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The Vermont Legislative Research Service

<http://www.uvm.edu/~vlrs/>

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Post-Graduation Intentions of Vermont College Students

This report conveys the results of an original survey conducted by the Vermont Legislative Research Service (VLRS) that asked Vermont college students about their perceptions of Vermont as a place to live and work and their post-graduation plans. The primary incentives students identified that would get them to stay in Vermont after their graduation were more affordable housing and costs of living, financial incentives such as assistance with student loans, personal relationships, and a high paying or meaningful job.

In May 2015, the Vermont Legislative Research Service published a [report about the migration patterns of college students and recent college graduates](#). It discovered that the young, single, and college educated (YSCE) generally exhibit a net migration flow to urban areas. Specifically, larger metropolitan areas are more likely to experience a net in-migration of the YSCE population while smaller metropolitan and rural areas are more likely to experience a net out-migration.¹ Between 1995 and 2000, states with a net in-migration of the YSCE population tended to be located in the South Atlantic and West regions of the United States, whereas states with a net out-migration were found in the Midwest and Northeast.² The most important predictors of net migration patterns after college are attending school out of state,³ attending private colleges,⁴ and quality of life, as determined by the wealth of the state.⁵

¹ Ethan Hinch, Amanda Lowe, and Matthew West, *Migration Patterns of College Students and Recent College Graduates* (Vermont Legislative Research Service, 2015), 1, <http://www.uvm.edu/~vlrs/EconomicIssues/College%20Migration.pdf>.

² Hinch, Lowe, and West, *Migration Patterns of College Students and Recent College Graduates*, 1.

³ Hinch, Lowe, and West, *Migration Patterns of College Students and Recent College Graduates*, 3.

⁴ Hinch, Lowe, and West, *Migration Patterns of College Students and Recent College Graduates*, 3.

⁵ Hinch, Lowe, and West, *Migration Patterns of College Students and Recent College Graduates*, 5.

Methods

In order to obtain recent and original student input of students who currently attend Vermont universities and colleges, a survey was undertaken through a survey software tool called Qualtrics. The survey link was distributed by email and social media to students from universities and colleges throughout Vermont. As an incentive to participate, respondents were offered a chance to enter a drawing for a \$100 Visa gift card. Around 1,200 students completed the survey. The survey consisted of 28 questions, 18 of which asked about the likelihood of staying in Vermont after graduating from college and the aspects that make Vermont attractive or unattractive in terms of schooling, housing, job opportunities, culture, family, and diversity.

The survey questions used for the analysis to follow can be accessed in the appendix of this report.

The results from the demographics section of the survey showed that responses came from thirteen different universities and colleges throughout Vermont, with the schools that had the highest number of responses being Bennington College (roughly 12.5% of responses), Champlain College (roughly 42.5%), St. Michael's College (roughly 20.7%) and the University of Vermont (roughly 11.1%). Approximately 57.9% of the responses came from participants who identified as female, with 38% from male participants. In terms of race, 86.5% of the participants were white, 2% African American, and 5.6% of mixed race (or some other race not listed). Results of a question regarding how much student loan debt respondents would have upon graduation were distributed somewhat evenly across the categories: 22.9% said \$0, 28.1% said \$1-\$25,000, 27.5% said \$25,001-\$45,000, and 21.5% said above \$45,000. On a scale measuring political leanings, 66.8% of respondents were liberal leaning, 21.6% were moderate, and 11.7% conservative leaning.

Results

Figure 1 shows how Vermont is viewed by college students currently enrolled at colleges in the state. A majority of respondents considered Vermont to be a favorable place to be happy and raise a family. In terms of favorability to make a living and find a job, respondents felt that Vermont was only somewhat favorable. However, university students in Vermont overwhelmingly found Vermont to be a “not at all” favorable place to get an education.

