

An Exploration of Choice Criteria Used in the Selection of a First Academic Position Among New Doctorates in Marketing

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Abstract:

The process used by a new marketing Ph.D. in selecting the first academic post is an area of great interest given the current academic job market. The present study was designed to identify the criteria which new Ph.D.s use in selecting their first academic position. Among the results of the study was the identification of three distinct orientations—"lifestyle," "career- and work-related," and "location"—which influence the selection process.

Keywords: marketing faculty | higher education | business schools | faculty recruitment

Article:

The process used by new Ph.D.s in marketing in selecting the first academic post is of great interest given the current academic job market. Many universities are facing shortages of doctorally qualified candidates as business schools fight to keep pace with ever increasing enrollments at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Recent figures indicate that nearly one-fifth of all positions requiring the terminal degree in marketing remain unfilled, and the shortage shows no signs of diminishing (Cebrzynski 1987).

New doctorates in marketing are not being produced in sufficient numbers for a variety of reasons. The promise of high business salaries seems to have shut down the desire of many MBAs to spend additional time and effort in obtaining a doctorate (Fisher and Garrett 1984). Furthermore, high salaries in the nonacademic marketplace, the pressure to "publish or perish," and a general frustration with workload have combined to entice many faculty to seek greener pastures. These pressures often result in vacancies that may be difficult to fill (Carnegie Foundation 1985b, 1986).

Increasing demand in the face of inadequate supply may be very attractive to the new marketing Ph.D. However, the situation presents unique problems for department heads and university administrators. Accreditation by the AACSB depends, in part, upon the presence of an adequate complement of terminally qualified professors in a business school. Thus, an understanding of the factors used by the new marketing Ph.D. in selecting that first academic position is important.

Surprisingly, the choice criteria used by new Ph.D.s in seeking and accepting employment have not been investigated. Because of this, the present study was designed to identify the criteria which new Ph.D.s use in the selection of their first academic position. In addition, the research sought to determine whether general tendencies in the selection process exist across doctorates.

REVIEW OF PAST RESEARCH

Although the selection criteria used by new doctorate holders have not been the subject of detailed research, several studies have examined the process of selecting a university used by students at both the undergraduate and graduate level. While the choice criteria employed, as well as the decision process itself, may be different for the new Ph.D., these studies do provide a framework from which to begin this research.

Undergraduates have been found to weigh a campus visit more heavily than any other source of information in deciding which university to attend (Carnegie Foundation 1986). A visit to the campus could also have considerable impact on the new Ph.D. seeking employment, since the campus visit usually represents the greatest investment of time by the candidate in the recruitment process. Positive impressions formed during initial interviews (such as those conducted at the AMA summer Educators' Conference) can be altered dramatically as a result of the campus visit.

For masters students, the process is quite similar. Houston (1979) has identified four important information sources which influence attendance decisions. These sources are print media about a specific program, expert and peer-related personal sources, direct contact with schools such as visits and phone calls, and sources at the undergraduate institution they attend. While graduate students use a somewhat more detailed search process than undergraduates, the factors they consider are similar to those used by students at the undergraduate level.

Finally, of the studies conducted among students on the selection of a university, research which focuses on the selection process of a doctoral program by graduate students would, at first glance, appear to most closely reflect the job selection process of the new doctorate. In a study of how potential doctoral students determine the university they will attend, Heckler, Shimanski and Childers (1986) identified three important factors: the nature of the program (teaching or research-oriented institution); the reputation of the marketing department, the marketing faculty, and the business school in general; and the financial support levels offered by the school. In addition, the findings indicated that among potential doctoral students, conversations with the faculty and campus visits were deemed critical in the selection process.

In a related study, Childers and Heckler (1985) determined that marketing faculty differentiated between the quality of programs at various universities in a much more detailed fashion than did marketing doctoral students. However, the two groups were quite similar in their final ranking of marketing programs. This finding suggests that doctoral students are able to assess marketing departments in a similar, albeit less detailed, way than marketing faculty.

