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