

Entry-level job opportunities dry up for Class of 2003

Graduates will need to combat a slow market to secure a job

By Scott Hurff
Contributing Reporter

College seniors nearing graduation beware: where once recent graduates had the upper hand in the search for a dream job, economic circumstances have rendered this luxury a thing of the past.

According to Bill Currin, director of the university's Office of Career Services, students must make every effort to combat today's job market. "(Students) should rely on academic achievements, work experience and extracurricular activities. You just can't depend on any one thing. You've got to attack this thing with every weapon in the arsenal," he said.

This year, Career Services has been pushing for students to start early on their career search, offering workshops and programs to help gear students toward suc-

cess in their field. The annual career fair was held Sept. 18 in Benson University Center. Students brought résumés and began networking with representatives from nearly 40 companies, down more than 50 percent from last year.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers, a group that advises college students on career development, concluded in a recent survey of employers that respondents expect to hire 3.6 percent less college graduates than in the previous year.

"Last year's college grads experienced a difficult time in their job search, and it looks like this year will also be challenging," Marilyn Mackes, the executive director of NACE, said. "The Class of 2003 is going to face a lot of competition for jobs. Now, more than ever, students need to use all the resources available to them, particularly their campus career center, where they'll get expert guidance in conducting a successful job search."

Currin suggests that students take full advantage of the university's Career Services office.

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Bill Currin
Director of Career Services

Equipped with an extensive range of resources for all students, Career Services can assist participants in building their résumé, improving interviewing skills, and establishing their personal and career goals.

Senior Travis Greer, who will be applying to medical schools in the spring, says he has not yet been to Career Services. "I'm planning to, though," he said. "They set up mock interviews for people and I'm going to do a few to practice before med school interviews start."

Greer feels fortunate that he does not have to battle the poor economy to find a job. "I see so many of my friends already stressing about not having a job when they graduate that it makes me thankful I have four more years before I have to go through the same thing," he said. "Hopefully, by then, the economy will be on an upward swing and it will make getting a job a lot easier," he said.

Career Services not only offers its services to seniors, but to underclassmen and juniors, as well. The most valuable of these services are summer internships, says Currin.

"Internships are key," said Currin. "(They are) going to make (students) attractive to employers, but more importantly it's going to give students an opportunity to experience the real world and it gives them some feeling as to what they want to do," he added.

Even though a student may have a solid résumé and some experience, there are still not enough jobs in the market to house every graduate. According to the Bureau

of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in the country for August was 5.7 percent, up from 4.9 percent only a year ago. The unemployment rate for recent college graduates is estimated to be slightly higher.

In addition to these statistics, a report entitled "The Outlook for College Graduates, 1996-2006. Prepare Yourself," also published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, said, "Although the reality for most college graduates is not as bleak as the media portray, it is true that some graduates will not find jobs that make use of the college-level skills they've developed. Part of their frustration reflects individual circumstances and mismatches between employers and jobseekers. But another part is simple mathematics: There are more jobseekers with college degrees than there are openings for college-level jobs."

The report, published during the "boom" market of the late '90s, doesn't factor in the effects of an economic downturn. Where certain types of college graduates had a challenging time finding a sufficient job, the situation has only gotten worse.

"The top recruiters of the school are financial organizations and consulting firms," Currin said. "We've seen a major drawback in consulting firms. They just aren't hiring the numbers they've hired in the past. That is really hurting us, because we would have firms that would come in that would make 20 - 25 offers. The double-whammy is that students are also competing against recent graduates who have lost their jobs, and who are willing to accept an entry-level job," he said.

Despite the absence of some prominent recruiters, there is hope ahead. Where the already suffering economy was worsened by the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the dry spell will turn around. It is just a question of "when?"

"The good news is that if you look at the demographics with



Sarah Leer/Old Gold and Black
About 40 businesses sent representatives to Career Service's job fair to recruit for employment. Here, junior Davonda Burton talks with Jon Cox of Krispy Kreme.

the upcoming retirement of the baby boomers, there's going to be an incredible job market down the road," said Currin. "We went through this thing in the late '80s and early '90s, and it turns very quickly from a dry spell into a feeding frenzy for talent. So for one of these classes down the road, it's going to be booming again," he added.

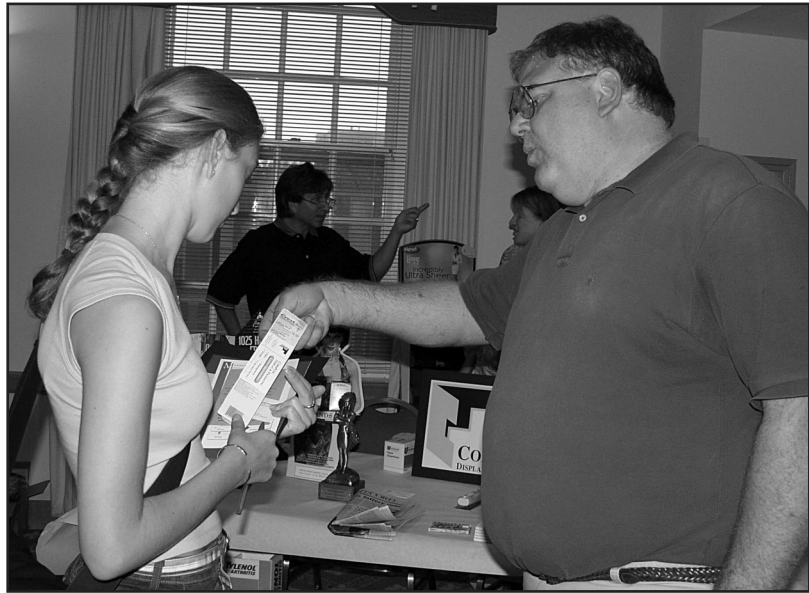
Until the market improves, though, Career Services will be working hard to utilize every possible resource to help students find jobs.

What usually occurs in a positive market is that most of the recruiting takes place during the fall. By starting early, recruiters are able to attract more students with the

qualifications they are looking for. This year, however, the recruiting process has reversed. Yet, Currin is optimistic that recruiters will return to the school in larger numbers in the spring.

"What we are hearing from recruiters is that they're assuming a 'wait-and-see' position this fall, and they're compressing the process," said Currin.

"They're going to see how the market unfolds as graduation approaches. We think we may see - this is a hopeful sign - some indications that we will see an improvement of recruiting activity in the spring, which is the opposite of what we've seen in the past. We can't guarantee this, though," he said.



Sarah Leer/Old Gold and Black
Senior Michelle Henley collects information on job availability from corporate recruiter Steve Green. Several hundred students came out for the Career Fest Sept. 18.

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