be-graduates. More opportunities for internships and improved placement services can help stem the out-migration of graduates. Colleges can also help alumni who do stay in the region to connect to important social and career networks. Colleges can open their doors and contribute to the quality and diversity of cultural and social experiences available to not only their own alumni but also the graduates of other institutions. And colleges can work

with business groups and others to better market the region to students, recent graduates and young alumni.

Of course, there are also leakages in the pipeline to higher education within New England. Vermont and Maine high school graduates matriculate to college at below-average rates, while Rhode Island and New Hampshire are only about average. Moreover, 82 percent of high school graduates nationally matriculate at colleges in their home states. In the New England states, fewer than 70 percent do, and Vermont, New Hampshire and Connecticut see higher percentages of high school graduates leave their states for college than any other states in the country.

In addition to providing a critical pool of hard-working entry-level and specially skilled workers for technology and creative industries, young workers often bring fresh ideas and energy to the workplace. They make New England more interesting

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and dynamic and they can be magnets that attract others, young and old, to visit and live in the region. Without more of them, New England will struggle to achieve significant employment growth and new business development.

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Pushing Plastic

JOHN H. HUMPHREY

As they send their teenage kids off to college in the fall, parents will probably counsel them on the dangers of accepting credit card offers and the risks inherent in credit card debt. Most probably assume that the university will be their ally in warning students about such dangers. But instead, most universities actually try to get their own students to take out a credit card. The Massachusetts state treasurer, who has launched a "Caution with Credit" program for students, estimates that 80 percent of schools do this.

Within the first year of our son's enrollment at Brandeis University, he received at home the following letter written and signed by the president of the Alumni Association:

"Dear Graham, Imagine the convenience of being able to purchase supplies for your classes, without worrying about carrying a lot of cash. You could pay school fees—or get quick cash in an emergency—and put it on one easy-to-use account. That's the kind of flexibility every student can appreciate, and it can be yours with the Brandeis University credit card! This unique financial tool can help you save money, simplify your life, build a good credit history, and show your pride every time you make a purchase."

A postscript adds that the credit card issuer helps support Brandeis with every account opened and for every purchase made with the card.

The Brandeis credit card is just like any other (but it has a nice picture of the university on the front). In 2006, the interest rate (APR) for most students was 15.99 percent, but in 2007 it was raised to 19.24 percent. If the student is late on a single payment, the APR switches to 25 percent and can't be lowered again. The fee for a late payment is up to \$35. But surely a teenager would never forget to pay a bill on time?

We were surprised to receive this solicitation, since our family had already taken every opportunity to opt

out of credit card solicitations. We wondered how the credit card company, Bank of America, knew our son was at that particular university and how it had obtained his personal information. Inquiries to university officials revealed that every year the university registrar gives Bank of America its database with the names and home addresses of the students. The solicitations have come twice a year.

Administrators give us a range of justifications for pushing credit cards on undergraduates, ranging from helping students "become responsible about managing their own finances" and creating good credit records, to providing a way to encourage students and graduates to stay connected to their college.

Brandeis is not alone. Brown University solicits its undergraduates twice a year in this way. It claims that it "offers credit counseling" and that the cards are "low credit limit/low balance" but carefully adds "depending on their circumstances."

As for the privacy issue, one university administrator I contacted told me that "students' personal information is not considered private unless a student formally requests that limits be placed on the categories of information that the university may choose to make available." He warned further that "not allowing the university to release their names casts [students] into total anonymity within the university's system ... they will be totally blocked from the student directory."

Happily, there are a few colleges out there still practicing old-fashioned values. Bryn Mawr and Kenyon are two colleges that do not target their own undergraduates to take out a credit card. Ironically, college administrators complain they get very little out of their "partnerships" with credit card companies. So why don't more colleges just refuse to push more debt on their students?

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