

PAA Extended Abstract

Affinity for Home: The Role it Plays in Rural Recruitment and Migration

Affinity for place is a key component to individual migration decision-making. Recruitment to rural places is based, in part, on the assumption that individuals raised in a rural area have an affinity for rural places and are therefore more likely to return to their hometown or a similar rural area. We tested that affinity hypothesis in a pilot survey (N=101) of nursing students in Mississippi. (Note: A survey of all nursing students in the state (~5,000) will be conducted during the fall semester of 2010. Those survey results will be reported at the PAA annual meeting.) We ask "Assuming that a suitable job opportunity (for example, salary, specialty area, etc.) was available, where would you want to work in Mississippi when you graduate?" We then match responses with birthplace, high school and location of family (i.e., direct city-to-county matches). We also code the respondents' cities via the rural-urban continuum county code and calculate correlations to similar sized communities. This tests the affinity for places similar to their hometown. As a control we ask if they have already applied for employment or accepted a job offer. In addition we ask respondents to rank the importance of job factors (e.g., salary package, working environment, work options in their specialty, opportunities for spouse/partner, public school system, amenities, climate, etc) in making a relocation decision.

In the spring semester of 2010 we conducted a pilot survey of Mississippi nursing students. A total of five (out of 22) programs had student participation in the survey. The participating programs were: Delta State University (12%), East Central Community College (1%), East Mississippi Community College (29%), Mississippi University for Women (12%), and the University of Mississippi Medical Center (6.8%). The average respondent is a female (90%), 24 years of age (The youngest respondent was 20 and the oldest 57). Nearly 90 percent (88%) are white non-Hispanics, 11 percent are black, and only one is Asian. More than 80 percent of respondents are in a relationship (41%) or are currently married (41%), about 12 percent (12%) have never been married and are not in a relationship, and only four percent are separated or divorced. Given that 81% are in a relationship or married, in the fall 2010 survey we will ask a question to determine if the nursing student will be a trailing or leading spouse, which can influence the job placement decision.

We asked respondents what was the most important reason for their choosing their school. The most popular answer choice (54%) was its offering a particular type of program. The second most common reason (22%) was its geographical location being close to home. One of the key purposes of this study is to understand what environmental, social, and fiscal factors are most important in nursing graduates in selecting a place to practice using a series of likert scaled questions ranging from "very important", "important", "neutral", "unimportant", and "very unimportant". These questions investigate the importance of total salary package, working environment and conditions, a place that allows them to practice their specialty, job opportunities for spouse or partner, area amenities, public school system, availability of additional

professional training opportunities, climate, size of the city, being close to family, future professional opportunities and “wherever I can find a job after graduation” . Nearly every respondent thinks that one’s total salary package is important or very important in influencing where they will work. Importantly, it also shows that one’s salary tends to be rated higher than their mean response of importance. All of the respondents felt that the working conditions are important or very important. The working environment is of particular importance to where a person will choose to work. On the other hand, we infer that the importance of being able to work in one’s specialty is relatively less important than the other two aforesaid dimensions due to the wider variation in responses. The results are inconsistently distributed in the importance of the job opportunities for a student’s spouse/partner in where they want to work after they graduate. For some, this factor has a higher score than their mean importance score, for others it is lower. This is due to some people not being engaged in an active relationship or not being married as well as this variable possibly being less important relative other factors. Similar findings of a well dispersed and an inconsistent pattern is exhibited for the importance of the public school system. We suspect that this is in part due to many students not having children who are/will be school age. The responses of importance of area amenities, the availability of additional professional training opportunities, climate, and the size of the city are very dispersed. This indicates that these three dimensions are of marginal importance in where one wants to practice after graduation, particularly the area amenities, climate, and size of the city. Contrary to our expectations, the importance of being close to family is varied and suggests marginal importance. Although there are some respondents who reported that the availability of professional opportunities was unimportant or neutral, the majority felt that this was an important or very important factor in considering where they want to practice. In addition, many of the respondents reported higher scores for this element than their mean importance score; thus signifying that it is of relative importance, but is not the most important factor in deciding where to practice. The final factor that we measured to understand where nursing students desire to locate upon graduating was “Wherever I can find a job.” The results are a wide distribution of perceived importance, but most of the values tend to be at mean level of importance, or higher. Therefore, we conclude that the majority of nursing students are willing to locate to areas where they are offered employment, even if the job is not located in a preferred area.

