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# Colleagues From Near and Far: Out-of-State Professionals in the Higher Education Workforce

By Brielle Johnson and Melissa Fuesting

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## Introduction

Hiring employees who reside in another state presents multiple logistical challenges for higher education institutions and HR professionals. When employees reside out of state, colleges and universities must comply with relevant employment laws and tax systems that vary across states, resulting in greater complexity of HR functions.<sup>1</sup> Although the vast majority of employees in higher education continue to work in-state and on-site, colleges and universities are facing pressure to offer more flexible work arrangements.<sup>2</sup> Hiring employees across state lines enables higher education institutions to attract and retain top talent, particularly as workers increasingly expect and prioritize flexible work arrangements.<sup>3</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for higher education institutions to reevaluate their workforce policies, and institutions embracing location flexibility have documented benefits such as increased employee satisfaction and improved collaboration.<sup>4</sup> This report provides a deep dive into the out-of-state professional workforce in higher education. It is important to note that employees who live and work in a different state do not necessarily have remote work arrangements, and this group likely consists of a mix of employees who have a regular expectation of commuting across state lines to work on-site and employees who do not have any regular expectation of working from campus (e.g., fully remote). In this report, we examine the characteristics of out-of-state professionals and the institutions where they are employed.

### The Data

CUPA-HR started collecting state of residence data in the *Professionals in Higher Education Survey* in 2021-22.<sup>5</sup> This survey is administered annually and includes positions that typically require professional-level expertise, a baccalaureate degree or higher, or professional licensure. State-of-residence data offers opportunities for deeper insights into employees who reside out of state. In this report, professionals whose state of residence differed from the state where their institution's primary campus is located were classified as out-of-state. Given the relatively high qualifications required for these positions, colleges and universities may be especially motivated to expand their applicant pools for

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<sup>1</sup> Moody, J. (2022, July 28). [Colleges Look to Staffing Firms to Allow Remote Work](#). *Inside Higher Ed*.

<sup>2</sup> Weissman, S. (2023, January 3). [The Great Resignation at Community Colleges](#). *Inside Higher Ed*.

<sup>3</sup> Schneider, J., & Bichsel, J. (2025, September). [The CUPA-HR 2025 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey](#). CUPA-HR.

<sup>4</sup> Tsipursky, G. (2023, August 8). [How Higher Ed Is Embracing Flexible Work](#). *Forbes*.

<sup>5</sup> CUPA-HR. (2025). [Professionals in Higher Education Survey, 2021-22 to 2024-25](#) [Data set].

professional roles by considering out-of-state candidates and implementing flexible work policies to remain competitive and retain talented staff.<sup>6</sup>

## The Analyses

This report provides insights into out-of-state professionals in 2024-25 and examines how this sector of the workforce has changed in the years since CUPA-HR began collecting incumbent-level state-of-residence data in 2021-22. Unless otherwise specified, data presented in this report reflect findings from the 2024-25 *Professionals in Higher Education Survey*. First, we report on the characteristics of institutions that have professionals residing out of state. Then, we examine the characteristics of out-of-state professionals, including the most common positions and position categories for out-of-state professionals. We also provide a focused analysis on out-of-state professionals who reside in non-neighboring states. Finally, we conclude with some key takeaways from our analysis of the out-of-state professional workforce.

## Institutions With Out-of-State Professionals

### The Proportion of Institutions Reporting at Least One Professional Residing in a Different State From Where They Work Has Grown Over Time

Since CUPA-HR began collecting state-of-residence data in 2021-22, most institutions have reported at least one out-of-state professional working at their institution. The percentage of institutions that reported at least one professional residing out of state has grown each year, from 63% in 2021-22 to 70% in 2024-25 (Figure 1). This increase over the past several years suggests higher education institutions may be increasingly open to employing professionals living in another state. Although more colleges and universities employ out-of-state professionals compared to previous years, a substantial percentage of higher education institutions (30%) did not report a single out-of-state professional in 2024-25.

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<sup>6</sup> Ellis, L. (2021, June 17). [‘A Mass Exodus’: Inflexible Remote-Work Policies Could Bring Major Staff Turnover](#). *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