An examination of the process by which students seek a university to attend can provide guidance in specifying which factors might be important to new Ph.D.s considering their first

academic employment. However, certain aspects of the choice process will be different and some factors may weigh more heavily than others in career moves than in educational choices. The specification and importance of the criteria involved in that first career decision are the focus of this article.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study was carried out using mail surveys. Individuals selected had recently finished, or almost finished (i.e., were ABD), their doctoral work in marketing. Some of the respondents actually had accepted a position at a university. A total of 65 surveys were sent out to Fellows of the 1985 AMA Doctoral Consortium at Duke University. A cover letter requested the recipient to pass the questionnaire on to a colleague in the program who was in the market if the recipient was not actually looking for a position at that time. A total of 53 completed responses were returned. Of those, 39 had accepted an offer of employment at the time of the survey, while the remaining 14 were still in the market for a variety of reasons (such as family emergencies, dissertation problems, and/or the desire to "shop around").

Questionnaire

A set of 20 criteria was developed based in large part upon previous studies on related topics (outlined above) and on extensions of those studies. Information was gathered through a 20-question survey instrument. Twenty 5-point semantic differential scales were used, in which "5" indicated that an item was very important in the university selection process while a score of "1" indicated that it was not. Exhibit 1 describes the variables used in the study.

RESULTS

The results of the survey were evaluated through an examination of mean scores for each question as well as a factor analysis, which might reveal meaningful groupings of the criteria variables. Such groupings could prove useful in shedding light on the universities' recruiting processes and problems.

A review of the mean scores for each question across all respondents is shown in Table 1. Several important points emerge from an examination of these figures. First of all, the campus visit proved to be the single most important determinant of job choice. A mean response of 4.28 for "campus visit" across all candidates proved to be significantly higher than all other decision variables. This is to be expected since the campus visit represents the best, and in many cases the only, opportunity for the recruit and the prospective university to evaluate each other first hand.

Two of the top four criteria cited by the respondents related to reputation. These criteria, marketing department reputation (the second highest rated criteria) and university reputation (fourth highest), suggest that initial career moves among new doctorates are based, at least in part, on the commonly held belief that new Ph.D.s should go to the "best" school possible upon leaving their doctoral program. This interpretation becomes more apparent when one considers

that the third most important criterion was research orientation. Many doctoral students at leading universities, such as those cited by Childers and Heckler (1985), are encouraged to go to institutions with a research orientation.

Table 1. Means for decision variables for all respondents

Variable	Mean Value	Rank
Campus visit	4.283	1
Marketing department reputation	3.887	2
Research orientation	3.868	3
University reputation	3.808	4
Geographic location	3.736	5
Research/teaching tradeoff	3.623	6
Spouse opinion	3.551	7
Person at institution	3.396	8
Region of country	3.385	9
Dissertation chair	3.340	10
Physical facilities	3.264	11
Salary	3.208	12
Faculty influence	3.019	13
Climate	2.981	14
Spouse career	2.958	15
Benefits package	2.792	16
Consortium	2.750	17
Family location	2.519	18
Big city location	2.472	19
Peer opinions	1.981	20

Among those criteria ranked lower, "benefits package" was not considered very important. Similarly, "salary" was ranked in the middle of the group, a result which may have occurred because salaries are fairly equal across all recruiting departments, so that the variance between tendered offers is small. Also of note is that neither faculty influence, peer opinions, nor attendance at the AMA Doctoral Consortium seemed to be very important in the decision.

Differences emerged, however, when the sample was split into those who had decided on a position ($n = 39$) and those who were still in the market ($n = 14$). While the campus visit was the most important criterion among individuals who had made a decision, it was ranked ninth among those who had not accepted a position (see Table 2). Possibly candidates who had successfully completed the decision process looked back on the campus visit as the key factor, while those who were still in the process had not experienced a campus visit strong enough to create a favorable impression. Among the "undecided" group the reputation of the department and geographic location were identified as the two most important variables in the decision-making process.

