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## Exploring Job Selection Influences of Construction Management Students

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As a pilot study, this study aims to explore factors and their importance in influencing construction management students during job selection decisions. To do so, the authors reviewed job postings from widely utilized job search platforms and conducted an online survey questionnaire with undergraduate and graduate students in a large midwestern US university's construction management program. The findings show that participating students now value compensation, work-life balance, and job fit, signaling a change in their priorities towards seeking a supportive and fulfilling workplace in addition to financial stability. The importance of company culture, training, professional growth opportunities, and mentoring emphasizes the desire for support, growth, and guidance in early career progression. Additionally, the importance placed on location factors shows that participating students make informed decisions based on both personal and professional considerations. Overall, this study provides valuable insights for employers looking to attract and retain young talent, helping tailor their recruitment strategies and workplace offerings to align with the preferences and priorities of recent graduates. Ultimately, this study serves to foster a better understanding of the expectations of emerging professionals in the construction industry, facilitating a more effective partnership between educational institutions and employers.

Keywords: Construction, Job selection, Factor, Career, Retention

### Introduction

Construction management (CM) students, as they prepare to enter the workforce, bring specific motivations and perspectives that, if understood, can shape effective recruitment and retention efforts. By aligning these students' early career expectations with their goals, the industry not only fosters individual professional growth but also builds a stronger, more stable workforce. For the construction industry, where workforce sustainability is a constant challenge, meeting these expectations is key to developing and retaining skilled talent over the long term (Young et al., 2022). To bridge this gap, educational institutions could enhance career support services for students, such as allocating more resources on resume reviews and interview preparation, to better prepare students for the future job market. On the other hand, employers should be informed about the factors students consider when evaluating job offers to improve retention efforts. Such understanding can be crucial given the high demands in the construction workforce and the shifts in workplace dynamics post-COVID-19

(Deloitte, 2023; Deloitte, 2024). Moreover, it is worth noting that the new generation might also seek different attributes in their careers, prioritizing flexible work arrangements, meaningful work, and supportive organizational cultures (PwC, 2021).

For the past decade, the US construction industry has faced lasting labor shortage issues resulting from multiple factors, including overall increased demands from the projects, competition within the same pool of labor force from similar sectors, as well as less ideal working environment and various pay scale (ABC, 2023; Hovnanian et al., 2022). The shortage situation worsened due to the global pandemic accelerating the retirement of our skilled workforce and attracting fewer new workers to the sector (ABC, 2023; Hovnanian et al., 2022). According to American Builders and Contractors (ABC), the US construction industry needs to hire nearly 454,000 additional workers to satisfy the industry's demand in 2025 (ABC, 2023). In addition, the recent development of technologies in the construction industry has also shifted the industry's demands regarding the desirable skills for the future workforce. For example, with the industry's transition to construction 4.0, building information modeling (BIM) related skills have become a cornerstone for construction digitalization (de Souza & Debs, 2023). Moreover, tools such as advanced laser scanners, drones, RFID, and GPS were also adopted in the procedures of construction data collection. Consequently, the industry's increasing adoption of new technologies in the future requires extensive skills from young construction professionals, hence also resulting in potential misalignment of the industry demands and new graduates' expectations (de Souza & Debs, 2023).

To mitigate such issues, one viable approach is to understand the underlying factors affecting individuals' decisions to enter the construction field, as career expectations are crucial in determining job satisfaction and retention, especially in industries like construction that face significant labor shortages (Deloitte, 2023; Deloitte, 2024). Hence, through an analysis of responses from CM students in a large midwestern US university's construction program, the purpose of this pilot study is to explore factors and their importance influencing CM students during job selection decisions. The research question answered in this study is as follows: **RQ:** What are the critical factors and their importance in the job selection decision of CM students?