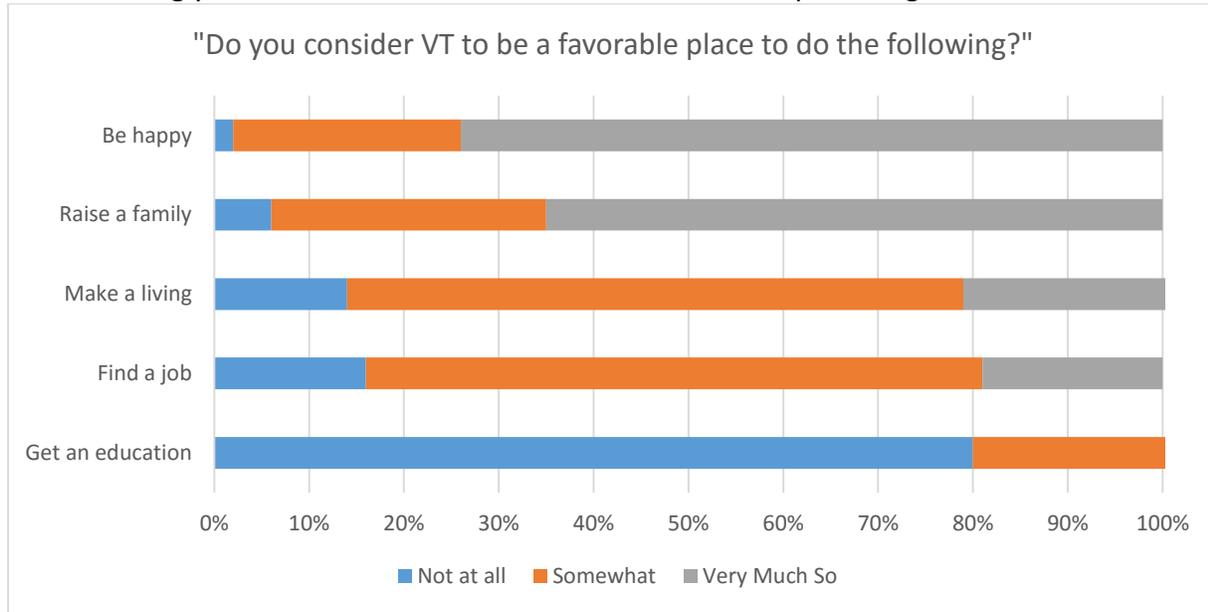


Figure 1: How Vermont is Viewed by Current College Students

Respondents used a sliding 1-10 scale to rate various “goods” Vermont provides. The results can be found in Figure 2. Not surprisingly, the highest rated good was Vermont’s natural amenities, receiving a rating over nine. The next two closest were the vibrant social scene and good political climate, both rating in the high sixes. Vermont was rated the lowest with regard to convenient transportation out of state and affordable housing, the only two categories rated under five. The remaining five goods of employment opportunities, competitive wages, good public transportation, employment opportunities in your field, and a reasonable cost of living ranged between five to five and a half.

