

## **ARE YOU WILLING TO RELOCATE? RECRUITING THE COLLEGE STUDENT IN TODAY'S MOBILE WORK ENVIRONMENT**

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Willingness to relocate is just one factor that companies use to profile the ideal employment candidate. While most of the relocation literature focuses on the relocation of current employees, this exploratory study investigates the issue through the eyes of the recent marketing college graduate. Marketing students were surveyed relative to their attitudes toward relocation. Eight demographic variables and twelve attitude statements were studied to explore the ability to predict students' willingness to relocate. The findings show a student's level of activity in campus organizations, marital status, and several attitudes relative to promotion and success are predictors of marketing students' willingness to relocate.

### **Introduction**

The demographic makeup of the American workforce is cause for concern among human resource managers who are responsible for recruiting, selecting, and hiring for marketing and sales positions. First off, a vast majority of business students enter the workforce as salespeople (Stevens & Kinni 2007). Furthermore, the growth in the number of non-retail salespeople is expected at a rate of 7%-19% through 2014, faster than any other sector (U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006). Second, the oldest of the Baby Boomer workers (those born between 1946 and 1964) are turning 60 years of age and are racing towards retirement at a rate of 7,918 per day (Administration on Aging/Department of Health and Human Services 2006). Third, the estimated 53 million members of the Millennial generation (born between 1981 and 2002 (Bartlett 2005), are the prime replacement marketing and sales targets and are not large and geographically disperse enough to fill the needs of the retiring Baby Boomer workforce.

In recognition of these problems, business colleges are busy preparing their graduates to fill

the shoes of retiring workers. Likewise, recruiters are drawn to campuses in pursuit of students who are skilled in the areas best suited to fill their job vacancies. Listen in on any of these job interviews and you are likely to hear the question, "Are you willing to relocate?" This simple inquiry sends chills of uncertainty through college recruiters and graduating college students alike. This is because hiring entry level workers who are open to relocation is increasingly important to recruiters, yet little is understood in the way of being able to identify these recruits. What is designed a qualifying interview question still remains ineffective at identifying entry-level candidates who are willing to pack their bags to pursue a career away from home. As one Fortune-100 recruiter puts it, "... students will answer the question about relocation with a yes ... mainly because they like to travel, want to see new things, or want to get away from where they grew up. Upon deeper questioning, the student really hadn't thought it through seeing that they will have to make an effort to make (new) friends, join a health club, and get involved so that they have a life, not just a job, in the new community..."

To address the problem, this research explores the relationship between college students' attitudes toward relocation and their stated willingness to relocate. We explore this in the business domain by predicting a marketing major's stated willingness to relocate based on both demographic and attitude data. This research is important to recruiters since gaining an understanding of this relationship may aid in identifying, interviewing, and selecting the right recruits to meet firms' long-term employment needs. For business faculty and career services professionals, such knowledge can enhance the process of connecting students with recruiters with specific job location needs. For all involved in the placement, recruitment, and selection process, this may be a needed step in the matching of college graduates to satisfying and long-term careers.

### **Background**

A vast amount of research can be found in the social science literature regarding issues, problems and concerns expressed by HR professionals regarding the willingness of their current work force to relocate. However, there is little empirical data regarding the willingness of prospective workers to relocate, in particular college students post graduation. Findings of relocation studies conducted on employers' existing work force (Frank 2000; Hendershott 1995; Reimer 2000; Stroh 1999; & Wong 1999) reveal that responsibility for elderly parents, number of previous moves, attitude toward the destination, involvement in the community, career motivation, and perceived stress associated with a move are all attitudinal factors impacting a worker's willingness to relocate.

Demographic factor research in the relocation literature exists but provides mixed findings.

Studies on age suggest two competing paradigms. The first theory is that older workers are less willing to relocate because they are more established in their career, family, and geographic area than a younger worker (Gould & Penley 1985; Mobley 1982; Brett & Werbel 1980). Alternatively, older workers are more willing to relocate because of their investment of time committed to their organizations (Meyer & Allen 1984). This suggests that age alone is not a primary factor influencing a worker's willingness to relocate (Stroh 1999). Research on gender as a factor suggests that females are usually less willing to relocate because they associate relocation with family conflict (Breen 1983). However, females often move for their spouse's relocation (Markham et al. 1983; Markham & Pleck 1986) unless they are the primary provider of financial support. Stroh (1999) points out that measuring the difference between willingness to relocate based on gender is difficult because typically men are offered more opportunities for relocation than women. This implies that female (relocation) subjects are fewer and the data is skewed based on gender.