This research serves as a pilot study, forming the foundation for an ongoing, broader investigation into the job selection factors of CM students. While this initial phase focuses on descriptive statistics at a single institution, the ongoing effort will expand to include inferential statistical analyses to draw possible relations and influence of demographics on the factors. The next phase of the study targets to incorporate data from multiple institutions across diverse regions, providing a comprehensive understanding that will validate and build upon the findings of this pilot study. Overall, this study provides valuable insights for employers looking to attract and retain young talent, helping tailor their recruitment strategies and workplace offerings to align with the preferences and priorities of recent graduates. Ultimately, this study serves to foster a better understanding of the expectations of emerging professionals in the construction industry, facilitating a more effective partnership between educational institutions and employers.

## Background

Despite its significance, few studies have concentrated on the job expectations of CM students. For example, existing studies often address career motivations through a broader lens, such as examining general job satisfaction factors like salary and job stability across various fields (Debs et al., 2024). In addition, despite studies in related fields that have implied factors such as clear career progression, competitive benefits, and supportive work environments are significant drivers of retention, few studies investigate such factors from the perspective of CM students (Ling et al., 2016). This

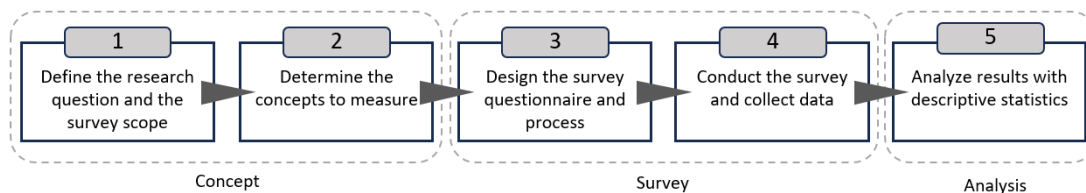
population may prioritize aspects unique to the field, such as hands-on project experience, work-life balance in high-demand roles, and the opportunity to engage in sustainable or innovative construction practices. Therefore, this lack of focused research resulted in a gap in what motivates CM students as they enter the workforce.

Within limited efforts, Jenkins et al. (2020) identified the CM student's decision criteria when selecting their future employers among four institutions in the US and sixty industry members. Their study revealed that students and employers hold differing views, where students value company criteria and long-term benefits more highly than industry recruiters anticipated. Koch et al. (2009) explored factors influencing students' decisions to enroll in CM programs, identifying "hands-on activities" and an "interest in construction" as key drivers. However, their study provided limited information addressing job selection criteria after graduation, which may differ from initial program enrollment motivations. Similarly, Devaney and Roberts (2012) approached the topic from the employer's perspective, examining employability factors for construction graduates. Their findings highlighted employer preferences for candidates with industry-specific skills, but the study lacks insights into job expectations from the graduates' perspective. In addition, Ling et al. (2015) investigated factors hindering CM graduates from taking professional jobs in the construction industry, including low starting salaries and poor work-life balance. Yet, by only focusing on industry deterrents, this study could overlook the specific motivations that might attract CM students with an understanding of students' unique expectations (Ling et al. 2015). Finally, an undergraduate level CM poster study (Aceves, 2024) studied the common job incentives of CM students. Despite these efforts, there remains a gap in understanding CM students' motivations and perceptions shaping CM students' career decisions during the job selection process.

By addressing this gap, this study aims to uncover the specific factors that shape job selection and satisfaction among CM students in a large US midwestern university's CM program. Through the review of job postings and an online survey, this research provides insights that can help both academic institutions and industry leaders better align their training and recruitment efforts with student priorities. In turn, these findings can inform more effective workforce development strategies, fostering an environment where CM professionals are equipped to thrive in their chosen fields.

### Methodology

The research design of this study follows a mixed methods approach within five steps presented in Figure 1. After determining the concept of the study with the research question, survey scope, and concepts to measure via a survey instrument, the research team focused on the design and conduct of the survey process for data collection, which is followed by data analysis with descriptive statistics including percentages, frequencies and mean ranking values.



