CUNY’s role as the primary route to higher education for area residents has long been well documented. In fall 2010, some 86% of the entering freshman class were graduates of local public and private high schools or GED recipients. Another 9% were graduates of New York State high schools located outside the City. More recently we have learned that almost 60% of college-bound graduates of New York City public schools enroll in a CUNY college. The University is also recognized as the area’s major producer of postsecondary degrees. In 2009-10 alone CUNY conferred more than 37,000 degrees, ranging from certificates to the Ph.D. Since CUNY first began to keep statistical records as a system in 1967, the university has awarded 1,188,376 degrees. Until recently, however, there was a gap in our knowledge about CUNY’s contribution to training the local workforce; we lacked good data about how many of our students remain in the area after graduating from CUNY.

The overwhelming majority of CUNY graduates currently reside in New York

Through a study conducted by CUNY’s Office of Policy Research (OPR), we now have good estimates for CUNY graduates going back almost 30 years. To obtain these estimates, we randomly selected a sample of graduates of our associate, baccalaureate, master’s, JD, and Ph.D. programs who graduated in 1981 and every three years thereafter until 2008. A locator service provided the address of the almost 13,000 graduates in our sample as of September 2008. We then calculated the percentage of graduates from each year and degree level who were found to be residing in the five boroughs of New York City or in New York State.

As shown in Figure 1, the OPR study found that, overall, two-thirds (67%) of CUNY graduates are still living in New York City and four out of five (82%) are residing somewhere in New York State (including

![Figure 1](image-url)
New York City). These percentages have fluctuated somewhat depending on the graduating class, but surprisingly, the portion of the class of 1981 living in New York State is almost identical to that of the class of 2008—85%. The New York City share of this total is somewhat less for the earlier cohort (68% vs. 74%).

When we look at the findings in more detail, we learn that where students now live differs by the degree they earned at CUNY. Figures 2 to 5 show the residence of CUNY’s graduating classes from 1981 to present, broken out by type of degree conferred (charts displaying figures for New York City are available on our website as a supplement to this research brief). Associate and baccalaureate degree recipients are most likely to reside in the City in 2008 (94% and 83%, respectively) and in the State (97% and 94%, respectively), while JD (41% in the City and 52% in the State—chart not shown), Master’s (62% in the City and 80% in the State) and Ph.D. recipients (58% in the City and 72% in the State) are less likely.

As we have seen, the residence of CUNY graduates also depends on the year of graduation, reflecting changing economic conditions and possibly migration patterns associated with age or career trajectories.

Examining how trends have changed over time, we observe that the residency of JD recipients in New York has been on the decline for graduates from 2002 onward (decreasing from 69% to 52%), while Ph.D. residency has increased over the period,
from 66% to 72%.

Also note the trough in the mid-1990s: all degree holders from that period are the least likely to be current residents of the State. This pattern may reflect adverse economic conditions in the City and State, such as the increase in joblessness that the State suffered at the beginning of the decade. According to statistics from the New York State Department of Labor, the number of private sector jobs in the State dropped from about 6.8 million in 1990 to about 6.3 million in 1993 and did not reach 6.9 million again until 1999. Private sector jobs grew sharply after 1999, reaching 7.2 million in 2001. Although there was some fluctuation throughout the 2000s, job numbers remained around 7 million until 2008.

Conclusions

From these data it is apparent that CUNY’s students tend to remain in New York City after graduating. If they move, they do not move far — the vast majority of students who graduated from CUNY between 1981 and 2008 were living in New York State at the time of this study. One obvious implication is that New York City and State reap the economic, civic, and social benefits associated with a college educated workforce and citizenry. Focusing on the economic benefits, we can conclude that investments made by the State and City to fund tuition assistance and the operating budget of the University pay dividends for many subsequent decades in the form of increased earnings for college graduates and associated tax receipt increases for the government. These investments in higher education also yield non-economic benefits associated with postsecondary degree completion including better health, increased civic participation, a longer lifespan, and improved quality of life.