### Percentage of Institutions With One or More Out-of-State Professionals

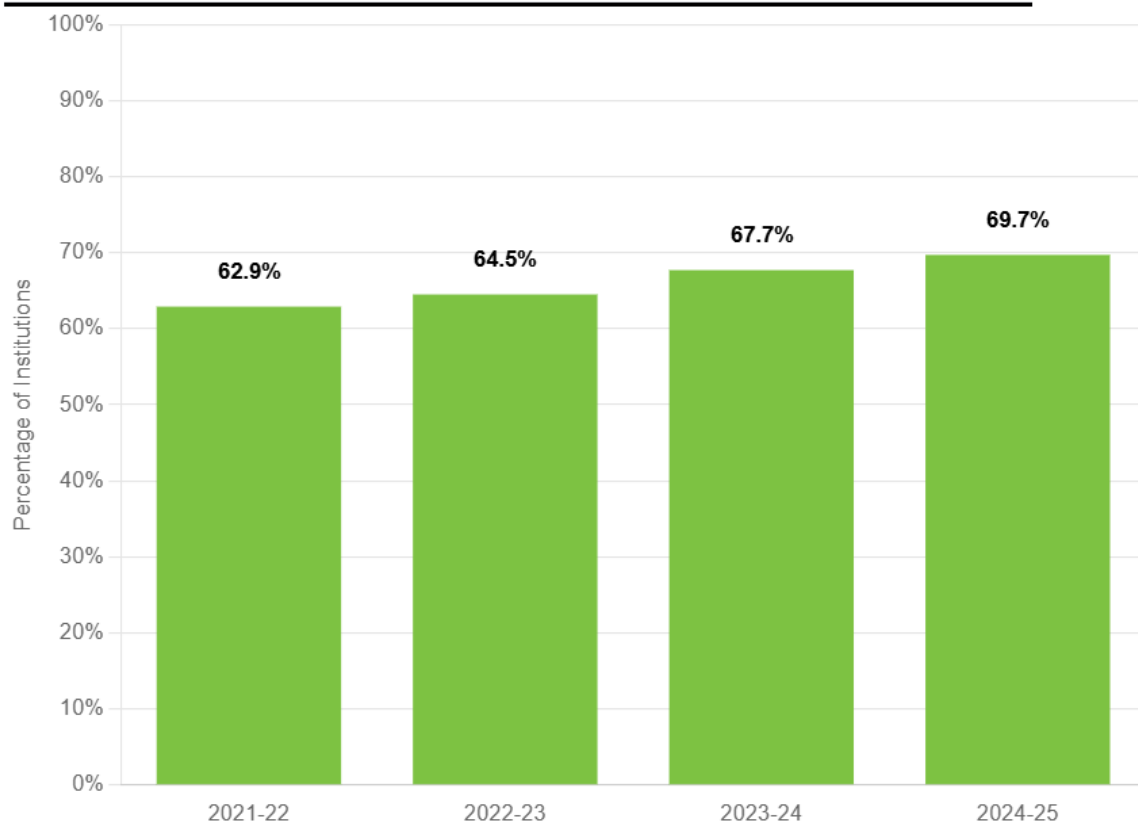


Figure 1. Percentage of Institutions With One or More Out-of-State Professionals

### Most Institutions Do Not Have High Concentrations of Out-of-State Professionals

Although a majority of colleges and universities reported at least one out-of-state professional, the number of out-of-state professionals at most institutions was relatively small. In 2024-25, only 3% of institutions reported 100 or more out-of-state professionals, and 87% of institutions reported 30 or fewer out-of-state professionals. These findings align with CUPA-HR's *Multi-State Workforce Survey* conducted in 2023, which found that institutions with a multi-state workforce tend to have relatively few employees residing out of state.<sup>7</sup> Figure 2 shows the distribution of institutions by number of out-of-state professionals in 2024-25.

<sup>7</sup> Schneider, J., & Tubbs, D. (2023, April). [Multi-State Workforce Survey Results](#). CUPA-HR.

**Distribution of Institutions by Number of Out-of-State Professionals**

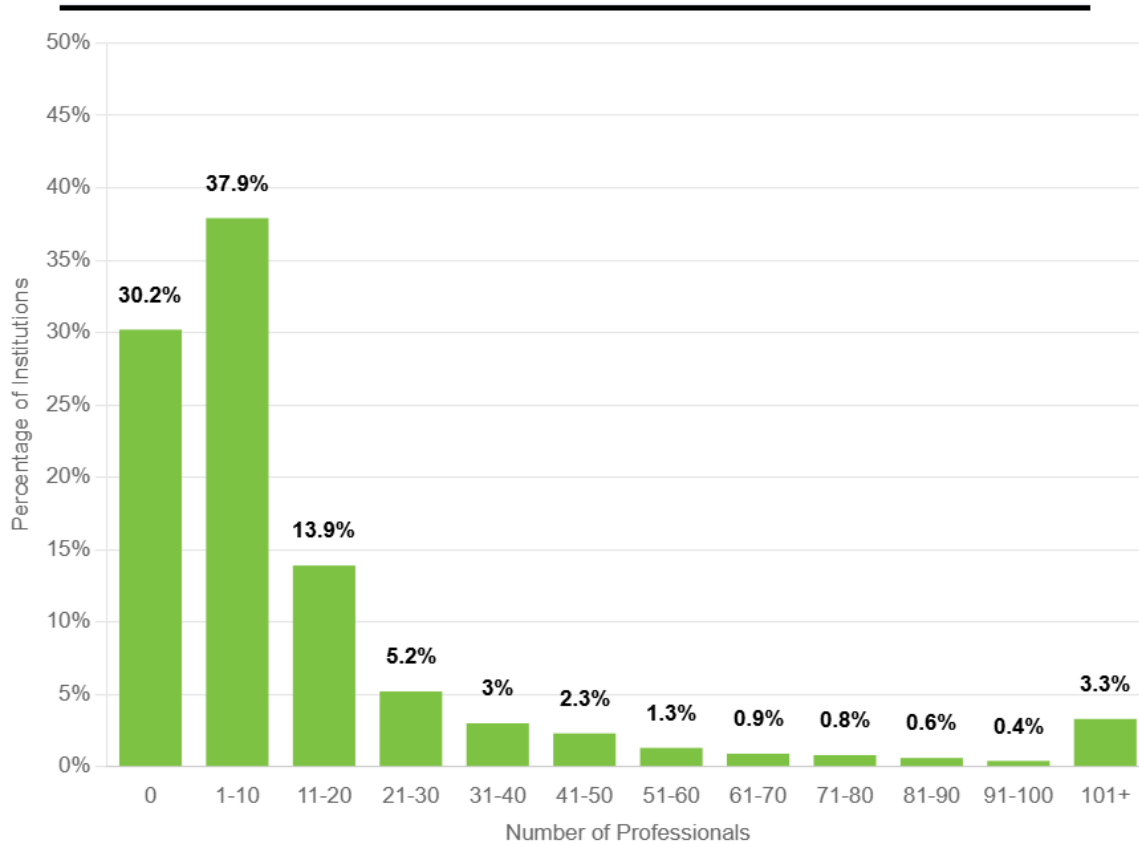


Figure 2. Distribution of Institutions by Number of Out-of-State Professionals

**The Percentage of Institutions With at Least One Out-of-State Professional Is Growing Faster Among Private Institutions Than Among Public Institutions**

Over three quarters (76%) of private institutions in 2024-25 reported at least one professional residing out of state compared to only 63% of public institutions (Figure 3). Across all survey years, private institutions were more likely than public institutions to report at least one out-of-state professional. These findings are consistent with the 2023 *Multi-State Workforce Survey*, which found that a greater percentage of private institutions hired out-of-state employees compared to public institutions.<sup>8</sup>

Between 2021-22 and 2024-25, the percentage of institutions reporting at least one out-of-state professional has grown among both private and public institutions. However, this growth was larger among private institutions, where the percentage of private institutions

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

with at least one out-of-state professional grew by 10 percentage points compared to a 3-percentage-point increase among public institutions.