**Figure 1.** Research Design

In the concept stage, in addition to the literature review, the research team reviewed random entry-level CM job postings on widely accepted job application platforms to determine the job selection

factors. After reviewing 36 postings with a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012), the team observed similar factors in the job postings and stopped including more job postings in their review. Moreover, the final list of the identified factors was initially reviewed by the research team, and after several discussions, the factors were categorized across four categories: i) Job, (ii) Benefits, (iii) Company, and (iv) Location, as outlined in Table 1. The *Job* category covered factors directly related to the position itself, while the *Benefits* category encompassed typical components of the benefits packages. The *Company* category involved factors directly related to the company, such as culture, values, reputation, training, mentoring, and company events. Lastly, the *Location* category focused on work schedule, cost of living in the location and the location's proximity to family & friends, and alignment with the lifestyle.

**Table 1.** Identified factors for job selection

Category	Factors
<b>Job</b>	Merit Cycle/Increase Percentages (Annual Pay Increase)
	Compensation/Salary
	Travel Frequency
	Work-Life Balance (i.e. weekend or evening work requirements)
	Job description/requirements
<b>Benefits</b>	Educational Benefits (tuition assistance)
	Visa Sponsorship
	Health Insurance
	Relocation Support (moving allowance)
	Retirement Plans
	Bonuses (e.g., Sign-on Bonus, Project Completion Bonus)
	Paid Time-off (PTO) and Vacation Days
Stock Ownership	
<b>Company</b>	Mentoring Programs
	Training and Professional Growth Opportunities
	Social Activities and Company Events
	Company Recognition and Reputation
	Company Culture and Values
<b>Location</b>	Remote Work Opportunities/Flexible Work Schedule
	Cost of Living in the Job Location
	Job Location (in relation to family & friends )
	Job Location (attractiveness or alignment with your desired lifestyle)

In the survey stage, a quantitative methodology was employed utilizing an online questionnaire to gather data in a large US midwestern university's CM program with over 600 students in all rankings and levels. Aligning with the purpose of the study, the questions were designed to collect information on identifying the factors that CM students consider in their job selection. The target population of the survey includes undergraduate and graduate students of all standings (*freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior*) and all levels (*master's and doctorate*). Considering that students from different majors can register for courses in the respective CM department, the research team included questions to distinguish these majors.

The survey instrument was developed on Qualtrics and distributed to students via emails, flyers, and in-class announcements before class sessions started. The online survey instrument was approved by the research team's institution with the IRB number 2024-493 in the exempt category. Thirteen questions, including ranking, multiple choice, and open-ended questions, were developed in the

survey, with an approximate completion time of 10-12 minutes. The research team reviewed the survey instrument for its structure, flow and consistency, and minor revisions were made to improve the flow, such as moving the set of descriptive questions on age, gender, and race at the end of the survey. The survey was open for five weeks starting at the beginning of October 2024. A total of 93 survey responses were collected, and 88 of them moved to the analysis stage since the remaining six responses were incomplete on the major questions about the job selection factors, supporting the main purpose of the study. The data collected for the factor ranking was analyzed to compute the mean ranks using Microsoft Excel.

## Results and Discussion

The survey results were organized according to the categories in the questions, such as a) descriptive questions and b) factor ranking questions. In the descriptive questions, students provided information on their major, academic standing, intended work sector, age, gender, race, and veteran status. The factor ranking questions asked students to evaluate the identified factors. The participants had the opportunity to provide additional factors not covered in these categories through an open-ended question.

