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Business Relocation America's Smartest Cities

Elisabeth Eaves, 12.15.06, 6:00 AM ET

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In Pictures: America's 10 Smartest Cities

We hear a lot about brain drain, the flow of highly-educated workers away from economically-stagnant regions. The flip side: Some places are magnets for the brightest of the bright. And whether you want to locate your new biotech firm near hotshot recruits, or you just want to socialize with the smart set, our list of America's 10 smartest cities provides a roadmap.

Using data from Sperling's BestPlaces (www.bestplaces.net), we looked at data from the 200 biggest metropolitan areas in the U.S. and ranked them based on the percentage of the population age 25 and over with at least a bachelor's degree.

Of course, educational attainment isn't a perfect proxy for intelligence. Plenty of innovators--perhaps most famously **Microsoft** (nasdaq: [MSFT](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) founder **Bill Gates**--were college dropouts. Still, taken collectively, education is a good, if incomplete, guideline to the level of intellect and capability you'll find in a given area.

In Pictures: America's 10 Smartest Cities

Boulder, Colo. may seem like a surprising winner, but it's no ordinary university town. The University of Colorado's students and staff account for about 38,000 of the city population of 282,200. Boulder, though, is also sticky enough to keep many of its own graduates around--and attract others.

"Boulder is recognized as a very exciting

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town to go live in," says Bert Sperling, founder of Sperling's BestPlaces. "It's attracting young degree holders who want to go somewhere with an outdoor lifestyle." If they don't come for the mountain scenery, it's for the employment opportunities. The National Center for Atmospheric Research, located in Boulder, has more than 120 Ph.D. researchers on staff and hosts hundreds of visiting scientists.

Other urban areas on our list also benefit from a high quotient of university faculty. Third-place Ann Arbor is home to the University of Michigan, while Durham,

N.C., which ranks sixth, is home to Duke University. The Fort Collins-Loveland metropolitan area, home to Colorado State University, came in seventh.

Some of our winners are no-brainers, so to speak. Cambridge, Mass., home to both Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, ranks fourth, with 43.4% of a population of 1.47 million holding a university degree. A slew of biotech firms are located there, as is a major research center owned by pharmaceutical giant **Novartis** (nyse: [NVS](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)).

If you ever question the wisdom coming out of our nation's capital, don't blame a lack of education. Washington, D.C., (together with its Virginia suburbs, Arlington and Alexandria) ranks eighth, a fact probably related to its many lawyers. Bethesda, Md., a D.C. suburb and a growing metropolitan area in its own right, comes in second place. It's home to the National Institutes of Health, which employs 18,627, and **Lockheed Martin** (nyse: [LMT](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)), which employs 135,000 in the aerospace and defense sector.

Silicon Valley, not surprisingly, makes an appearance on our list, with the metropolitan area around San Jose, Calif., coming in at No. 10. Home to corporations including **Apple** (nasdaq: [AAPL](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)), **Google** (nasdaq: [GOOG](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)), **Yahoo!** (nasdaq: [YHOO](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)), **Hewlett-Packard** (nyse: [HPQ](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) and hundreds of other technology icons, there's a reason that 2.4% of the region's population holds a Ph.D.

Still, when it comes to doctorates, small towns are the standouts. Looking at all metropolitan areas with populations of 50,000 or greater, Ithaca, N.Y. ranks No. 1. Home to Cornell University, a whopping 7.92% of residents hold Ph.D.s. Ames, Iowa, where Iowa State University is located, is second, at 7.2%. Other university towns round out the top five: In State College, Penn., the figure is 6.04%; for Corvallis, Ore., it's 5.63%; and in College Station, Tex., it's 5.14%.

We can't guarantee that moving to any of these hubs of mental wattage will make you any smarter, but at least you'll benefit from the sort of perks demanded by highly educated citizens, like good schools and a vibrant cultural scene. Not incidentally, many of our top ten are pretty places, from the California sunshine to the leafy streets of New England. Degrees aside, those smart people are clever at making lifestyle choices too.

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