2021-22 to 2024-25 Professionals in Higher Education Surveys

### Percentage of Private and Public Institutions With One or More Out-of-State Professionals

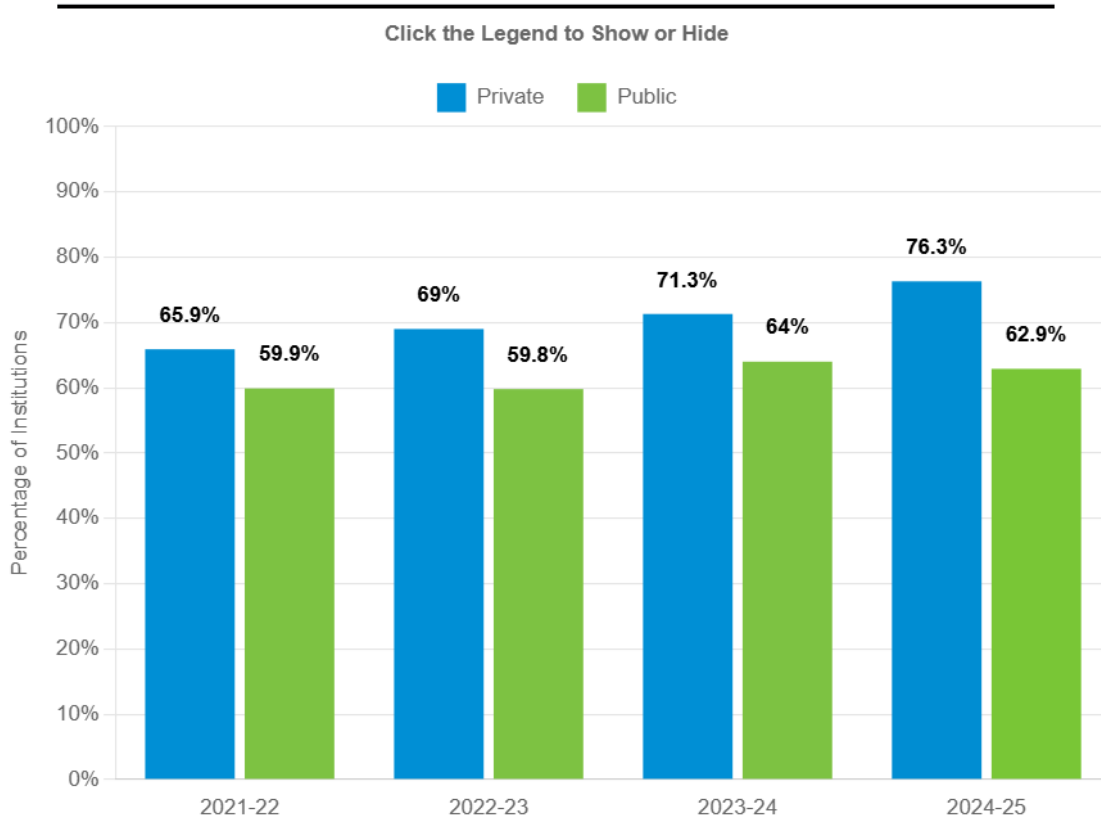


Figure 3. Percentage of Private and Public Institutions With One or More Out-of-State Professionals

### Institutions That Award Master's and Doctoral Degrees Are More Likely to Have Out-of-State Professionals Than Those With Associate's and Bachelor's Degrees as Their Highest Degree Awarded

Throughout all years of data, a majority of institutions that award bachelor's degrees and higher reported at least one out-of-state professional (Figure 4).<sup>9</sup> Half or less of institutions with an associate's degree as the highest degree awarded reported a professional residing out of state each year since 2021-22, and there was no growth in the percentage of associate's institutions reporting an out-of-state professional from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

<sup>9</sup> This analysis uses the [2025 Carnegie Classifications](#) for highest degree awarded.

Institutions awarding master’s and doctorate degrees had the largest growth in the percentage of institutions with at least one out-of-state professional. The percentage of institutions with one or more out-of-state professionals grew by 8% for doctoral institutions and 9% for master’s institutions from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

2021-22 to 2024-25 Professionals in Higher Education Surveys

**Percentage of Institutions With One or More Out-of-State Professionals by Highest Degree Awarded**

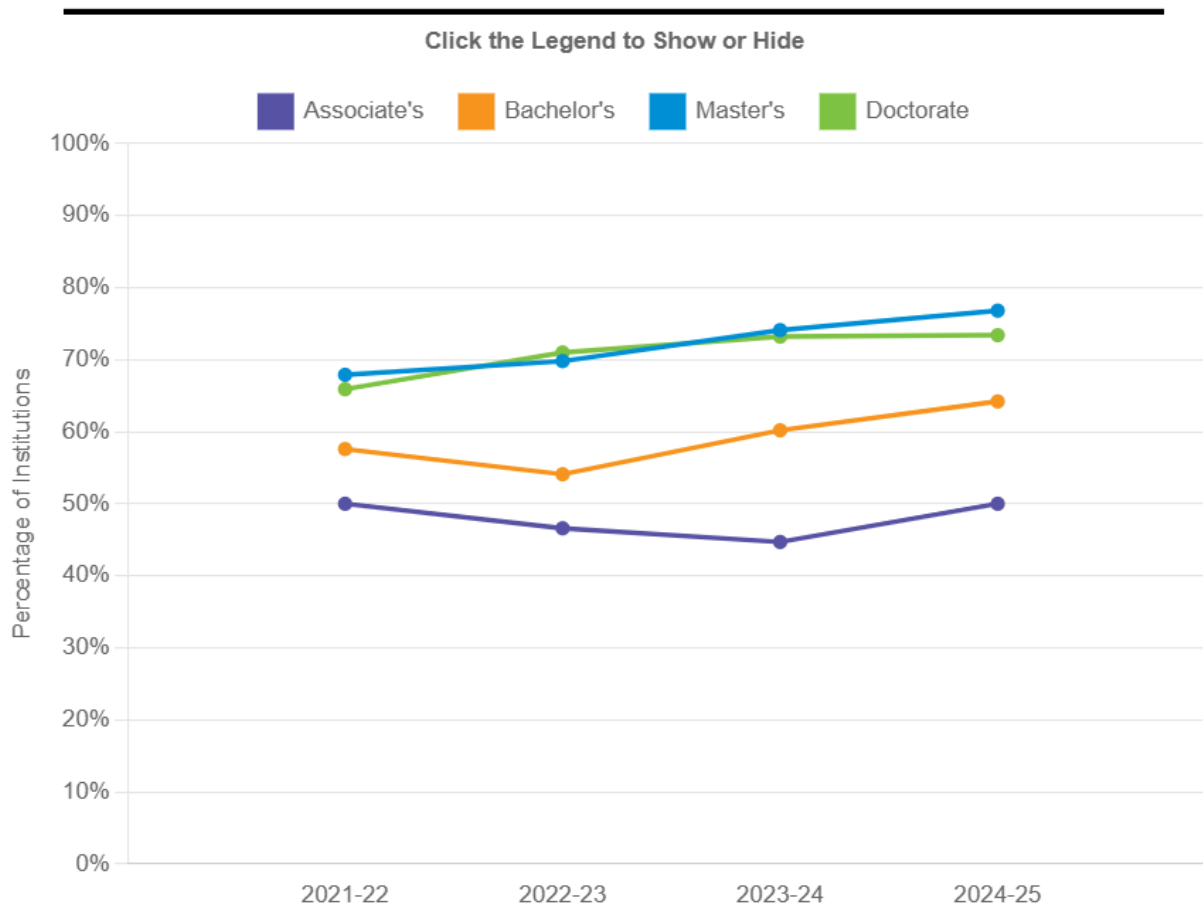


Figure 4. Percentage of Institutions With One or More Out-of-State Professionals by Highest Degree Awarded

**Pennsylvania, New York, and Illinois Have the Most Institutions With at Least One Out-of-State Professional**

Figure 5 shows the total number of institutions in each state with at least one out-of-state professional. Pennsylvania had a total of 51 institutions with at least one professional residing out of state, followed by New York with 43 institutions and Illinois with 37

institutions. These states were followed by California (33 institutions), Minnesota (30 institutions), and Ohio (26 institutions).