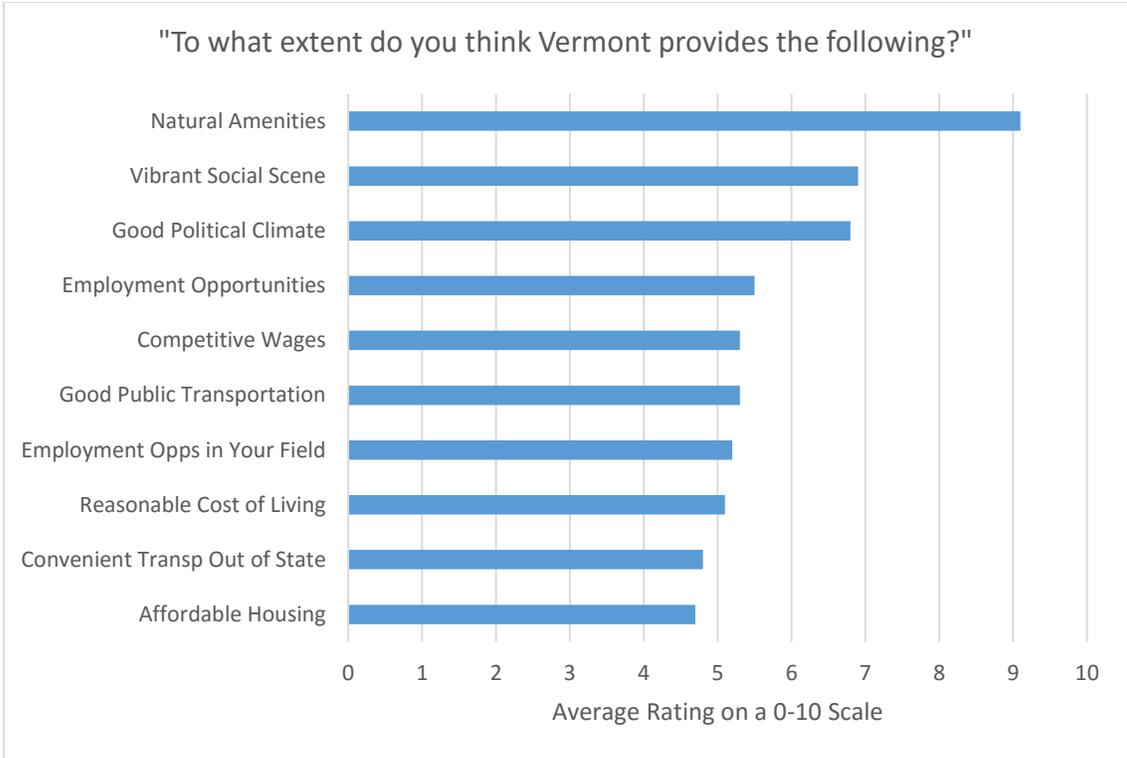


Figure 2: Respondents' Ratings of Vermont on Various Characteristics

As Figure 3 shows, survey respondents have varied plans after graduation, but almost ten percent more respondents indicated that they were very unlikely or unlikely to stay in Vermont after graduation than indicated they were very likely or likely.

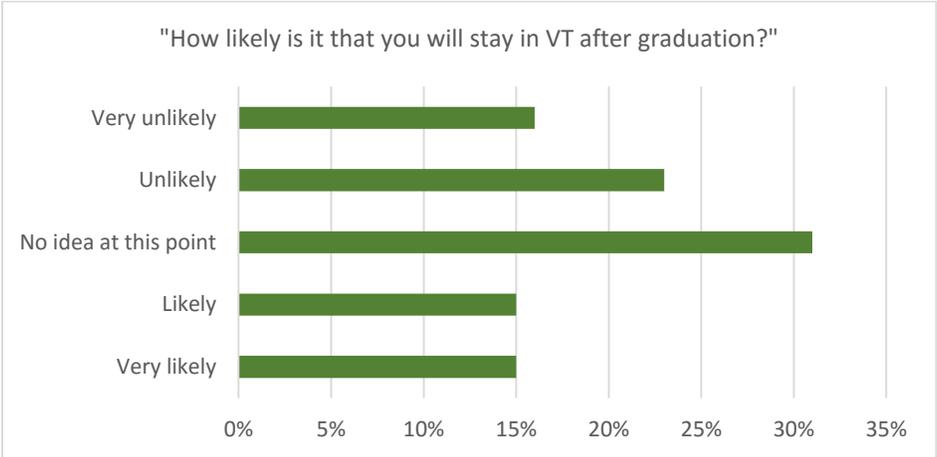


Figure 3: Likelihood of Staying in Vermont after Graduation

Respondents were presented a list of factors ranging from employment opportunities to the social and environmental climate, and asked respondents to indicate whether the factors would increase likelihood of them staying in Vermont. The results are presented in Figure 4 below. The top five factors to increase the likelihood of staying in Vermont after graduation are a high paying job, a meaningful job, a more affordable cost of living, affordable quality housing and assistance with student loans.

