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Albany 11th smartest metro in nation

New study shows Albany tops all New York cities

The Business Review (Albany) - by [Robin K. Cooper](#) The Business Review

Glenn McGee could have been a bioethics director at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., or at Wake Forest University in North Carolina.

The 40-year-old Texan picked Albany instead where he's the youngest bioethics center director in the world.

McGee heads the Alden March Bioethics Institute at Albany Medical College and Albany Medical Center. He's part of a growing number of highly educated workers drawn to Albany for research and technology opportunities.

Albany ranked No. 11 in a new Bizjournals study of America's 100 largest metropolitan regions with the highest concentration of educated workers (www.bizjournals.com/specials/pages/163.html). Cities with an educated work force have a bright future.

Madison, Wis., led the list of America's smartest metro areas followed by the nation's capital and Silicon Valley.

Albany edged out Austin, Texas, another state capital known for its university-based research, entrepreneurs and computer-chip makers.

Other top finishers ahead of Albany included Boston; San Francisco; Minneapolis, Minn.; Raleigh, N.C.; and Seattle.

Madison, which is home to 543,000 people, won top billing for the nation's highest concentration of educated workers due to the presence of several economic sectors.

The area includes the 42,000-student University of Wisconsin, the state capital and a thriving biotechnology sector.

Similar factors were behind Albany's strong showing.



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"I came to Albany to build what will be the top bioethics program in the nation," says Glenn McGee, head of the Alden March Bioethics Institute at Albany Medical College and Albany Medical Center.

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The region and its 851,000 residents are supported by a cluster of state government jobs, colleges, research centers and health care companies that place a premium on education.

"Albany is so much like Madison--big university, state Capitol and a finite number of people," Kajal Lahiri, a University at Albany economics professor.

The study of the nation's 100 largest metro areas analyzed 2006 **U.S. Census Bureau** data to measure the percentage of residents with varying degrees of education, from high school dropouts to those with an associate or post-graduate degrees.

The study, which defined Albany as the Albany-Schenectady-Troy metro area, was conducted by bizjournals--a division of American City Business Journals, The Business Review's parent company.

It found that 17 percent of Madison's population has a graduate or professional degree and 28 percent have a bachelor's.

In Albany, nearly 16 percent of the residents have a graduate or professional degree. Another 19.3 percent hold a bachelor's and 12.6 percent have an associate degree.

Albany's strong showing is partially due to its ability to attract people like McGee, who breezed through his master's and doctorate in bioethics in three years before serving as associate director for Education at the **University of Pennsylvania Center for Bioethics**.

He moved to the area in 2005, passing up bioethics director jobs at Wake Forest and the Library of Congress.

"I came to Albany to build what will be the top bioethics program in the nation," McGee said. "If I had gone to Washington I would have been just another cog."

Now he's interviewed regularly by national media about bioethics issues. And he has added to Albany's brainpower by hiring scholars from bioethics centers at **Johns Hopkins University** in Maryland and Loyola University in Chicago to work in Albany.

The Albany bioethics center is a multi-institutional research organization involving a dozen schools including the University at Albany, **Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute**, Albany Law School and **Albany College of Pharmacy**.

It's rare to find so many schools willing to collaborate, McGee said. The area has so much to offer.

"It's not me, it's Albany's ability to support something like this," he said.

Scholars used to move to big cities to work with emerging technology, McGee said.

They don't have to do that anymore.

Research opportunities at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy and UAlbany are attracting more

educated people to the area each year.

A decade ago, the **College on Nanoscale Science & Engineering** at UAlbany didn't exist.

The nanoscience facility has grown into a \$4.2 billion, 450,000-square-foot complex for 2,000 scientists, researchers and students. An expansion will expand the nanocenter to 800,000 square feet by mid 2009.

That \$150 million expansion will bring 450 more jobs to the area when International Sematech--a consortium of computer-chip firms--moves its headquarters from Austin.

Cutting-edge research in biotechnology also is happening at Rensselaer. The institute's incubator led to the creation of MapInfo Corp. (now **Pitney Bowes MapInfo**).

Rensselaer also was the birthplace of Vicarious Visions video game design company and **Albany Molecular Research Inc.**, now known as AMRI.

The region's thriving base of educated workers also is home to more than 45,000 state employees and 14 college campuses with 58,000 students and 2,800 faculty.

The impact of those jobs is evident in the study.

"The level of educated people in Albany has always been high," said Jim Ross, a Capital Region market analyst for the state Department of Labor.

But it may have grown in recent years, Ross said.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York's Buffalo Branch issued a report last summer questioning whether Upstate New York was suffering from insufficient "brain gain."

"No state has as low a rate of educated workers moving in as upstate New York," Federal Reserve Chief Economist Richard Deitz said after analyzing 2000 Census data.

That doesn't seem to be the case in the Albany area.

Technology companies and research opportunities are two important reasons.

Other economic drivers include the area's three dozen health care organizations, which employ 720 plus medical doctors and 5,700 nurses.

That doesn't include more than four dozen technology companies with local offices that employ more than 8,847.

Among the largest local tech companies are **GE Global Research** and **Lockheed Martin Corp.'s Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory Inc.**, which employs 2,600.

Other big names with a highly educated work force include Albany Medical Center, which has 272

practicing physicians and 1,150 registered nurses.

"Albany is catching up to some of these other areas, Lahiri said.

Small backstreet technology companies are adding to the mix, he said. And it's happening in a region with a relatively small population.

McGee is convinced that the Albany area and the bioethics institute will continue to prosper.

"If I have to kill myself, we're going to get this medical school ranked for its impact and role on national conversations," he said.

Community colleges boost ranking

The Albany area has the third highest concentration of graduates with an associate degree in the country, according to the Bizjournals study.

And interest in two-year degrees appears to be growing.

"We are seeing more and more people come here to study nursing, dental hygiene, architecture and construction," said Hudson Valley Community College President Drew Matonak.

The Troy school graduated 1,787 students last year, a 5.7 percent increase from 2006. "This is the most exciting kind of impact. Graduates are impacting the region because people are staying here when they finish school," Matonak said.

Hudson Valley faculty and administrators work directly with area businesses to ensure that the curriculum teaches students the skills they'll need when they join the work force.

A recent study showed that Hudson Valley and its graduates have nearly a \$1 billion impact on the Capital Region. The school has granted 65,000 degrees since it was founded in 1953.

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