

Student Focus Groups: 2001

1. Purpose of Study:

- A. To gain insight into students' motivating factors about selecting employment and their community of residence. Three general topics covered:
 - Perceptions of the Fargo/Moorhead area
 - What graduating students want in their careers
 - Decision-making factors
- B. Nine focus groups, or planned discussions facilitated by a moderator, conducted with 56 students at educational institutions within 60 miles of Fargo/Moorhead
- C. Discussions revolved around two basic themes: work and community.

2. Student Focus Group Findings: Themes that capture motivations behind students' decisions regarding residential preferences and employment selection

- A. Self-fulfillment:
 - Desire for variety, challenges, opportunities for responsibility and leadership
 - Want to contribute to larger goals and feel recognized/respected
- B. Economic Considerations:
 - Salary and wages in area are not competitive
 - Incentives can attract/ retain students despite low wages
 - Examples of incentives (e.g. flexible benefits/innovative hooks) include:
 - Family-based, holistic (e.g., childcare, maternity leave, spousal benefits)
 - Flexible (e.g., flexible/extended leave, flexible hours)
 - Innovative hooks (e.g., student loan repayment programs)
 - Affordable living is an important concern
 - Cost-of-living concerns
 - Lack availability of moderate income housing, especially in Moorhead
- C. Work Environment:
 - Want an environment that is people-oriented, family-friendly
 - Desire an emphasis on teamwork, employee appreciation
 - Dominant interests include: flexibility, progressive approaches, casual atmosphere, diversity of work
- D. Stability/Company Philosophy:
 - Want long-term growth and stability
 - Looking for mobility and challenges within the company
 - Skeptical of companies that have history of laying off employees in times of economic uncertainty
 - Concerned about resistance to change they see in leadership
 - Feel diversity and expanded vision will promote long-term stability

- E. Opportunities:
 - Opportunities in the area are limited
 - Skills development, experience, networking, and cross-training are viewed as strategies to remain employable/marketable
 - Desire closer linkages between educational institutions and employers
 - Praise variety of educational opportunities for advanced skills training
 - Criticized conservative atmosphere which is resistant to change and diversity
 - Concerned about limited opportunities for advancement, few international opportunities, little diversity in types of job opportunities, too few entry-level positions for new graduates
- F. Amenities:
 - Concerned about lack of diversity in recreation, cultural events, and social activities
 - Too much unplanned growth
 - Illustrated by limited green space and concentrated housing
 - Agree area is family-oriented with attention given to schools and neighborhoods
- G. Community Approach:
 - Criticized area for not being “young adult-friendly”
 - Leadership is conservative and not progressive
 - Examples cited include legislation restricting cohabitation and local ordinances restricting youth activities (e.g., the juice bar controversy)
 - Desire greater recognition and celebration of diversity in community
 - Desire greater sensitivity to the needs of young adults

3. Recommendations:

- A. Re-evaluate legislative barriers
- B. Create a more young adult-friendly community
- C. Focus on providing positive college experiences so students are more likely to feel committed to community after graduation
- D. Address housing issues in the community
- E. Renovate downtown; create more of a sense of community for Fargo/Moorhead as a whole
- F. Better market recreation and job opportunities
- G. Address pay issues and benefit packages
- H. Examine availability of job opportunities
- I. Address conflicts between entry-level labor force and employer’s needs/expectations
- J. Recognize and celebrate diversity
- K. Examine infrastructure issues
- L. Pursue opportunities with respect to technology; demonstrate an openness and willingness to change