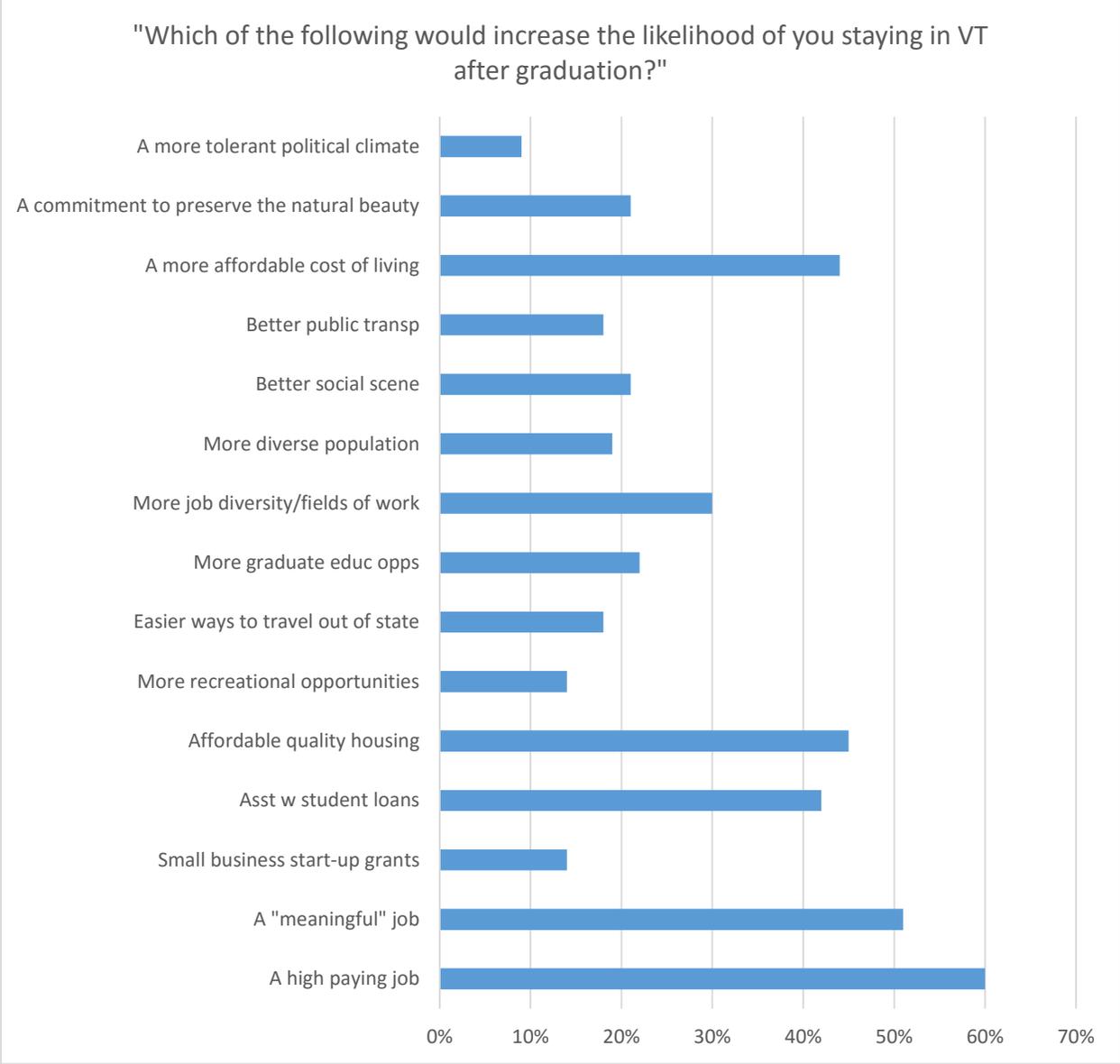


Figure 4: What Would Increase the Likelihood of Staying in Vermont

There were three statistically significant differences between public and private students. Private school students reported a greater likelihood of staying in Vermont than their public counterparts if they received assistance with student loans, a more affordable cost of living and a commitment to preserve the natural beauty of Vermont.