2024-25 Professionals in Higher Education Survey

**Map of Number of Institutions in Each State With One or More Out-of-State Professionals**

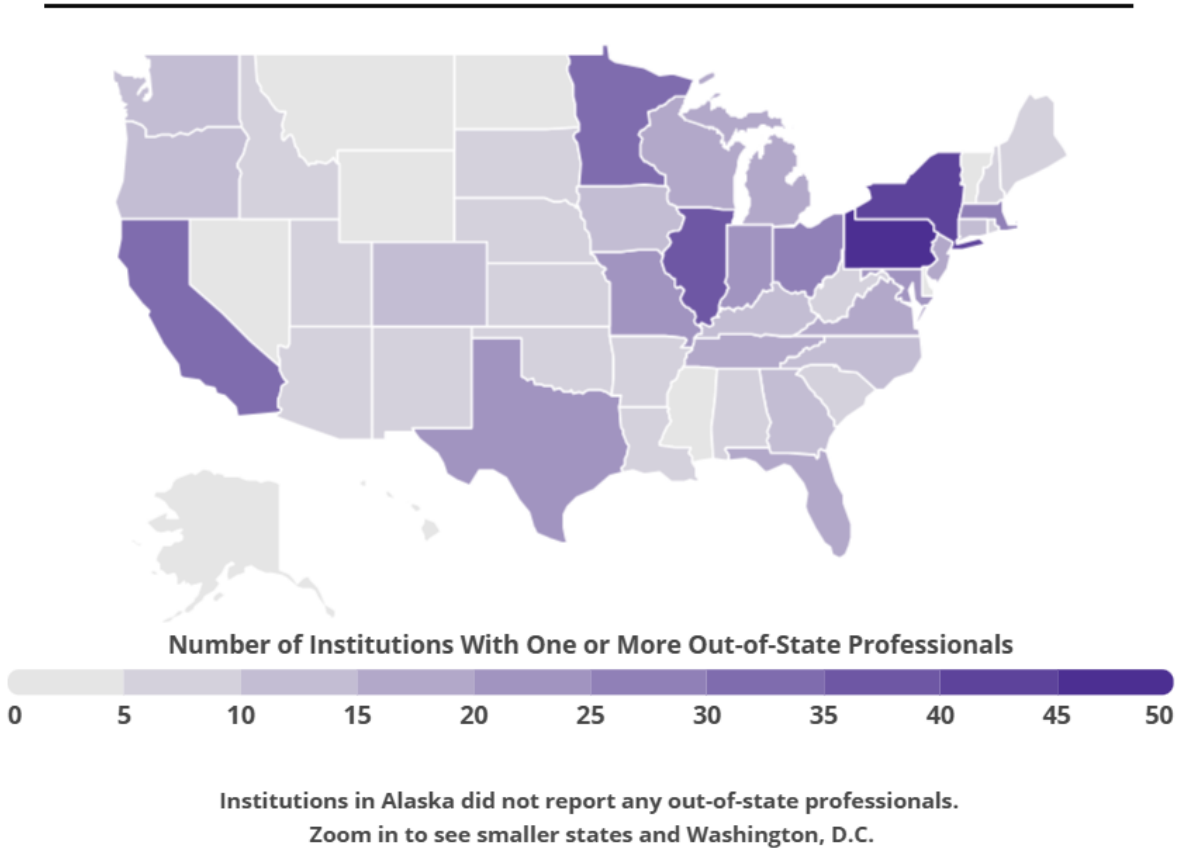


Figure 5. Map of Number of Institutions in Each State With One or More Out-of-State Professionals

## Characteristics of the Out-of-State Workforce

### **In 2024-25, 5% of Professionals Resided Outside the State in Which Their Institution Was Located**

The percentage of out-of-state professionals grew slightly since CUPA-HR began collecting this data, up from 4% of professionals in 2021-22 to 5% of professionals in 2024-25.

In 2024-25, there were essentially no differences in demographics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, age) between in-state and out-of-state professionals. Out-of-state

professionals were slightly more likely to have exempt status compared to in-state. Exempt-status employees are not entitled to the overtime pay provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Eighty-nine percent of out-of-state professionals had exempt status, whereas 85% of in-state professionals were exempt.

The most notable difference between in-state and out-of-state professionals was the length of time they held their current position (Figure 6). The average number of years in position for in-state professionals was 5 years compared to 4 years for out-of-state professionals.<sup>10</sup>

Often, years in position are used as a proxy for retention. It could be that out-of-state employees do indeed stay in their positions for less time than in-state employees. However, this difference may also reflect a recent increase in the number of positions that allow location flexibility, including hybrid or fully remote work arrangements. If this is the case, roles held by out-of-state professionals may tend to have a more recent hire date than roles held by in-state professionals simply because location-flexible jobs are newer to higher education than traditional, on-site roles.

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<sup>10</sup> The difference in years in position between in-state ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 6.52$ ) and out-of-state ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 5.36$ ) professionals was statistically significant after controlling for position ( $F = 308.4$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