Relative to family factors, Hall and Hall (1978) found that a significant number of relocation offers are turned down because of lack of spousal support or concern for the children's well being. The presence of children makes an employee less likely willing to relocate (Hall & Hall 1978), unless a substantial pay increase was involved (Araji, 1983) or the children were older (Turban et al. 1992). The research here is somewhat mixed as some studies have found a strong positive link between marital status and willingness to relocate (Araji 1983; Brett & Reilly 1988) while others have found that married women are less likely want to relocate than married men (Gaylord 1984). A study by Gould

and Penley (1985) suggests that when both a husband and wife are employed, both parties would be more willing to relocate for each other. Gould and Penley (1985) cite that dual income households have more money to finance a move. Other studies found that when traditional gender roles are assumed, families may be more willing to relocate (Lamont & Wuthnow 1990; Bielby & Bielby 1992). Traditional gender roles mean that a wife is more willing to move to accommodate her husband's career. On the contrary, many studies have found that employees with employed spouses are less willing to relocate (Brett & Reilly 1988; Bielby & Bielby 1992; Lichter 1982; Martin & Roberts 1984). A move has to be financially worthwhile to counter the employed spouse's income. In particular, a woman will be less willing to relocate for her husband's career if she is very involved in a career of her own.

### Attitudes Toward Relocation

Workers' attitudes may impact their stated willingness to relocate for their jobs. Two theories useful for understanding an individual's attitude toward a particular behavior are the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975) and theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen 1975). The first theory suggests human behavior is predicated on an individual's *attitude toward the behavior*, that is, "an individual's positive or negative feelings about performing the target behavior". Attitudes toward a behavior are predicated on an individual's belief system and the perceived importance one places on the combined set of these beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975). Such beliefs may be formed based on childhood experiences (e.g., children of parents who move a lot) or adult career modeling (e.g., one's family moved frequently to advance a parent's career)

(Dette & Dalbert 2005). According to the theory of planned behavior, subjective norms are also considered in the formation of behavioral intentions. Such norms are people's beliefs about how other people they care about (e.g., friends and family) will view the behavior in question. This was reinforced by the research of Kracke (1997) who found that parents play a major role in the decision-making process of their children. In the context of relocation, a worker may form a negative attitude about moving based on the belief that a family member may require them to remain nearby (e.g., "I anticipate my parents requiring my care within the next five years"). Likewise, friends and spousal attitudes toward moving may serve to capture normative influences (Brett & Reilly 1988). For example, a worker who has a positive attitude about the relocating may indicate so by the attitudinal statement, "most of my friends will relocate for careers after graduation."

One's *attitude toward the destination* may shape his/her willingness to relocate. A worker who has a positive attitude about the destination and has some familiarity with the area is likely more willing to relocate than one who is unfamiliar with the new territory (Carruthers & Pinders 1993). Likewise, studies have indicated that negative attitudes toward relocation may be formed when the relocation destination is viewed as dissimilar to what the individual considers "home" (Vardi 1977). According to Riemer (2000), the concept of home is more than just a physical location or house rather it is a more all-inclusive concept. Home is an area where people identify themselves relative to childhood memories and feelings of belonging. When someone moves, he/she is losing a part of him/herself; a major part of him/her is changing. To these people, relocation signifies a

new beginning (Riemer 2000). An example of an attitudinal statement here is, "I want to relocate to an area that is similar to what I consider home."

One's sense of *career development and advancement* may also serve to form attitudes toward relocation. A worker may view relocation a necessary part of being successful in the job or advancement of one's career. Such attitudes form as early as high school (e.g., "I am preparing for a career that may require me to relocate"). Feeling the pressures to enter the workforce, adolescents may choose careers requiring them to move to colleges that are away from their homes (Dette & Dalbert 2005). According to the American Council on Education (2004) of those who go to college, 18% moved more than 50 miles and 35% moved 101-500 miles from their permanent home. This is evidence that one's attitudes toward career development and advancement play a role in willingness to relocate.