A number of interesting differences became apparent when the sample was split into those who were married ($n = 38$) and those who were unmarried ($n = 15$). The inclusion of marital status in the analysis is justified by the growing number of dual career couples, and, related to this, an assumption that a married candidate would consult his or her spouse prior to making an important career decision. Table 2 shows the overall rankings for each of the groups in light of these differences.

Table 2. Rankings of all choice variables for married/unmarried and decided/undecided candidates

Variable	Rank			
	Married	Unmarried	Decided	Undecided
Campus visit	1 ^b	1	1 ^a	9
Spouse opinion	2 ^b	20	8	3
Geographic location	3 ^b	10	6	1
Marketing department reputation	4	2	3	1
Research orientation	5	3	2	5
University reputation	6 ^b	4	4	5
Region of country	7 ^b	14	11	4
Research/teaching tradeoff	8	6	7	7
Salary	9 ^b	12	12	7
Dissertation chair	10	8	9	12
Person at institution	11	5	5 ^a	17
Spouse career	12 ^b	19	14	15
Physical facilities	13	7	10	12
Climate	14	11	15	10
Benefits package	15	16	16	15
Faculty influence	16	9	13	14
Consortium	17	15	19	11
Family location	18	18	18	18
Big city location	19	13	16	19
Peer opinions	20	17	20	20

^a Significant difference between decided and undecided respondents ($p < .05$).

^b Significant difference between married and unmarried respondents ($p < .05$).

The most significant point of this analysis, stemming from the realities of joint decision-making in marriage situations, is the fact that "spouse's opinion" becomes the second most important factor for married candidates. Furthermore, these variables which would seem to affect both candidate and spouse jointly (e.g., geographic location) also play a greater role in the decision process for married candidates. The fuller implications of these findings will be discussed in the next section.

Factor Analysis

The purpose of the factor analysis was to examine the covariance relationships among the variables in terms of a few underlying but unobservable qualities, called factors (Johnson and Wichern 1982). This analysis was conducted across all respondents. The relatively small sample size prohibited splitting up the respondents into married and unmarried groups.

Three factors were retained based on an eigenvalue >1 . Results of the pattern of choice criteria across these three factors suggested the existence of three identifiable groups (see Table 3) which account for 41% of the total variance in the sample. These groups might be viewed as (1) lifestyle orientation, (2) career and work-related orientation, and (3) location orientation. The first factor, lifestyle orientation, contained the criteria of salary, benefits package, climate, and person at institution, and accounted for 15.5% of the total variance. The second factor, a career- and work-related orientation, centered on the advice of the dissertation chair, the university reputation, department reputation, research orientation, school physical facilities, and region of country of the university, and accounted for 14% of the total variance. The third factor is more difficult to interpret, but seemed to consist mainly of location factors. This factor was influenced primarily by geographic location of the institution and the campus visit, and accounted for 11% of the total variance.

Table 3. Orthogonally rotated factor pattern for all respondents

Variable	Factor			Communalities
	1	2	3	
Geographic location	.239	-.196	.789	.72
Dissertation chair	.224	.401	-.119	.23
Family	.153	.132	.059	.34
Salary	.736	.311	.050	.64
Big city location	.010	.030	.009	.05
University reputation	-.021	.826	-.104	.69
Spouse	.010	.014	.083	.10
Research orientation	-.038	.604	-.149	.39
Faculty influence	.040	.082	.001	.12
Person at institution	.819	.177	-.040	.70
Consortium	.037	.004	.029	.07
Benefit package	.704	.021	.044	.50
Peers	.009	.015	.002	.02
Climate	.700	.131	.370	.64
Dual careers	.001	.016	.011	.03
Campus visit	-.152	.151	.733	.58
Research/teaching tradeoff	.123	.060	.026	.21
Physical facilities	.362	.485	.072	.37
Marketing department reputation	-.194	.861	.010	.78
Region of country	.280	-.208	.816	.79
Eigenvalue	3.09	2.79	2.23	
Variance explained	15.45	13.95	11.15	
Cumulative variance explained	15.45	29.40	40.55	