### *Demographics of the Survey Participants*

Of the survey participants, 75% (n=66) were CM students, while 11% (n=10) came from other majors such as construction related (n=5), architectural engineering (n=1), finance (n=1), exploratory studies (n=2), and one student who identified as “undecided”. Additionally, 11 students did not specify their major. The survey population primarily consisted of undergraduates, who made up 89% (n=78) of the respondents, while the remaining were graduate students. Among the 88 participants, 88% (n=77) were between the ages 18-24, with 8% (n=7) aged 25-3; four students did not specify their age group. Gender distribution showed that 65% (n=57) identified as male and 31% (n=27) as female students, with four participants opting not to disclose their gender. In terms of racial diversity, 67% (n=59) identified as white, where 15% (n=13) as multiracial, 9% (n=8) as Asian, 5% (n=4) as Hispanic or Latino, and 2% (n=2) as Black or African American, while two participants preferred not to say. Out of 88 participants, only one of them identified themselves as a “veteran”. The demographics of the survey participants are summarized in Table 2.

<b>Table 2. Summary of participant demographics</b>	
<b>Highest categories in major, standing, and age</b>	
CM major	75%
Undergraduate	89%
Age 18-24	88%
<b>Gender distribution</b>	
Male	65%
Female	31%
Other & not disclosed	4%
<b>Race distribution</b>	
White	67%
Multiracial	15%
Asia	9%
Hispanic & Latino	5%
Black or African & American	2%
Preferred not to say	2%

Since most participants were undergraduate CM students, it can be observed that the results primarily reflect their perspectives on the survey questions. However, responses from graduate students and those in other majors provide valuable data points for ongoing research. Although two-thirds of the participants were male, the presence of one-third of female participants positively reflects gender diversity within the CM program. Finally, the racial composition of participants largely mirrors the demographic distribution typical of a midwestern population, with a higher proportion of white participants compared to other racial groups.

### *Ranking of Job Selection Factors*

Aligning with the purpose of the study on identifying the job selection factors of CM students, the researchers analyzed the mean ranking values of the factors ranked by participants. Following the same categories in Table 1, the mean ranking values of the *Job* category are presented in Table 3. Compensation/salary, work-life balance, and job description/requirements were the top 3 factors selected by the survey participants. The construction industry has long been known for its demanding work structure, leading to several issues in work-life balance (Adah et al., 2023; Tijani et al., 2022). While compensation and salary are expected to be the top factors in job selection, it is encouraging to see that the new generation of the construction workforce is placing significant importance on work-life balance, which ranks closely behind compensation. This shift may motivate employers to adapt their practices to foster a more sustainable work environment. Additionally, job description and requirements ranked among the top three factors, indicating that participants prioritize career fit in their career planning. Lastly, merit cycles and travel frequency were ranked at the bottom of the list, suggesting that participating students are open to the challenges associated with travel demands in the industry and are less concerned with annual salary increases compared to the salary itself.

**Table 3.** Mean ranking values of factors in the *Job* category

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Mean Ranking*</b>
Compensation/Salary	3.80
Work-Life Balance (i.e. weekend or evening work requirements)	3.49
Job Description/Requirements	3.44
Merit Cycle/Increase Percentages (Annual Pay Increase)	2.53
Travel Frequency	1.74

\*1=lowest, 5=highest

In evaluating job offers, students who prioritize factors like retirement plans, paid time-off (PTO) and vacation days, health insurance, and bonuses show a clear preference for both long-term security and a healthy work-life balance. The participating students ranked these factors as the top four in the *Benefits* category, as presented in Table 4. In addition, they indicate an awareness of the benefits of investing early to ensure stability in later years. Similarly, PTO and vacation days reflect a desire for adequate rest and recovery, as well as time to pursue personal interests or spend with family, which contributes to overall job satisfaction and reduces burnout risk. Health insurance is another vital factor, as it ensures access to essential medical services, which can be a significant financial consideration. Lastly, the emphasis on bonuses—such as sign-on or project completion bonuses—demonstrates that students value opportunities for additional financial rewards for their efforts, which can help with immediate financial needs or serve as an incentive for outstanding performance. The following factors, relocation support, stock ownership, and educational benefits, may reflect a strong inclination toward personal and professional growth, financial empowerment, and long-term career development. Relocation support, such as a moving allowance, may indicate a willingness to pursue opportunities that may be geographically distant, provided the company assists with the transition. Stock ownership, on the other hand, shows a desire to engage as stakeholders within the organization,

