

Students in Dr. Windy Rachal’s Business Communications classes at Nicholls State University collaborated with South Louisiana Economic Council (SLEC) to gather data on two pressing issues affecting the Bayou Region (St. Mary, Assumption, Lafourche, and Terrebonne): 1) the misperception that there are neither jobs nor professionals available to meet local labor needs, and 2) interest in knowing what other companies are doing in the wake of the hurricanes to offset the demand on their human resources.

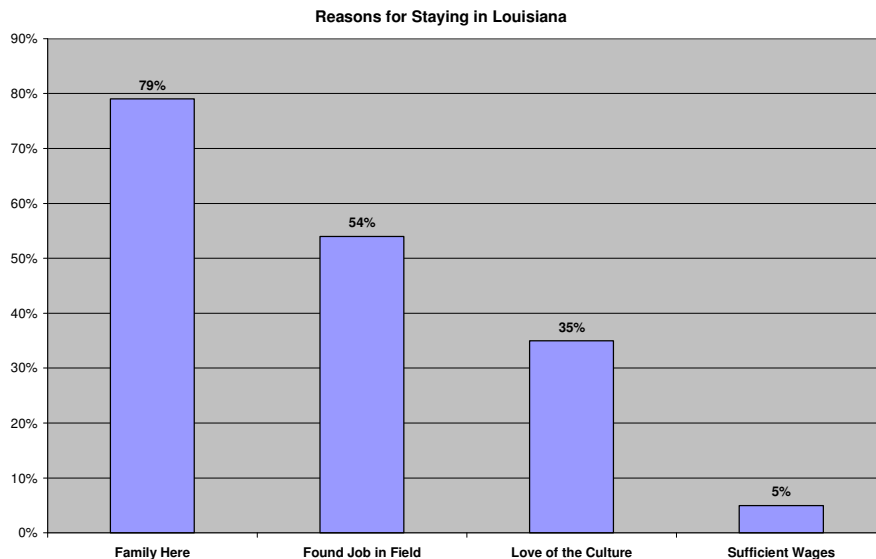
Survey Assessing Nicholls Alumni Job Outlook

In order to address the conception that there are no local jobs for local graduates, SLEC has already developed a program called “No Place Like Home” which uses monster.com technology to provide online job matching. The program is in its infancy and needs funding for further development. In order to support the need for this program development, SLEC worked with Nicholls students to prove or disprove the hypothesis that graduates are leaving because they perceive a lack of job opportunity in South Louisiana but want to return if opportunities were available.

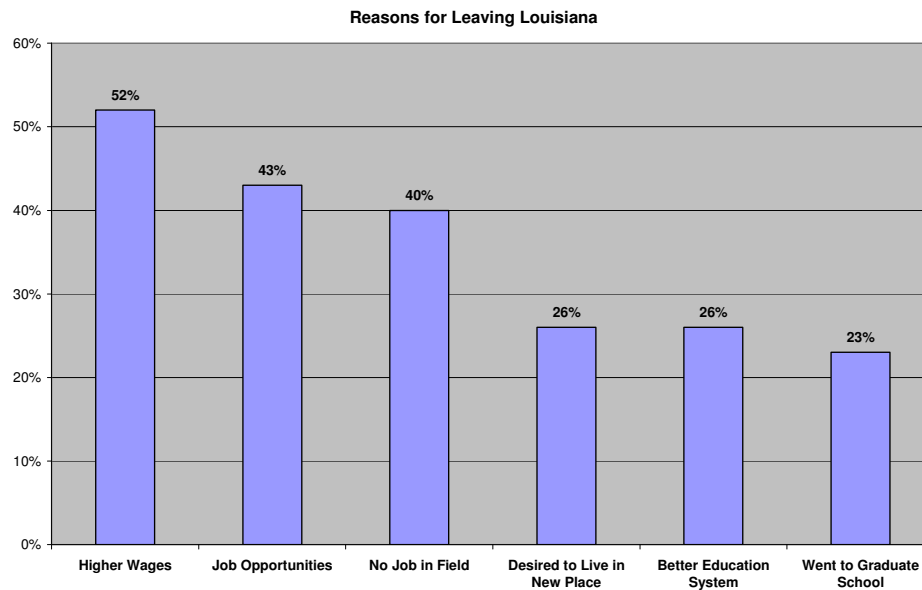
Students addressed these needs by conducting normative survey research. Five hundred recent Nicholls graduates were solicited to participate in the survey; one hundred and thirty participated.