Insights and Implications

A number of practical recommendations may be made in light of these findings. First, results of the factor analysis suggest that, while each choice decision is unique, new marketing doctorates do appear to fall into three orientations (see Table 3). Consequently, these groups could reasonably be treated as three distinct segments of the new Ph.D. market: those most interested in lifestyle issues, those most interested in career and work-related issues, and those who have overriding and constraining geographic preferences. In light of these segments, a marketing department should determine its strengths and weaknesses and then match those with the candidates from a particular orientation in order to achieve a better fit. For example, a department which has not established a strong research tradition and reputation may find itself striking out in the market year after year if it persists in courting those Ph.D.s who weigh the career- and work-related criteria most heavily. Such a department might better compete for those candidates whose criteria parallel more closely the reality of the department.

The second insight emerging from this study is that the campus visit is critical in the selection of a first academic position. As one might expect, the campus visit is an important criterion across all candidates in the selection process. However, its importance depends on an individual's stage in the decision process. Among candidates who had accepted a position, the campus visit proved to be the most significant factor, while those still in the process of deciding ranked it ninth. One possible explanation for this difference is that candidates who had made a job decision realized the importance of the campus visit only in retrospect. The "undecided" group, on the other hand, had yet to experience the way in which perceptions might change as a result of a favorable campus visit.

In any case, the findings suggest that the campus visit is a significant factor in the selection process. As a result, recruiting departments, as well as the candidates, must have clearly

established goals for the visit. Unfortunately, faculty and administrators frequently are involved in activities which take away from the planning of campus visits. Perhaps a rethinking of this important event could also lead to a more efficient matching process. The department and/or university should be able to plan the campus visit in such a way that the department's intended orientation is accentuated and made plain to the candidate. A well-managed campus visit to an institution with a teaching emphasis probably would not win over a candidate with a strong research orientation and, given some compatibility between the candidate's research aspirations and those of the recruiting department, the campus visit could be a critical factor.

Third, married candidates appear to have a set of key choice criteria different from their unmarried counterparts. In particular, married doctorates seem much more concerned with quality of life factors. For example, geographic location is much more important to the married candidate, who may be less mobile than the single candidate.

In addition, the choice process of married candidates was influenced heavily by the spouse's opinion. Not surprisingly, among married candidates, the spouse's opinion was ranked a close second to the campus visit. While the married candidate's concern with the spouse's opinion is not unexpected, this finding emphasizes the critical importance of bringing the spouse into the recruitment process. By acknowledging the importance of a spouse in the final decision, a department can develop avenues of communication aimed specifically at providing the spouse with important information. This can take many forms, from including the spouse on the campus visit to personal letters and fact sheets conveying information about employment opportunities, schools, and other considerations which the spouse might find useful. The key is to recognize the spouse as an integral factor in the decision process which the married candidate goes through in selecting that first position.

On the other hand, unmarried candidates seem to be most concerned with basic career factors. As a result, they considered such items as department and university reputation, research orientation, the research and teaching tradeoff, and the opinion of the dissertation chair much more heavily than the married candidates. This finding makes intuitive sense since the unmarried candidates are less constrained and probably more focused in their goals.

SUMMARY

This study sought to examine the choice criteria used by new doctorates in marketing in selecting their first academic position. The findings suggest that, among new Ph.D.s in marketing, three distinct orientations influence the selection process. These orientations are lifestyle, career- and work-related considerations, and location. Recruiting departments might wish to consider these orientations as market segments. One possible explanation for these groups was the impact of a spouse on the process of selecting a position. Results of the study did suggest that married candidates weigh the criteria somewhat differently from their unmarried counterparts. Married candidates' criteria were identified to be more lifestyle-oriented and were influenced by the spouse's opinion. Unmarried candidates, on the other hand, appear to be more single mindedly career-oriented. In addition, the ranking of criteria appears to depend somewhat on the candidate's stage in the decision process. The campus visit is the single most important variable

among those who have selected a position, while the reputation of the department and geographic location are the key factors of individuals still in the selection process.