creating a sense of commitment to the company's long-term success and the potential for financial growth beyond regular salary. Educational benefits, such as tuition assistance, are particularly appealing to those who wish to continue developing their skills and knowledge. This benefit is attractive to students aiming to stay competitive in the rapidly evolving environment of the construction industry, allowing them to build expertise without bearing the full financial burden of further education. Visa sponsorship received the lowest mean ranking overall. Most graduate students in the CM program are international, whereas only a small percentage of undergraduate students are. Given the limited number of graduate students among survey participants, this result was anticipated. However, visa sponsorship remains critical in job selection decisions for international students (Gopal, 2016).

**Table 4.** Mean ranking values of factors in the *Benefits* category

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Mean Ranking*</b>
Retirement Plans	6.00
Paid Time-off (PTO) and Vacation Days	5.77
Health Insurance	5.36
Bonuses (e.g., Sign-on Bonus, Project Completion Bonus)	5.24
Relocation Support (moving allowance)	3.92
Stock Ownership	3.49
Educational Benefits (tuition assistance)	3.33
Visa Sponsorship	1.97

\*1=lowest, 8=highest

Table 5 shows the factors and their ranking in the *Company* category, where company culture received the highest mean ranking among participating students. This can indicate that a positive and supportive company culture is vital for students transitioning to a professional environment, aiding in adjusting to new responsibilities. In addition, this would help students and early career professionals to increase their sense of belonging in the profession and company. Students rated training and professional growth opportunities as the second most important factor, highlighting the significance of employers who prioritize their personal and professional development, offer ways to enhance skills, stay informed about industry trends, and progress within the company, leading to increased job satisfaction and employee retention. Company recognition and reputation received the third highest mean ranking, indicating that students place significant value on working for well-known and respected organizations. By ranking as the fourth most valued factor, mentoring programs highlight the participants' strong preference for guidance and support from seasoned professionals. This emphasizes the importance of structured, supportive relationships in enhancing belongingness, confidence, job performance, and opportunities for career progression. Social activities and company events received the lowest mean rank compared to other factors listed, suggesting that the participating students may prioritize practical benefits like professional development, mentorship, and work-life balance over social opportunities.

**Table 5.** Mean ranking values of factors in the *Company* category

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Mean Ranking*</b>
Company Culture and Values	4.33
Training and Professional Growth Opportunities	3.36
Company Recognition and Reputation	3.09
Mentoring Programs	2.41
Social Activities and Company Events	1.80

\*1=lowest, 5=highest

The *Location* related factors presented in Table 6, primarily reflect students' perceptions' regarding the implications of relocating or considering various geographical locations based on job requirements. The job location, being close to family and friends, received the highest mean ranking score, followed closely by the attractiveness of the job location and its alignment with the students' desired lifestyle, which indicates that the participating students highly consider the job location. Proximity to family and friends and alignment with a lifestyle not only provides emotional support but also enhances the quality of life, fostering connections and support mechanisms for social needs that improve the sense of belonging. Cost of living received the third highest mean ranking in the *Location* category, highlighting that student's awareness of higher salaries may not offset the expenses associated with living in expensive areas, such as housing, transportation, and everyday expenses. Moreover, a favorable cost of living can make certain job opportunities more attractive, especially for those just starting their careers and possibly managing student debt. Remote and flexible work opportunities, ranked as the last one in this category, indicate that participating students place higher importance on other listed location related factors. This may also suggest their preference for in-person interactions and the benefits of being physically present in a workplace, such as networking opportunities, mentorship, and team collaboration, especially given that most construction industry jobs require a physical presence. The nature of the construction field often involves hands-on work, site visits, and direct collaboration with teams and clients, making in-person engagement essential for effective communication and project management.

