

Interning your way into a job

Most students start college with the hope of getting a great job after graduation, but with the current economy, some students are concerned those hopes will not become a reality.

Even before the events of Sept. 11, 2001, the job outlook for students was not as strong as it had been in years past. Corporate layoffs and a volatile stock market were on the minds of everyone.

"[The current job market] may be a little rockier now than it was before," said Barry Cooper, Cargill's general manager of animal nutrition. "However, there will be good jobs for good people."

Companies' general hiring plans have not dropped substantially. In fact, 55 percent of employers have not changed hiring plans, 36.7 percent are hiring fewer people and 8.3 percent plan to hire more employees, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

However, last year 55 percent of companies offered a signing bonus and that number has decreased to about 36 percent this year, according to the association.

Hiring in agricultural-related fields is promising as well. The U.S. Department of Agriculture expects there to be 57,785 job openings and 57,175 qualified graduates available this year.

Deere and Co. has slowed its hiring but is starting to pick back up again, said Claya Knupp, recruiting coordinator for Deere and Co.

On the other hand, Cargill is planning to continue to hire as many as they usually do, said Cooper.

While colleges have noticed a slight drop in recruiting efforts,

one thing that remains the same is qualified candidates are still in high demand. One way candidates can make themselves more marketable is to have experience in their career area.

"We have noticed that there are more candidates available for hire," said Cooper. "A couple of years ago students could sit back and wait for an offer they were completely pleased with. Now the companies are more able to sit back and wait for good candidates."

The career areas that seem to be in highest demand include engineering, computer-related fields and business disciplines, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

Within agriculture, managers and financial specialists and marketing, merchandising and sales representatives as well as communication and education specialists make the top of the list, according to the USDA.

Some of the top skills employers look for in potential employees include communication skills, honesty, interpersonal skills, problem-solving abilities and teamwork abilities, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

With employers potentially looking to hire fewer candidates, relevant work experience could be the deciding factor between otherwise equally qualified candidates, according to the association.

Because experience is so important to employers, many companies choose to hire from their internship programs.

"We [Deere and Co.] hire a lot of interns after they have completed an internship with us," said Knupp.

Some employers said there are equally rewarding benefits for both parties in an internship program.

"A 90-day internship allows the student to learn about our company and our goals and allows us to learn about the student's work habits," said Cooper. "Then we can both evaluate the experience to see if it is a fit."

Shannon Angle, an agricultural economics senior from Burlington, Okla., received a job as a result of her internship.

During the summer of 2001, Angle interned with Williams Communications in Tulsa, Okla., and was hired into the professional development program for Williams Energy upon completing the internship.

"I went into the internship knowing I was interested in working there and just worked hard," said Angle. "Besides getting the job, the greatest benefit was finally getting to use the things I had learned in class. It helped bring everything together to make better sense."

A couple of places to look for internship opportunities are Oklahoma State University Career Services and the College of Agricultural Sciences and



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Natural Resources Career Services. They hold a number of career and internship fairs on campus that provide students opportunities to network with companies that may offer internships and full-time employment.

Another good place to look is on the Internet. Some companies advertise their internships and put applications on their company Web sites.

Also, friends and past connections often open the doors to internships. Some students have found internships by calling a contact at a company and simply asking if they are interested in having an intern.

“Many companies are no longer pursuing you. You may have to go after them,” said Angle.

Because many companies have standards about the number of persons they hire from internship programs, internships often are a way to secure a good job. Cargill’s long-term goal is to have 80 percent of their full-time employees hired from their internship program, said Cooper.

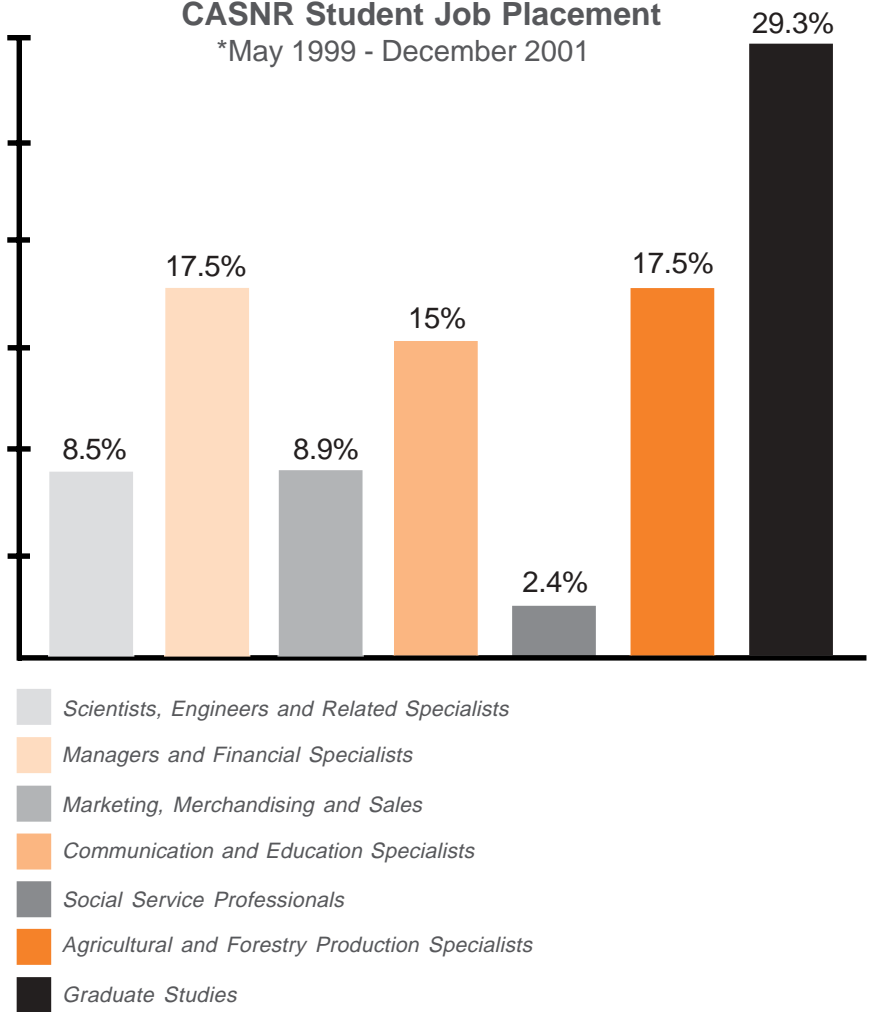
While experience is an important component of securing a competitive position in the job market, persistence is a valuable tool as well.

“Be willing to pay your dues. Stay positive, keep your head up and build your network,” said Cooper. “Get your foot in the door and leverage your way into bigger and better things.”

◆ *By Jamie Glover, Elgin, Okla.*

CASNR Student Job Placement

*May 1999 - December 2001



*These figures are based on students whose placement was known at the time of graduation using data averaged from May 1999 to December 2001.