Results

Eighty percent of recent graduates stayed in South Louisiana after graduation. When asked to indicate all the reasons why they stayed, 79% had family located in South Louisiana, 54% found jobs in their professions, and 35% love the culture. Only 5% of these recent graduates stayed in South Louisiana because of wages.



Twenty percent of recent graduates left South Louisiana. When asked all the reasons why they left, 52% found higher wages, 43% found job opportunities, 40% could not find a job in their profession, 26% desired to live in a new place, 26% wanted a better education system, and 23% went to graduate school.



Of the graduates who left South Louisiana, 70% were employed in South Louisiana before they left. When asked what would motivate them to return, 70% desire to return to family, 61% desire to return to culture, and 48% higher wages. Only 17% of these graduates said there is nothing that would motivate them to return.

Wages were of primary concern to these graduates: none would return to South Louisiana for lower wages than they currently make. But 30% would return for the same job opportunity with the same pay that they currently have, 43% would return for the same job with higher pay, and 52% would return for a different job with higher pay.

Of the graduates who left Louisiana, 57% spent no time looking for a job in South Louisiana. When graduates were asked all the ways they searched for jobs most respondents said primarily through the Internet (59%), followed by classifieds (53%), and word of mouth (53%).

Of those who stayed, 30% spent no time looking, and another 30% looked for less than one month. These graduates searched for jobs primarily through word of mouth (58%), followed by classifieds (41%), and the Internet (35%).

A greater number of participants who left the state (82%) are employed in the profession they went to college for than are those who stayed in the state (69%).

Forty-four percent of graduates who stayed in the state felt that it is difficult to find a job in South Louisiana, and 68% felt that it is difficult for South Louisiana to keep college graduates in the local job force. Similarly, 77% of those who left felt that it is difficult to find a job in South Louisiana, and 88% felt that it is difficult for South Louisiana to keep college graduates in the local job force.

All of the participants felt that a program like No Place Like Home would be beneficial—48% felt it would be extremely beneficial. Moreover, 62% would personally use such a program.

Participants were employed in almost every industry, with the highest percentages coming from education (24%), healthcare (14%), finance and insurance (10%). All participants are originally from South Louisiana.

Summary

In summary, the survey shows that most who stay in Louisiana do so because of family and culture rather than wages and job opportunities, and most who leave do so because of wages and job opportunities. An overwhelming 70% of those who left want to return to family and the culture of South Louisiana, but would require wages at least equal to what they currently earn. Fewer of the graduates who stayed in South Louisiana are employed in the profession for which they went to college. Fittingly, there is significant agreement that it is difficult to find a job in South Louisiana and difficult to keep graduates in the local job force.

While the survey seems to indicate that low wages are a greater issue than job availability, there was still significant support for development of an online job matching service like "No Place Like Home," and most participants would personally use that service. Because Internet job searches ranked first for graduates who left the area and third for graduates who stayed, it is reasonable to believe that an online job matching service like "No Place Like Home" would be a successful job search and recruiting method.

Survey Assessing How Bayou Region Businesses Dealt with 2005 Hurricane Season

In the wake of the 2005 hurricane season, area businesses have been largely concerned with labor and wage issues: employee turnover, increase in wages, recruiting, etc. Area businesses are interested in knowing what other local businesses are doing to offset the demand on their human resources.

The second class used normative survey research to assess what local businesses have done post hurricanes to retain and attract workers. Of the fifty-five companies in the Bayou Region that were solicited to participate, thirty completed the survey. Thirty percent of the respondents came from the manufacturing industry, 13% construction, 10% food services, 7% wholesale trade, 7% public administration, and 7% other services. The remaining percentages came from such industries as mining, utilities, retail trade, transportation and warehousing, real estate and rental, professional, scientific and technical services, educational services, and healthcare and social assistance industries.