Given this background, we can begin to understand the factors that may be considered when predicting one's willingness to relocate. Understanding such factors can be a powerful recruitment and selection tool for employers. Unfortunately, there are few, if any relocation studies that focus on the business college student or recent business graduate as its subject and their attitudes toward relocation. Therefore, we use this as a platform to advance the existing literature by addressing the following questions:

What are some of the demographics that can be used to profile a business college student who is willing to relocate?

What attitudes towards relocation are likely to predict that a business college student is willing to relocate?

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## **Methodology**

### *Sample and Data Collection*

Junior/senior level, full-time, students were solicited based on a convenience sample from six major universities located in the eastern half of the United States. Each of these universities expressed an interest in better understanding the issue of students' willingness to relocate after graduation. The majority of these students were marketing majors and/or students with a strong interest in professional sales as a career choice. This group was of particular interest because careers in marketing and sales are more often associated with relocation than careers in other business fields (Brett and Werbel 1980). The population studied represented a mix of commuter and residential students with the majority of students (72%) being in their senior year of college. Three hundred and thirteen students were given an in-class survey, producing 238 usable responses, which resulted in a 76% response rate. Seventy-five surveys were eliminated from the sample because of missing or incomplete responses.

### *Survey Instrument*

Prior to full deployment, a survey was developed and pretested using a small sample of college students at one pre-selected university. Changes to the survey were made to address instruction clarity and length issues. After a redraft, the survey was distributed to students at six major universities who agreed to participate in the study. Directions were given orally to the respondents during class time. The only specific directions given were regarding the definitions of relocation and home. Relocation was defined as either initially accepting a job (at least 100 miles) away from the perceived "home", or accepting a job near (within 100 miles) "home", and then

being relocated. The student based on what he/she considered to be home defined "home". Subjects were asked to keep their definition consistent throughout the survey. No other directions were given. Next, the administrator orally explained the confidentiality of the survey. To ensure confidentiality, the students inserted their own surveys into an envelope so that the administrator could not see any personal data.

Sample items from the survey questionnaire are included in the paper's appendix (shown on page 30 following this article). Subjects were asked: "Would you be willing to relocate (move more than 100 miles from what you consider to be your home) in order to fulfill your work plans upon graduation?" The response to this question was either "yes", "no", or "don't know". Next, the survey measured eight demographic variables: home distance from university, campus activity level, gender, age, marital status, spousal employment, presence (and number) of children, and grade point average. *Home distance* from university is the number of miles a student lived away from "home" while pursuing an undergraduate degree. *Campus activity level* is the degree of involvement that a student has with campus organizations; participants were given four self selected levels to choose from (1 = uninvolved to 4 = very active). This demographic variable was chosen because moderate to higher levels of involvement in campus organizations may indicate a student's ability and willingness to adapt to and forge new relationships. Relocation to a new environment would require the desire and ability to make new friends, establish relationships with colleagues, and exercise leadership skills. *Grade point average* was chosen because some recruiters use it as a selection tool to find the "top" academic students. It may be

reasonable to assume that students with higher grade point averages might have more job offers (Barr and McNeilly 2002). Having more job offers gives the student more choices to decide on whether he/she is going to relocate. Conversely, students with lower grade point averages might have fewer job offers and fewer choices about relocation. Other demographic variables included: *gender* = male or female, *age* = years a person has lived, *marital status* = single/divorced or married/engaged, *spousal employment* = yes or no, and the *presence of children* is the number and ages of children that a respondent may have.

Students were then asked to respond (yes or no) as to their agreement with twelve statements reflective of their attitudes toward relocation for a job upon graduation. These statements were developed to capture their relocation attitudes relative to their: friends/family, career, and sense of home.