One finding which held across married and single candidates is the importance of the campus visit. This finding confirms the necessity of planning and organizing a campus visit which accurately reflects the strengths of the department and university under consideration. Furthermore, recruiters may wish to consider ways to assimilate the spouse into the recruiting process more prominently.

In conclusion, the recruiting process is time consuming and expensive for a department as well as mentally and physically draining on the candidates. Although this study sought to identify the choice criteria used by new marketing doctorates in selecting that first academic position, in a broader sense it attempted to focus attention on the development of better and more efficient ways to make the process more successful for both the recruiting university and the candidate. Further research is needed, however, to confirm these findings as well as examine other elements of this complex process.

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Exhibit 1. Choice Variables used in the Study

Choice Variable	Explanation	Source
Benefits package	Retirement, health insurance, travel allowance, etc.	_____
Big city location	Large cities offer a wide array of cultural and economic opportunities. However, they are also associated with pollution, high crime rates and rush hours. Thus, the decision to locate either in, or away from, a large city would not be accidental.	Houston (1979) Heckler, Shimanski, and Childers (1986)
Campus visit	Candidate is brought to the university, expenses paid, for a day or two for interviews, and usually to present research.	Carnegie Foundation (1986)
Climate	Candidate may have a strong preference for, or aversion to, hot summers, humidity, cold winters, etc.	Heckler, Shimanski, and Childers (1986)
Consortium	The AMA Doctoral Consortium may be the first major professional and/or social interaction the candidate has with prominent researchers in the field and with peer colleagues from other (potential employer) universities.	_____
Dissertation chair	The dissertation chairperson usually has a substantial personal investment in the new Ph.D. The chairperson generally will have expended time and effort on the candidate and his/her dissertation project. Thus the chairperson's opinion with respect to the choice of the first academic job may be significant.	_____
Faculty influence	Although the dissertation chairperson is perhaps pre-eminently influential, other faculty in the candidate's department also have a stake in his/her choice of a university. Furthermore, the faculty, coming presumably from a variety of universities themselves, constitute an important source of information.	Heckler, Shimanski, and Childers (1986); Carnegie Foundation (1986)
Family location	Candidates may have a strong preference to locate close to or far away from family. This decision would probably not normally be accidental.	Punj and Staelin (1978); Houston (1979)
Geographic location	Candidates may have strong preferences for, or aversions to, mountains, deserts, the ocean, flat land, rivers, forests, etc.	_____
Marketing department reputation	The research and/or teaching reputation of the department vis-a-vis those of other departments may be important.	Houston (1979); Heckler, Shimanski and Childers (1986); Punj and Staelin (1978); Childers and Heckler (1985)
Peer opinions	The candidate probably will develop personal and professional relationships with peers in his/her doctoral program. Thus, peer opinions regarding other universities and programs may be influential.	Carnegie Foundation (1986)
Person at institution	The presence of a particular person at the institution with parallel interests or high reputation may influence the candidate.	Houston (1979); Heckler, Shimanski, and Childers (1986)
Physical facilities	Beautiful campus, attractive buildings and offices, or their opposites may be important since the candidate envisages himself/herself experiencing them daily should a contract be signed.	_____
Region of country	Candidates may have strong loyalties, preferences, aversions or prejudices towards various regions of the country.	Heckler, Shimanski, and Childers (1986)
Research orientation	The particular areas of research specialty of faculty can lead to a department's reputation for excellence in a particular area.	Houston (1979)
Research/teaching tradeoff	Academics usually are evaluated and promoted on the basis of (among other things) their research and teaching. However, different universities may weigh these factors differently.	Carnegie Foundation (1985, 1986)
Salary	Generally split into two components: a nine-month "base" and summer research support.	_____
Spouse career	Many married candidates are constrained in their choice of a university by the fact that their spouse must also be able to obtain employment in a particular area of specialization.	_____
Spouse opinion	Regardless of whether the spouse's career is important, the spouse's preferences and opinions probably would be taken into account very seriously before a contract is signed.	_____
University reputation	In the eyes of the general public, the overall assessment of a university tends to ignore the strengths and weaknesses of particular departments.	Houston (1979)