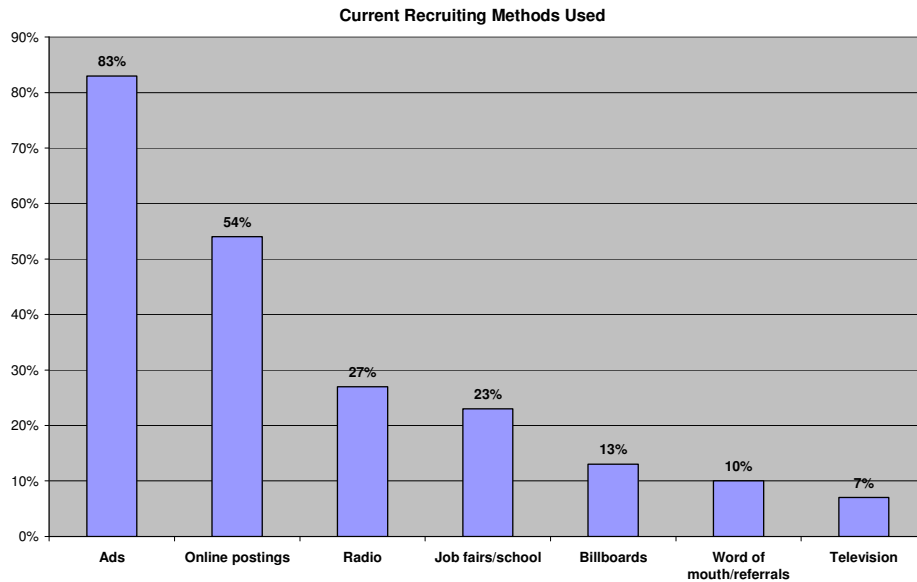
Results

All respondents said they were at least somewhat affected by the hurricanes. Thirty-three percent were “very much so” affected.

Forty-six percent of respondents said that their company had a significant to somewhat significant need for additional personnel to meet industry demands. Forty percent of respondents said that they had a slight need for additional personnel. When asked if companies had experienced an increase in sales volume since the hurricanes, 27% said they had no increase with the remaining 73% stating an increase in sales volume.

It is interesting to note that most companies stated a need for additional personnel, but the majority of companies (56%) said production had not slowed due to a shortage in employees. The survey showed that all companies had internal restructuring to compensate for lost or inadequate supply of workers, and all of the companies have had to ask current employees work longer hours and take on additional duties. Only 20% indicated that they have not increased wages to retain those employees, with 80% of companies increasing wages. All of the companies stated that their human resources are running at full capacity since the hurricanes.

Ninety-three percent noted an increase in employee turnover since the hurricanes. All of the businesses have experienced a fair to significant degree of difficulty hiring qualified employees since the hurricanes, and all have had to change recruiting methods. Current methods used are newspaper ads (83%), online postings (54%), radio (27%), job fairs/schools (23%), Billboards (13%), word of mouth/referrals (10%), and television (7%). All indicated that they prefer to hire locally and that these methods were working for them. Forty-seven percent have had to lower minimum skill requirements for entry-level workers.



To attract new employees, 60% had to increase wages, but 43% have done nothing. Likewise, 57% have increased wages to retain employees, but 37% have done nothing. Twenty percent of the companies are offering a bonus to retain workers, and 13% are offering a sign-on bonus to attract workers.

Of the 63% who increased wages, most (37%) increased by only a dollar or two. The second largest increased was two-three dollars (26%). All but two of the companies considered this change permanent.

Summary

In summary, all of these companies have been affected significantly by the hurricanes. All are stretching human resources and restructuring to meet increased demand. Turnover is high (as indicated by 95%), and all are having difficulty finding new, qualified workers. Most companies have increased wages slightly and permanently, but a significant number (37%) have not increased wages at all. All companies have had to adjust recruiting methods, and many (47%) have lowered qualifications to deal with hiring difficulties.