### Analysis and Results

Sample descriptive statistics profiling the mean, standard deviation, and correlation among the demographic variables are illustrated in Table 1 (shown on page 26). In order to address the objectives of the study, separate binary logistic regression analyses were performed in order to predict (student relocation) group membership (Malhotra 2006) based on both demographic and attitude statement variables. To do so, the binary response (dependent) variable was willingness to relocate (yes = 1 = 175 cases, no = 0 = 63 cases).

Table 2 (shown on page 26) illustrates the results of the demographic predictors. Here, two of the eight predictors were significant. These were: *active in campus organizations* ( $b = .382, p < .05$ ) and *marital status = single/divorced* ( $b = 1.995, p$

**Table 1** Means, Standard Deviation, and Correlation among Variables

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Willingness to Relocate	0.67	0.47	1							
2 Home Distance from University	139.10	456.88	.064	1						
3 Level Activity in Campus Orgs.	2.34	1.02	.119	-.019	1					
4 Gender = male	0.46	0.50	.035	.149*	-.080	1				
5 Age	23.07	4.75	-.058	.121*	-.272**	-.042	1			
6 Marital Status = single/divorced	0.81	0.39	.194**	-.011	.155*	.060	-.386**	1		
7 Spouse Employed	0.86	0.35	.175**	-.019	.161**	.071	-.381**	.979**	1	
8 Number of Children	0.13	0.51	-.006	-.067	-.251**	.013	.408**	-.444**	-.426**	1
9 Grade Point Average	3.10	0.41	-.016	.100	.212**	-.007	-.107	.092	.104	-.020

\* Correlation is significant at the  $p < .05$  level (2-tailed)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the  $p < .01$  level (2-tailed)

**Table 2** Demographic Predictors of Students' Willingness to Relocate Logistic Regression Results <sup>a</sup>

Predictor Variables	Beta coef.	Std. error	P-value
Home Distance from University (miles)	.000	.000	.407
Active in Campus Organizations	.382	.169	.024*
Gender = Males	.344	.323	.287
Age (years)	-.009	.035	.795
Marital Status = Single/Divorced	1.995	1.026	.049*
Spouse/Fiance Employed = Yes (if married)	.754	1.027	.463
Number of Children	.596	.338	.078
Grade Point Average	-.589	1.955	.905

<sup>a</sup> Hosmer and Lemeshow Model Fit Test: chi-square = 5.494 (sig = .704)

Overall Percentage of cases correctly predicted = 76.9

N = 238 \* $p < .05$

**Table 3** Attitude Predictors of Students' Willingness to Relocate Logistic Regression Results <sup>a</sup>

Attitude (agree with the following statements)	Beta coef.	Std. error	P-value
"Its is more likely that I will have to relocate because I have a college degree."	1.248	.456	.006**
"I anticipate my parents requiring my care within the next five years."	-2.120	.662	.001**
"I want to relocate to an area that is similar to what I consider home."	.512	.376	.172
"I am preparing for a career that is often associated with relocation."	1.087	.415	.009**
"There are realistic alternatives to relocation."	-.797	.504	.114
"I would no relocate for a career if the salary was too low."	-.287	.469	.541
"I think that relocation is necessary for me to be successful in my career"	1.493	.495	.003**
"I have given or would give dishonest answers about relocating in a job interview."	-1.200	.600	.045*
"Most of my friends will be relocating for jobs during their lifetime."	-.177	.432	.681
"My parents had to relocate for jobs during their lifetime."	.481	.419	.251
"There are not many job opportunities in my career field near my home."	.292	.421	.487
"Employees who turn down relocation offers are less likely to be promoted and are considered less committed to the company."	.692	.382	.070

<sup>a</sup> Hosmer and Lemeshow Model Fit Test: chi-square = 2.866 (sig = .942)

Overall Percentage of cases correctly predicted = 81.1

N = 238 \*p<=.05 88p<=.01

<= .05). Overall, this model predicted correctly 76.9% of the cases with a reasonable Hosmer and Lemeshow Model Fit Indicator (chi-square = 5.494, sig. = .704). The Hosmer and Lemeshow Model Fit Test measures the correspondence of the actual and predicted values of the dependent variable. In this case, better model fit is indicated by a non-significant chi-square value depicted by smaller chi-square and larger significance values (Hair et al. 1998).