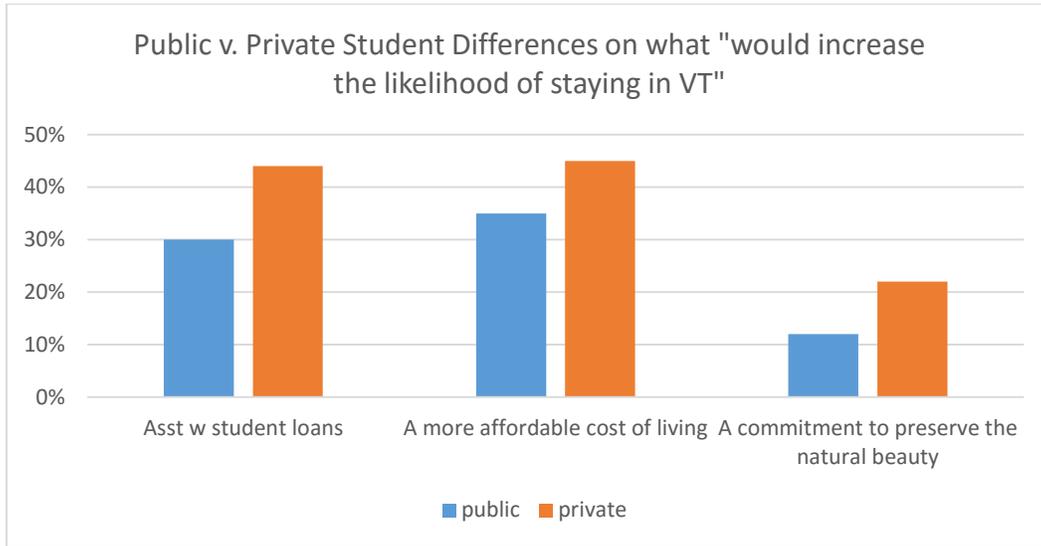


Figure 5: Public/Private College Student Differences on Factors that Would Increase Likelihood of Staying in Vermont

In Figure 6 we summarize the most common answers from three open-ended survey questions asking “What would be the one thing that would get you to stay in Vermont after graduation” and “Is there anything else that would make you want to stay in Vermont after graduation?” (Questions 15, 16 and 18 in the appendix) Figure 6 presents the data by total number of responses, but with many responses condensed into specific categories, inasmuch as the raw data was disparate because of the free response answer model. “Housing” groups together responses about improving the quality of housing stock, additional assistance for homeownership, cost of living and improving the rental experience. “Jobs” condenses responses about well paying, meaningful, and full-time jobs, as well as responses about connecting jobs with educational opportunities and universities, and developing pathways straight to careers out of college. “Financial Incentives” includes assistance with student loans, decreasing taxes, and subsidies for staying in Vermont. “Post-Graduate Education” encompasses graduate school, medical school, dental school, law school, and software related opportunities.

It is important to note that because of the survey introduction, which mentioned the survey also included questions regarding marijuana (used for a different VLRS study), that there could be a priming influence on this survey. This could be a potential explanation for the high number of responses surrounding marijuana legalization.