### Distribution of Years in Position by Employee Location

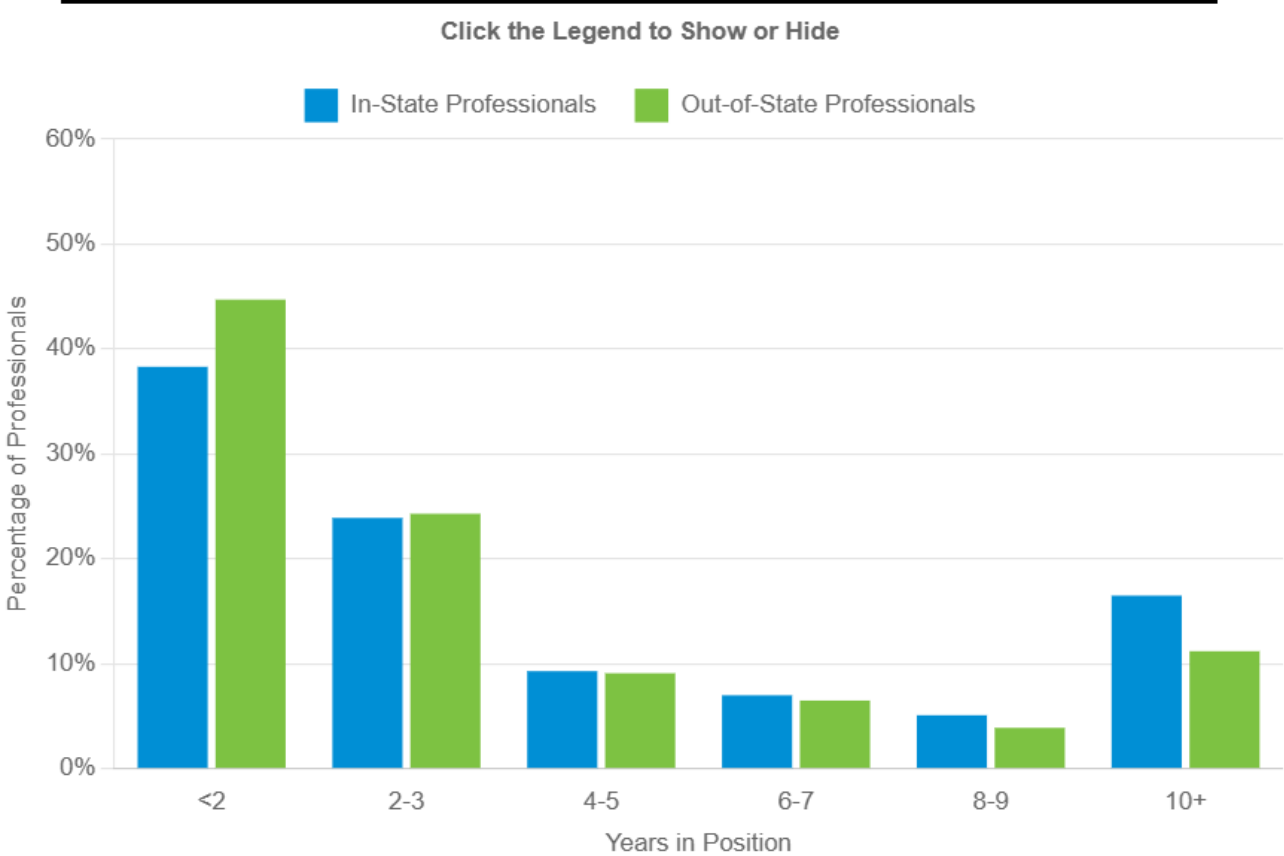


Figure 6. Distribution of Years in Position by Employee Location

### Athletics and Information Technology Are the Professional Areas With the Largest Percentage of Out-of-State Professionals

The professional areas with the largest percentage of out-of-state professionals were athletics (7%); information technology (6%); external affairs (5%); and academic affairs (5%) (Figure 7).<sup>11</sup> Athletics positions in higher education are unique in terms of tenure and hiring practices. These positions are often high turnover due to coaches regularly moving across institutions to pursue new coaching opportunities, and new head coaches often replace most if not all of their assistant coaching staff.<sup>12</sup> The hiring processes for athletics positions are often expedited to ensure coaches can immediately start recruiting athletes, forming

<sup>11</sup> The [Professionals Survey Participation and Information Template](#) shows which positions are included in each professional area.

<sup>12</sup> Vannini, C. (2018, April 5). [Moving Up and Often: Climbing the Coaching Ladder Means Being Prepared to Relocate](#). *The New York Times*.

staff, and evaluating talent. As such, their permanent residence may be in another state as they rapidly transition to a new institution, resulting in a large proportion of athletics professionals reported as having an out-of-state residence. Further research is needed to determine if the relatively large percentage of out-of-state employment in this sector is temporary and transition-related or if institutions offer more location flexibility for athletics roles compared to other jobs in higher education.

Information technology (IT) positions have large concentrations of out-of-state professionals for a different reason: Colleges and universities have experienced staffing shortages for IT positions, as employees in this sector can often earn more outside of higher education.<sup>13</sup> As such, institutions may be motivated to broaden applicant pools and consider out-of-state candidates to fill technology roles, and many IT roles are well suited to hybrid or remote work arrangements.<sup>14</sup>

Unsurprisingly, facilities (2%) had the smallest percentage of professionals residing out of state; these positions are generally focused on maintaining on-site facilities and operations, so a physical presence on campus is likely required to execute most job functions.

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<sup>13</sup> McKenzie, L. (2023, April 24). [Staff Shortages Stifled Colleges' 2022 IT Modernization Plans](#). *Edscoop*.

<sup>14</sup> Bichsel, J., Fuesting, M., Tubbs, D., & Schneider, J. (2023, September). [The CUPA-HR 2023 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey](#). CUPA-HR.

Percentage of Out-of-State Professionals by Position Category

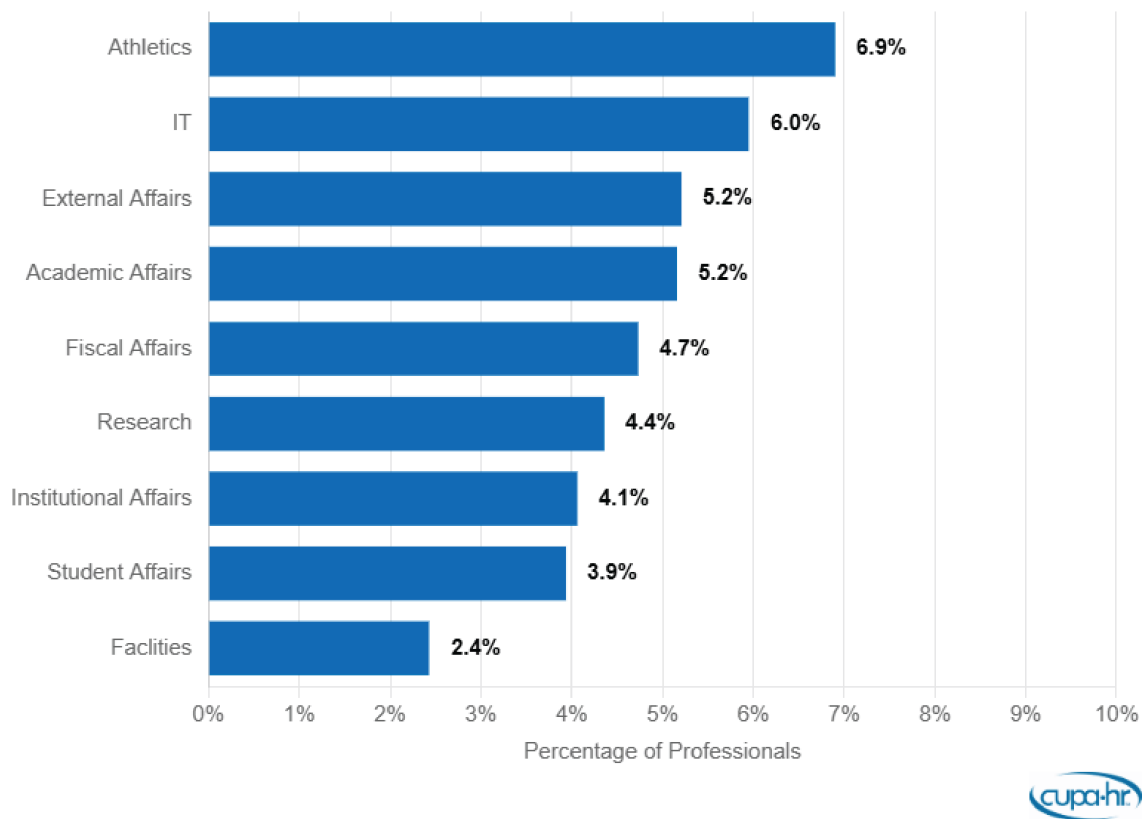


Figure 7. Percentage of Out-of-State Professionals by Position Category

**Athletics and IT Positions Accounted for 10 of the 15 Positions With the Largest Percentage of Out-of-State Professionals**