Table 3 provides the attitudes expressed by students as predictors of willingness to relocate. Overall, this model predicted correctly 81.1% of the cases with a good Hosmer and Lemeshow Model Fit Indicator (chi-square = 2.866, sig. = .942). The five significant attitude statements predicting membership in this group were:

*"It is more likely that I will have to relocate because I have a college degree"* (b = 1.248, p < .01)

*"I anticipate my parents requiring my care within the next five years"* (b = -2.120, p < .01)

*"I am preparing for a career that is often associated with relocation"* (b = 1.087, p < .01)

*"I think that relocation is necessary for me to be successful in my career"* (b = 1.493, b < .01)

*"I would give dishonest answers about relocating in a job interview"* (b = -1.200, b < .05)

### Discussion and Implications

Contrary to some of the existing relocation literature (Breen 1983; Gould & Penley 1985; Mobley 1982; Brett & Werbel 1980), several demographic variables such as *gender* and *age* are

not significant predictors of willingness to relocate. One explanation for this is that our sample differs from that traditionally used in relocation research (i.e., more mature workers). Our sample of marketing students are likely younger, with little variation in age, and have relatively fewer family ties, household belongings, and childcare responsibilities. At this age, younger men and younger women likely share such life stage attributes equally. Thus, there is little reason to believe that age and gender account for differences in willingness to relocate among our student sample. It was also interesting to note that home distance (miles) from the university was not a significant predictor of relocation willingness. One reason for this finding may stem from our sample consisting primarily of students with a strong interest in professional sales as a career choice. Based on the belief that these future salespeople have in that they are preparing for a career that is often associated with relocation, distance from home is less of a significant issue. It is explainable that differences in willingness to relocate are predicted by *level of activity in campus organizations* and *marital status* being single/divorced. Moderate to higher levels of involvement in campus organizations is indicative of a student's ability and willingness to adapt to and forge new relationships. Relocation to a new environment would require the desire and ability to make new friends, establish relationships with colleagues, function in a team setting, and exercise leadership skills. Also consistent with the relocation literature (Araji 1983; Brett & Reilly 1988), being single or divorced allows for flexibility and freedom from many of the responsibilities that would normally be a deterrent to relocation.

Some of the significant attitudes found to predict a marketing student's willingness to relocate provide interesting insight into how the student views relocation relative to the impact on their family, the recruiting process, and ultimately success in a career. Those indicating a willingness to relocate feel that their parents *will not* require their care within the next five years. As a significant attitude, this indicates that the impact on family is a major relocation consideration. Relative to the recruiting process, those willing to relocate indicated that they would be truthful with a recruiter when asked about their relocation propensity. This may be indicative of the honesty and integrity values instilled upon them from their parents and friends. This may also be evidence of sound ethical guidance and counsel emanating from the business schools where they studied. Several of the significant attitudes were related to the students' view of career success. College students believe that relocation is necessary to be successful in their career and that by nature of earning a college degree, they will likely have to relocate. It is possible that these beliefs are based on the feeling that in today's global competitive marketplace, firms will seek to hire and promote workers that demonstrate adaptability as well as capability. Replacing workers is costly, so the individual willing to relocate may be viewed as an extremely valuable resource to acquire and retain.

Based on the results of this study, we can begin to infer that a marketing student's willingness to relocate can be profiled. The profile that has emerged from this exploratory study can be summarized by suggesting that an undergraduate marketing student will be willing to relocate if he/she:

1. Is active in campus organizations

2. Is single/divorced
3. Has parents who will not need care within 5 years
4. Believes that he/she will have to relocate having received a college degree
5. Believes that he/she is preparing for a career often associated with relocation
6. Believes that relocation is necessary for a successful career