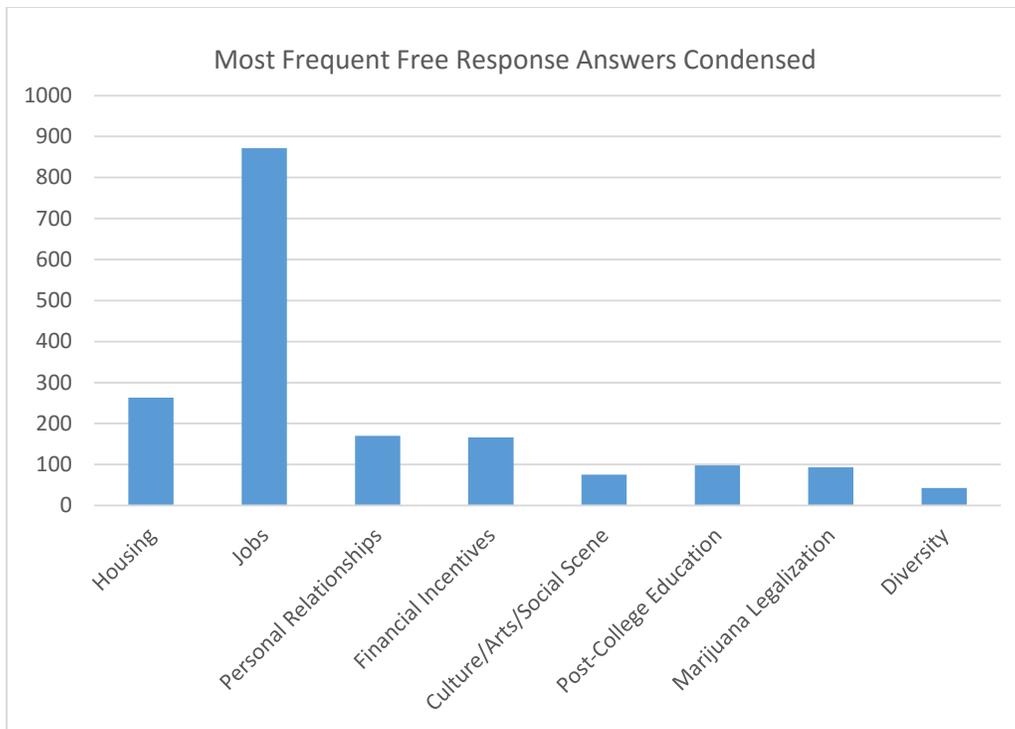


Figure 6: Responses to Open-Ended Question “What would be the one thing that would get you to stay in Vermont after graduation?” and the Follow-up “Is there anything else...?”

Respondents provided suggestions of potential ways to improve life in Vermont that did not fit into the categories used in the above figures or had drastically fewer responses. Several dealt with infrastructure, with just over 20 respondents requesting better public transportation both within Vermont and outside of the state, improvements to walking and biking paths, and more parking, particularly in Burlington. Advancement of public education, including primary and secondary schools, affordable and accessible childcare, and expansion of VSAC grants, were relevant responses, but each received less than a dozen responses. Finally, a dozen respondents wished to see more promotion of original local businesses and more assistance for small businesses to be in compliance with current Vermont laws

Frequent responses difficult to improve through legislative action

There were a number of responses which offered reasons for why students would not want to stay in Vermont after graduation, reasons which are not necessarily affected or influenced by legislative action. A common response stated discontentment with the weather and location of Vermont, i.e. its harsh winters, rural location, and distance from the ocean. Some respondents expressed displeasure with the current liberal political climate of Vermont. Lastly, a desire for something new was a common response from students who are graduating college. The desire to both work and live in a new location or state and to travel both domestically and abroad

were common reasons for why students may want to leave Vermont. These reasons are not directly tied to or influenced by Vermont legislative action.

Conclusion

Identifying potential solutions for the problem of Vermont college students leaving the state post-graduation is difficult, as many legislative actions focused on removing one negative factor preventing students from staying could just as easily act as a disincentive to other students from staying. The most common issues reported by survey respondents—jobs, housing, cost of living, personal relationships, and high student debt—combine to create a climate that leads more students to consider leaving Vermont post-graduation.

This report was completed on May 16, 2016 by Laura Felone, Tracy Guion, and Evan Leonard under the supervision of Professors Jack Gierzynski, Robert Bartlett and Eileen Burgin in response to a request from members of the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development.