Now that the importance of characteristics of the desired locale have been determined, we wanted to find out what percent nursing students would accept a job in Mississippi upon graduation if one where available. Our results indicate that nearly 90 percent (88%) report that they would and only two percent would not. On the other hand, 10 percent are unsure or refused to answer. These statistics are of interest as it provides clear evidence that the majority of students would be happy to practice in the state, and that 10 percent are ambiguous.

Our results show that among the 101 respondents, 12 reported having already made a job commitment upon graduation, 84 do not, one did not know, and four failed to answer. Further probing show that of 12 who have job commitments, 11 of are in Mississippi.

The thrust of this study is to better understand how nursing student's backgrounds affect their preferences in what geographical location they desire to work. We ask respondents to select up to five areas or cities in Mississippi where they would like to work. We have transformed these data to county level indicators and linked these counties to their appropriate county Beale Code. A Beale Code is a county level rural-urban continuum typology with 9 classifications. We collapsed the first three into one category making this new group encompass counties with population sizes of 250,000 or more. Beale codes distinguish between counties that are adjacent to a metro area and those that are not-adjacent to a metro area, but have the same population size. We combined these separate categories and examine counties only in terms of population size. From these county typologies, 43% of the preferred locations that respondents selected were in counties which have populations of 250,000 or more, 36% were in counties with populations between 20,000 and 250,000, 20% preferred counties with population sizes between 2,000 and 20,000, and less than one percent (0.8%) preferred counties with 2,500 or fewer residents.

We also asked respondents what city and state they were born in and graduated high school. Responses for those who were born and/or graduated high school in cities located within Mississippi were converted to county Beale Codes and matched to their preference cities and if applicable, where they have committed to a job. Lastly, we matched Beale codes for the county of the nursing school's county and preference cities and/or job location. This is at the heart of our study as it allows us to clearly identify what proportion of nursing students prefer to return to their home county or one that is similar in size. We found that nearly half of our respondents wanted to relocate to their birth county (47%), high school county (48%), or county in which their nursing school is located (49%), or a county that has an equivalent Beale code.

Table 1: Percent of Respondents Preference Locations' Beale Codes Matching Respondents' Birth, High School, and Nursing School Counties' Beale Codes

County of Birth	Match	No Match	Total n	Pct Matched
n	122	138	260	47%
County of High School				
n	153	168	321	48%
County of Nursing School				
n	182	189	371	49%

Note: Respondents could select up to five geographic preferences.

When we focus our attention to how nursing students' place of job commitments Beale codes match their home counties' Beale codes, we see very suggestive findings. We note however, that these findings are only suggestive due to the very limited sample sizes of respondents who had actually made a job commitment. We find that five of the six respondents had a job commitment in a county similar to their birth. Eight of the 10 students report having a job commitment in a county with a matching Beale code. Lastly, we find that five of the 10 have job commitments in counties with Beale codes equivalent to their nursing school's county. Despite the limitations posed by the small sample sizes, the cross tabulations strongly suggest that nursing students do have

strong ties to their home counties and further support the need to perform more research in this vein.

Table 2: Percent of Respondents Committed Work Locations' Beale Codes Matching Respondents' Birth, High School, and Nursing School Counties' Beale Codes

County of Birth	Match	No Match	Total n	Pct Matched
n	6	1	6	83%
County of High School				
n	8	2	10	80%
County of Nursing School				
n	5	5	10	50%

The results quantify the role that community (as opposed to economic opportunity) plays in the migration decision and reveals whether those raised in small towns yearn to return to a small town. This research could have fundamental implications for recruitment and economic development strategies, especially in rural areas.