The implications of this study are important to marketing students nearing graduation, corporate recruiters/human resource managers, and marketing faculty. For students approaching graduation (as well as recent college graduates), this study can be useful in understanding and validating their own personal feelings towards job relocation. Such introspection can confirm a decision to accept a job offer that requires them to move. For corporate recruiters and human resource managers, these findings may be used to supplement answers to questions about job relocation from students. For example, most recruiters place value on experience out of the classroom such as teamwork and leadership positions within university organizations (Barr and McNeilly 2002; Taylor 2003). Whereas studies have shown that students reporting less free time perform better academically (Ackerman and Gross 2003), recruiters may wish to probe further to gather information about students' level of campus activity. Although an applicant might *say* he/she is willing to relocate, a lack of involvement in activities outside of the classroom might suggest that the student will experience challenges acclimating to a new physical environment. Research studies have also suggested that marketing academics can advise and help prepare students for careers in

marketing (see Craig and Bridges 2005; Chapman and Avila 1991; Goldhehn 1989; Turley, Shannon, and Miller 1993). Faculty involvement here should include helping students set realistic relocation expectations for their jobs. This may include advising them on company needs (to relocate employees) and ways to cope or adapt to new environments.

### Conclusion

“Are you willing to relocate?” This important question posed during a job interview may trigger feelings of doubt, indecision, and insecurity for both corporate recruiters and graduating students during the employment decision-making process. During our research, such uncertainty was confirmed by corporate recruiters, one who openly commented “...I have found that recent college graduates say they don't mind relocating, practically anywhere, but then down the road they usually want to return to an office closer to home...” Our research may serve recruiters here by helping them to better understand the student demographic and attitude factors of those students truly willing to relocate. The findings of our study extend the extant relocation research while providing a practical tool for recruiters to supplement their interviews and intuition. A limitation of our study stems from our respondents' concept of home. We allowed each student to self-define home (as long as s/he kept this definition consistent throughout the survey). Based on this definition there was the possibility that “home” took on various meanings (e.g., parent's home, home-town, etc.) Subsequent research on this topic might provide for a specific definition of home for subjects to base their survey responses. A second limitation and cautionary note for managers is that some interview questions could be illegal if they are designed to reveal an

applicant's age, sex, race, religion, and national origin. During the live interview, such illegal questions should not be asked. However, if such information is either apparent (e.g., gender and age range) or volunteered (e.g., marital status), the research here may provide additional insight as to whether a student might be willing to relocate for a job.

Further research on this topic might test for differences between groups of college students based on major area of study and academic program level (i.e., undergraduate versus graduate). Also, another possible influence on willingness to relocate may stem from family history of relocation (i.e., my family relocated several times during my childhood). Further study on this topic could include questions relative to such family history. Seeing that the basis for this study is classifying individuals as "willing to relocate", a logical extension to this research is the development and testing of a scale measuring *propensity to relocate*. Doing so would enable us to measure the *level* of one's relocation willingness. Such continued research to understand job candidate relocation tendencies remains a much-needed aid to employers in their struggle to attract and retain human resources in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

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**Appendix****Sample Questionnaire Items**

Would you be willing to relocate (move more than 100 miles from what you consider to be your "home") for a job after graduation?

yes     no     don't know

**Please check "yes" or "no" for each statement.**

**yes no**

- It is more likely that I will have to relocate because I have a college degree.  
  I anticipate my parents requiring my care within the next five years.  
  I want to relocate to an area that is similar to what I consider "home". (size, etc.)  
  I am preparing for a career that is often associated with relocation.  
  There are realistic alternatives to relocation.  
  I would **not** relocate for a career if the salary were too low.  
  I think that relocation is necessary for me to be successful in my career.  
  I have given or would give dishonest answers about relocating in a job interview.  
  Most of my friends will be relocating for careers after graduation.  
  My parents had to relocate for jobs during their lifetime.  
  There are not many job opportunities in my career field near my "home."  
  Employees who turn down relocation offers are less likely to be promoted and are considered less committed to the company.

How far away did you live from this university **before** you started your undergraduate program?  miles

I have been  in campus organizations during my undergraduate years.

very active                       relatively inactive  
 fairly active                       uninvolved

Please indicate your sex.

male                       female

Please indicate your age in years.  years

Marital status.

married                       divorced  
 single                       single but engaged

If married or engaged, is your spouse/fiancé employed?

yes     no     not applicable

Do you have children?

yes     no

If yes, how many children do you have and what are their ages?

number of children  
 ages of children

To date, what is your cumulative grade point average?

GPA (example 3.2, 2.7, 1.3, etc.)