**Table 6.** Mean ranking values of factors in the *Location* category

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Mean Ranking*</b>
Job Location (family & friends )	3.03
Job Location (attractiveness)	2.79
Cost of Living in the Job Location	2.49
Remote Work Opportunities/Flexible Work Schedule	1.68

\*1=lowest, 4=highest

The last question of the survey questionnaire provided an opportunity for participating students to state additional factors not listed in the survey questions. Out of 88 students, ten of them provided their suggestions on additional factors where these suggestions are frequently focused on long term career support, family background in construction, references from the company at the time of application or interview process, alignment of leadership behavior, and company values and long-term viability of job location. These answers were summarized in five factors and presented in Table 7. Overall, these findings align with limited research and the observations of researchers, such as clear career progression, competitive benefits and long term support, and supportive and inclusive work environments, and job location.

**Table 7.** Additional Factors to consider in job selection

Company support for the long-term career goals
Family background in construction
References from the company
Company leadership and their alignment with company values
Long term viability of the job location

## Conclusion

This study aims to identify factors and their importance that CM students consider in their job selection decisions. The significance of understanding the job expectations and motivations of CM



students lies in its potential to bridge the gap between academic training, industry needs, and workforce satisfaction. With this in mind, the study effectively highlighted the key job selection factors and their importance in mean rankings that CM students prioritize as they prepare to enter the workforce. The emphasis on compensation, work-life balance, and job fit indicates a shift in values among the new generation of professionals, who seek not only financial stability but also a supportive and fulfilling work environment. The significance of company culture, training, and professional growth opportunities, and mentoring highlights the desire for connection, development, and guidance in navigating the early stages of their careers. Additionally, the importance placed on location factors reveals that students are making informed decisions based on both personal and professional considerations.

By focusing on CM students' perspectives during the job selection process, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding that can inform targeted workforce development strategies, fostering a more motivated and prepared construction workforce. The implications of this study for educators and universities include (i) tailoring career services to address the specific motivations and concerns of CM students, such as providing guidance on negotiating benefits, (ii) encouraging industry to present roles emphasizing clear career progression and supportive work environments during campus recruitment events, and (iii) establishing alumni support networks and mentoring programs to offer students role models who reflect the industry's work environment dynamics.

The limitations of this study are twofold: (i) the selection of identified factors, which may not capture the full range of factors that students might weigh when choosing a job, and (ii) the target population of the survey participants, which was limited to a specific institutions student and may not reflect the views of a broader participant group including various institutions across the US. The factors chosen for analysis may overlook other influential aspects, potentially skewing results toward those most relevant to the surveyed population. Similarly, since the survey participants belong to a single institution, their responses may not be fully generalizable, limiting the applicability of findings to other institutions or geographical regions.

Furthermore, this study is an important step comprising several opportunities for future research studies. First, the input from the construction industry and their people or talent management departments would enhance the list of identified factors, followed by a comprehensive literature review effort. Expanding the study to multiple institutions, including various regions, would provide a better understanding of students' perceptions of their job selection decisions. In addition, future studies should focus on the possible relations and influence of demographics such as academic standing, age, gender, race, geographic location, and institutional characteristics on job selection decisions with descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Future studies should also investigate the implications of identifying student's job selection factors and expectations for improving curriculum and career services development, recruitment and retention strategies to inform the industry, and the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in the future workforce.

By identifying and analyzing the factors that influence job selection among construction students, this study provides valuable insights for employers looking to attract and retain young talent. The findings can help companies tailor their recruitment strategies and workplace offerings to align with the preferences and priorities of new graduates. Ultimately, this study serves to foster a better understanding of the expectations of emerging professionals in the construction industry, facilitating a more effective partnership between educational institutions and employers.

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