We analyzed common positions (i.e., those reported by at least 100 institutions) to see which were the most likely to have professionals living out of state. In the 2024-25 *Professionals in Higher Education Survey*, all but 7 of 408 positions had at least one out-of-state professional reported. Figure 8 shows the 15 positions with the highest concentration of out-of-state professionals.

Athletics coaches were some of the most likely positions to be filled by out-of-state professionals. Six of the 15 positions with the largest percentage of out-of-state professionals were coaches. As noted in the previous section, athletics roles are quite distinct from other positions in this survey. These roles often have accelerated hiring processes that require new hires to transition to their new position as quickly as possible,

resulting in their permanent residence being in another state.<sup>15</sup> These professionals may also work as recruiters who are required to travel extensively, so their primary residence may be more flexible compared to employees expected to work on campus.

Outside of athletics positions, most other positions with large percentages of out-of-state professionals included those with duties that can be performed well in a hybrid or remote work arrangement. For instance, human resources information system (HRIS) consultants were the most likely to live out of state (12%). Instructional designer, business intelligence specialist, and database administrator positions also had large percentages (11% each) of professionals residing out of state. IT and other data-focused positions were some of the most likely to have out-of-state professionals. These findings may be indicative of strong competition for professionals with this type of technical expertise, and institutions may consider out-of-state employment to fill these positions.

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<sup>15</sup> Vannini, C. (2018, April 5). [Moving Up and Often: Climbing the Coaching Ladder Means Being Prepared to Relocate](#). *The New York Times*.

**Positions With the Largest Percentage of Out-of-State Professionals**

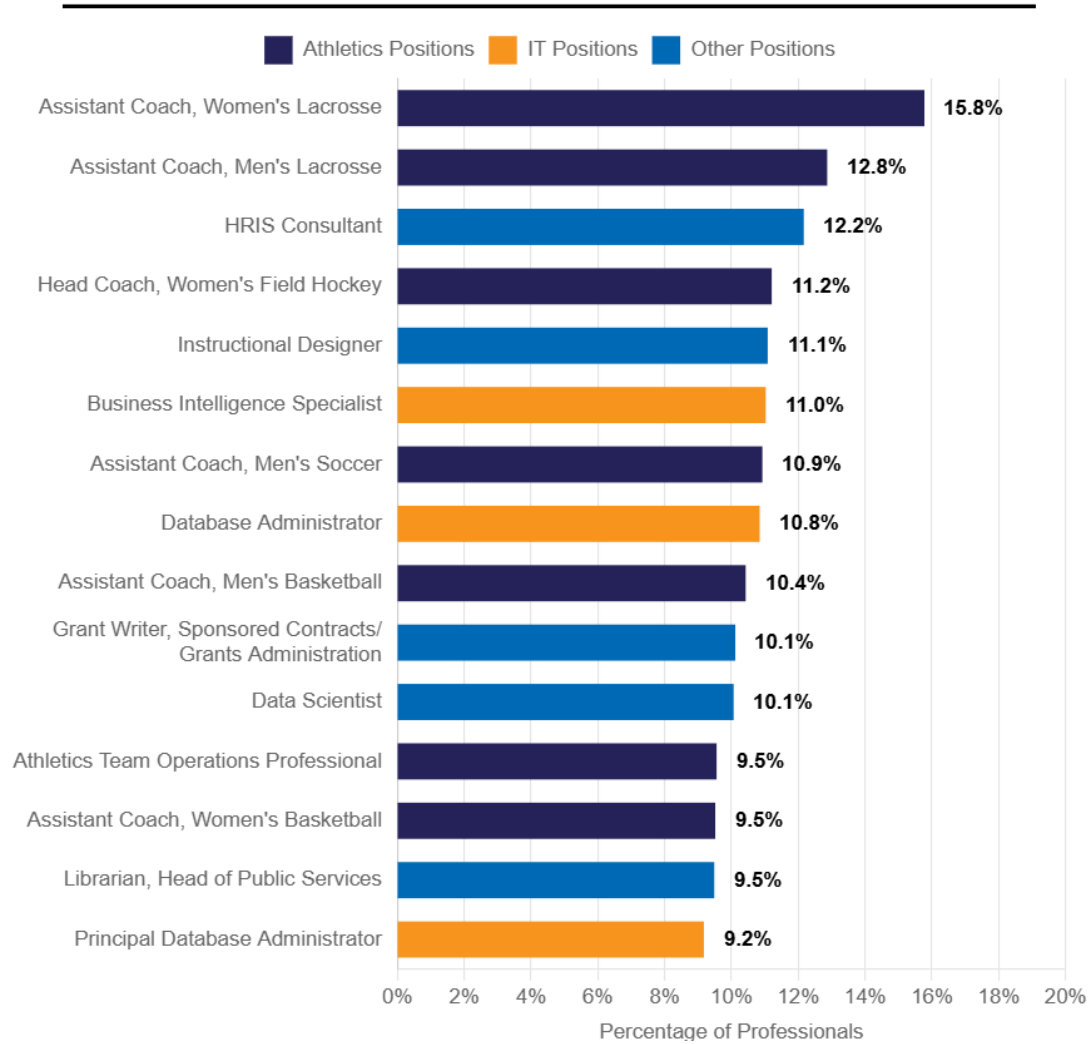


Figure 8. Positions With the Largest Percentage of Out-of-State Professionals

**Many Out-of-State Professionals Reside in Non-Neighboring States, and This Percentage Has Grown Over Time**

We examined the percentage of out-of-state professionals who lived in states that did not neighbor the state in which their institution was located (Figure 9).<sup>16</sup> The percentage of out-of-state professionals who lived in states that did not neighbor their institution's state grew from 34% in 2021-22 to 45% in 2024-25. Although our data does not specify professionals' work arrangements (e.g., remote, on-site, hybrid), it is reasonable to assume that out-of-state employees residing in non-neighboring states work partially or fully remote given the

<sup>16</sup> In this report, neighboring states are defined as states sharing a land border.

impracticality of commuting across multiple states on a regular basis. This pattern suggests that the availability of partially or fully remote positions within higher education may be growing over time.