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Disclaimer: This report has been compiled by undergraduate students at the University of Vermont under the supervision of Professor Jack (Anthony) Gierzynski, Professor Robert Bartlett and Professor Eileen Burgin. The material contained in the report does not reflect the official policy of the University of Vermont.

Appendix: Survey Questions

Q27 How optimistic are you about finding a job after graduation?

Q28 Have you looked into opportunities in Vermont for after you graduate?

1. Yes. (1)
2. No. (2)

Q28 Do you consider Vermont to be a favorable place to do the following?

	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Very much so (3)
Get an education (1)	3.	4.	5.
Find a job (2)	6.	7.	8.
Make a living (3)	9.	10.	11.
Raise a family (4)	12.	13.	14.
Be happy (5)	15.	16.	17.

Q29 To what extent do you think Vermont provides the following?

- _____ A vibrant social scene (arts, music, dating, etc.) (1)
- _____ Natural amenities (including natural beauty, outdoor activities, etc.) (2)
- _____ Employment opportunities in general. (3)
- _____ Employment opportunities specific to your field of interest. (10)
- _____ Affordable housing. (4)
- _____ A good political climate. (5)
- _____ A reasonable cost of living. (6)
- _____ Convenient transportation to places outside of the state. (7)
- _____ Good public transportation. (8)
- _____ Competitive wages. (9)

Q9 How likely is it that you will stay in Vermont after you graduate?

18. Very likely (1)
19. Likely (2)
20. I have no idea at this point (3)
21. Unlikely (4)
22. Very unlikely (5)

Q11 Which of the following would increase the likelihood of you staying in Vermont after graduation? (Mark as many as are true for you.)

1. A high paying job. (1)
2. A "meaningful" job. (2)
3. More diversity in the types of jobs/fields of work. (9)
4. Small business start-up grants. (3)
5. Assistance paying off your student loans. (4)
6. Affordable quality housing. (5)
7. A more affordable cost of living. (13)
8. A more diverse population in terms of race and ethnicity. (10)
9. More recreational opportunities. (6)
10. A commitment on the part of the state and local governments to preserve the natural beauty of the state.
11. A better social scene (arts, music, dating, etc.) (11)
12. Easier ways to travel outside of the state. (7)
13. Better public transportation within the state. (12)
14. More graduate education opportunities. (8)
15. A more tolerant political climate. (15)

Q15 What would be the one thing that would get you to stay in Vermont after graduation?

Q16 Is there anything else that would make you want to stay in Vermont after graduation?

Q18 Vermont State Legislators are interested in creating programs/incentives to make Vermont a more attractive place for its college graduates to live after graduation. Can you think of anything, outside of the questions that we asked, that you think legislators ought to know regarding the attractiveness of the state to college graduates?

Q16 To finish up, we would like to ask a few questions about yourself.

Q18 What is your gender?

16. Female (1)
17. Male (2)
18. Transgender (3)
19. Gender Neutral (4)
20. Other (5)

Q20 Below is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative." "Where would you place yourself on this scale?

21. 1 - Extremely Liberal (1)
22. 2 (2)
23. 3 (3)
24. Moderate (4)
25. 5 (5)
26. 6 (6)
27. 7 - Extremely Conservative (7)

Q22 What race do you consider yourself?

28. White (1)
29. Black or African American (2)
30. American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
31. Asian (4)
32. Of mixed race or some other race (5)
33. I prefer not to say (6)

Q24 Do you consider yourself Hispanic or Latino(a)?

- 34. Yes (1)
- 35. No (2)
- 36. I am part Hispanic/Latino(a) (3)

Q25 How much student loan debt do you expect to have when you graduate college?

- 37. \$0 (1)
- 38. \$1-\$25,000 (2)
- 39. \$25,001-\$45,000 (3)
- 40. Above \$45,000 (4)

Q30 If you wish to be entered in the drawing for the \$100 Visa card, enter your email address below. Your email address will be separated from your responses so that we will have no way to associate your responses with you.

- 41. click and write in your email address for the drawing (2) _____