2021-22 to 2024-25 Professionals in Higher Education Surveys

### Percentage of Out-of-State Professionals Residing in a Non-Neighboring State

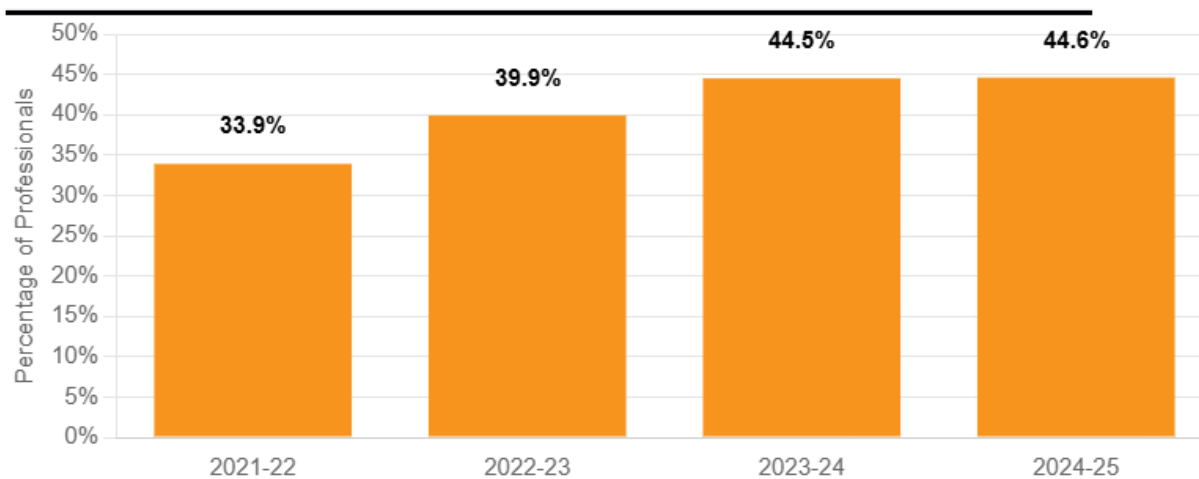


Figure 9. Percentage of Out-of-State Professionals Residing in a Non-Neighboring State

### California, Florida, Massachusetts, Illinois, and New York Are the States Most Commonly Home to Institutions That Employ Professionals Who Live in Non-Neighboring States

Figure 10 shows where institutions are located that have out-of-state professionals who live in a non-neighboring state.<sup>17</sup> Institutions located in California, Florida, Massachusetts, Illinois, and New York had the highest concentrations of non-neighboring out-of-state professionals. Institutions in North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming employed the fewest professionals who lived in a non-neighboring state.

<sup>17</sup> Employees residing in Puerto Rico and Guam were not included in analyses or reporting.

## Percentage of Out-of-State Professionals Residing in a Non-Neighboring State by Institution Location

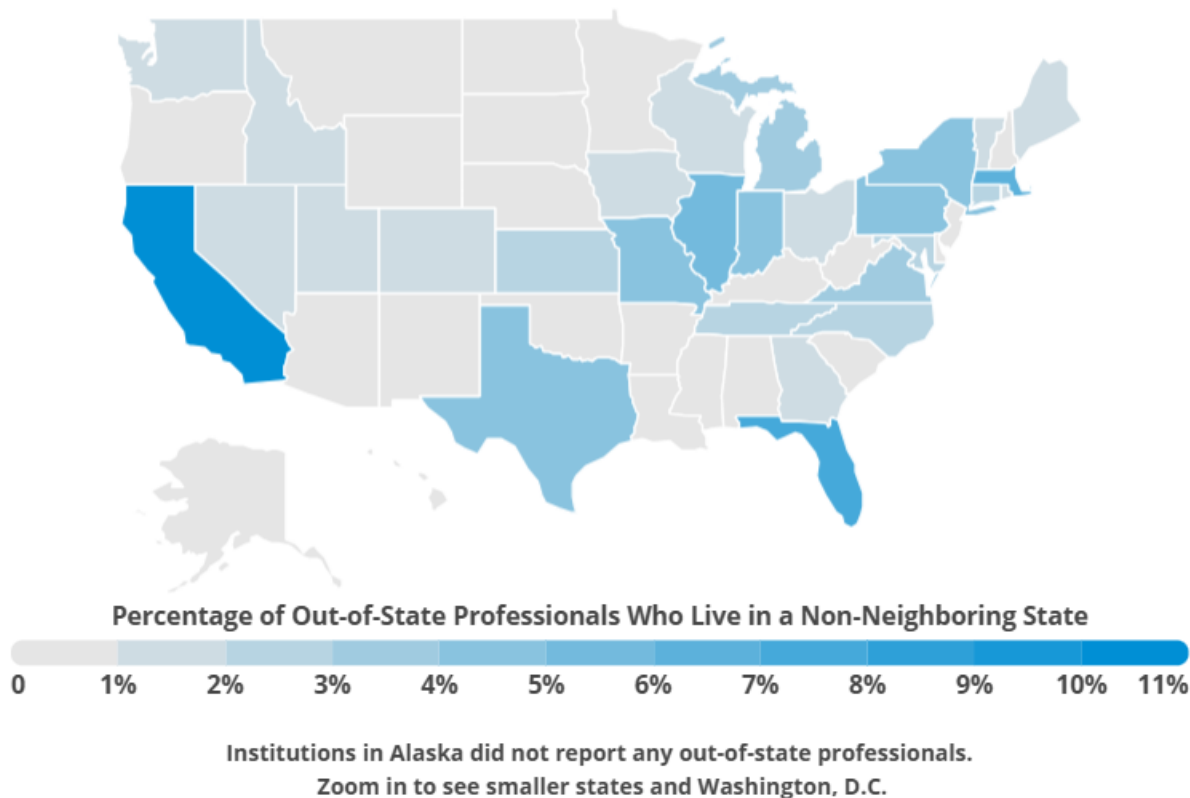


Figure 10. Percentage of Out-of-State Professionals Residing in a Non-Neighboring State by Institution Location

### Professionals Who Live in Non-Neighboring States Are Most Likely to Live in Arizona, Texas, Florida, California, or North Carolina

Figure 11 shows the concentration of out-of-state professionals who reside in a non-neighboring state.<sup>18</sup> Arizona, Texas, Florida, California, and North Carolina were the most common states for out-of-state professionals to live among those residing in a state that does not neighbor the state in which their institution was located. Very few professionals who worked at an institution in a non-neighboring state lived in Vermont, North Dakota, Alaska, Wyoming, or South Dakota.

Although most of these findings correlate with state population size, North Carolina and Arizona are exceptions. Arizona has the most out-of-state professionals working at

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

institutions in a non-neighboring state despite it being the 14th most populous state.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, North Carolina had a large number of professionals working at institutions in non-neighboring states and is the 9th most populous state. These states may be popular among professionals residing in non-neighboring states for several reasons including favorable climates (e.g., Arizona) or cost of living (e.g., North Carolina).

**2024-25 Professionals in Higher Education Survey**  
**Number of Out-of-State Professionals Residing in a Non-Neighboring State**



Figure 11. Number of Out-of-State Professionals Residing in a Non-Neighboring State

## Conclusions

Higher education employees increasingly desire and expect flexible work arrangements.<sup>20</sup> One form of flexibility that colleges and universities may offer is to allow employees to reside in a different state from where their institution is located. Although flexibility is important to employees, hiring across state lines can present logistical challenges for

<sup>19</sup> United States Census Bureau (2024, December). [State Population Totals and Components of Change: 2020-2024](#).

<sup>20</sup> Muscanell, N. (2024, February 5). [The Teaching and Learning Workforce in Higher Education, 2024](#). EDUCAUSE.

institutions. For example, HR professionals must navigate employment laws and tax systems that vary by state when employing a multi-state workforce. The following conclusions highlight key findings from our analysis of the out-of-state professional workforce.

**Most institutions hire out-of-state professionals, but the number of out-of-state professionals at each institution is relatively small.** The vast majority of institutions with at least one out-of-state professional reported having 30 or fewer professionals residing out of state. As such, out-of-state employment still appears to be the exception rather than the rule in higher education.

**Most professionals in higher education still reside in-state, though the percentage of out-of-state professionals has increased slightly over time.** From 2021-22 to 2024-25, the percentage of out-of-state professionals grew from 4% to 5%. Although small, this increase may reflect a shift in institutions' willingness to hire professionals across state lines to fill needed talent gaps or meet employee expectations for more flexible work options.

**Highest degree awarded and public or private institution type are related to the likelihood of employing out-of-state professionals.** Most institutions that award a bachelor's degree and higher reported at least one out-of-state professional compared to just half of associate's institutions. Additionally, private institutions were more likely than public institutions to report an out-of-state professional. In 2024-25, 76% of private institutions had an out-of-state professional compared to 63% of public institutions. These findings suggest openness or ability to hire out-of-state professionals may vary based on institution characteristics.

**The percentage of out-of-state professionals who reside in a non-neighboring state has grown by 11 percentage points in the past several years.** In 2024-25, the proportion of out-of-state professionals residing in a non-neighboring state was 45% compared to 34% in 2021-22. This shift within the out-of-state workforce is notable, as these professionals are unlikely to be regular commuters to campus and may work partially or fully remote.

## Recommendations

**Consider the potential benefits of expanding your multi-state workforce.** Employees are increasingly expecting flexibility at work, and higher education institutions that resist adopting more flexible policies may experience challenges retaining and attracting talent.<sup>21</sup> Opportunities for remote work, flexible schedules, and geographic relocation are among

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<sup>21</sup> Ellis, L. (2021, June 17). ['A Mass Exodus': Inflexible Remote-Work Policies Could Bring Major Staff Turnover](#). *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

the top reasons higher education employees consider new job opportunities.<sup>22</sup> By considering out-of-state candidates and offering flexible work arrangements, colleges and universities can remain competitive and maintain their status as employers of choice. In addition, considering partially or fully remote candidates may help higher education institutions attract talent for roles that are difficult to fill.

**Use job analysis to guide decision-making on flexible work arrangements.** Job analysis enables institutions to understand the work performed by employees, including the behaviors, skills, and context required to execute tasks and responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> Jobs can evolve over relatively short periods of time, so conducting a job analysis on a regular basis is critical to maintaining a current understanding of how and where work can be performed. In the *CUPA-HR 2025 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey*, 62% of employees indicated most of their work can be performed remotely. However, 72% of respondents reported they work completely or mostly on-site, while only 39% prefer this type of work arrangement.<sup>24</sup> A job analysis can help align work arrangements with employee preferences by helping leaders understand the work performed at their institutions and identify opportunities for more flexible work arrangements.

**Carefully consider differing state labor and employment laws when adding out-of-state employees.** Despite the potential benefits described previously, hiring and managing out-of-state employees can be a complex and arduous process. In general, employers must comply with employment laws of the state where their employee resides.<sup>25</sup> Laws related to payroll processing, wages and breaks, leave policies, and training requirements vary by state and at times can vary at even more local levels (e.g., by county). As such, institutions must be knowledgeable of laws and regulations wherever they have employees residing. To manage these complexities, some colleges and universities have policies that limit hiring to certain states. Other institutions have developed strategies for managing out-of-state employment internally or externally based on the level of complexity of each state's employment laws.<sup>26</sup> To accommodate employees residing in other states, institutions may need to make changes to institution-wide policies that impact all employees. Due to the various challenges associated with hiring across state lines, higher education institutions

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<sup>22</sup> Schneider, J., & Bichsel, J. (2025, September). [The CUPA-HR 2025 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey](#). CUPA-HR.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Office of Personnel Management. [Job Analysis](#).

<sup>24</sup> Schneider, J., & Bichsel, J. (2025, September). [The CUPA-HR 2025 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey](#). CUPA-HR.

<sup>25</sup> Wright, A. (2023, December 9). [9 Steps to Hiring Anywhere for Higher Education](#). *HigherEdJobs*.

<sup>26</sup> CUPA-HR. (2023, April 19). [Managing a Multi-State Workforce: Key Findings From the CUPA-HR Survey and a Public University's Hybrid Approach](#).

should deliberately approach out-of-state employment to ensure continued compliance and maintain alignment with their organization's mission.

**Provide resources to support supervisors in managing flexible work environments.**

For institutions looking to adopt more flexible work policies, an important consideration is the management of a workforce that operates hybrid, remote, or across state lines. Managing teams that work off-campus requires unique skills and approaches compared to supervising employees in-person. Many higher education institutions provide online resources to help supervisors navigate flexible work arrangements (e.g., [Rutgers University](#), [Carnegie Mellon University](#), [Baylor University](#)). Compared to managing employees on campus, supervisors who manage hybrid or remote teams may need to communicate with team members more intentionally, check in more frequently, and continuously monitor team performance and feedback to ensure work arrangements meet employee and organizational needs. Before implementing flexible work policies, higher education institutions should ensure resources are in place to support supervisors in their transition to managing hybrid or remote teams.

**About the Authors:**

Brielle Johnson, Ph.D., is a survey researcher at CUPA-HR.

Melissa Fuesting, Ph.D., is associate director of research at CUPA-HR.

*Graphics were created by Kate Roesch, data visualization developer at CUPA-HR.*

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