

# Wanted: OSU Graduates

## CASNR helps students find jobs

As students prepare to walk across the stage on their final day at Oklahoma State University, feelings of pride and excitement are often overwhelming, leaving them to wonder if they will get their dream jobs and how far they will have to move to pursue their goals.

While pursuing their dreams and goals, most of the students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources have the opportunity to work with Amy Gazaway, career development coordinator for CASNR Career Services.

"The majority of students I see in my office prefer to locate a job in Oklahoma," said Gazaway. "The main reason students want to stay in Oklahoma is family."

For students looking for jobs in Oklahoma, there is good news. Despite the current economic conditions, in-state jobs are still available.

"Many Oklahoma employers are small to mid-sized organizations that traditionally do not use on-campus interviews or career fairs to fill their hiring needs," said Gazaway. "Also, employers are operating with reduced recruitment budgets compared to past years. Therefore, students must be more proactive to find job opportunities."

While some employers may not like their recruiting budget, many still like to hire OSU graduates.

"We come to OSU and hire graduates for several reasons," said Lisa Binger, Excel employment manager. "They have a good work ethic, are well educated and have good people skills."

### *How do I go about finding the right job?*

Gazaway suggested networking, direct company contacts, job listings and referrals from CASNR and OSU career services, on-campus interviews, Internet searches, state employment offices, employment agencies, career and job fairs, professional organizations, employer Web

sites and job listings in newspapers as a few sources to use in the job search.

Louann Waldner, director of CASNR Career Services, said working with third party or professional recruiters is an option if the employer pays for the service.

"There are so many recruiters who are free to students that paying for one is just not necessary," said Waldner. "Students receiving graduate degrees use recruiters more frequently. While recruiters can be helpful, students should be cautious and read all contracts thoroughly before making any commitments."

Gazaway recommended students follow seven steps to having a successful job search, whether searching in Oklahoma or in other states:

- Research yourself.
- Identify targets.
- Research prospective employers and positions.
- Develop your job-search tools.
- Identify and use job-search resources.
- Request and prepare for interviews.
- Follow up after the interview.

Before beginning the job search, individuals should research their lives and career goals, said Gazaway. Additionally, students should know the career areas and types of positions are similar to their interests, abilities and values.

The next step is to identify targets. Write down types of organizations, names of specific employers and titles of specific positions where you are interested in working.

After identifying potential employers and positions available, learn as much as possible about employers and job opportunities, including how the employers recruit new professionals.

"There are no limits on what one should know about employers and positions that are under consideration," said Gazaway.

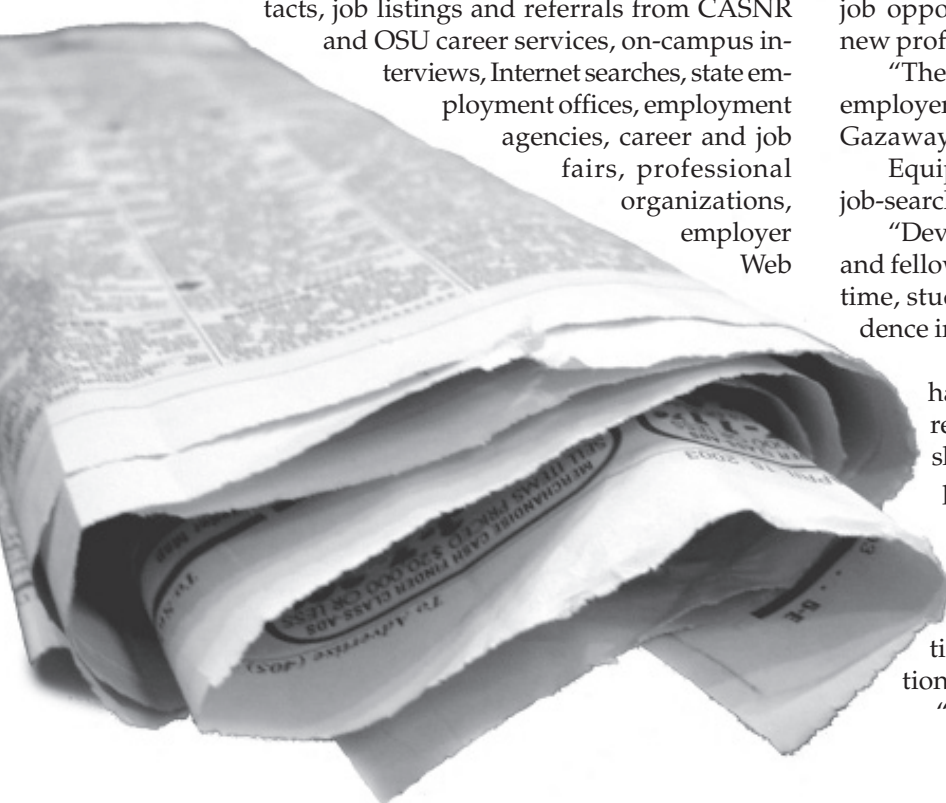
Equipped with information, students should develop job-searching tools.

"Developing a network with employers, alumni, faculty and fellow students is crucial," said Gazaway. "During this time, students also need to target résumés and correspondence in addition to practicing interviewing skills."

With knowledge and the appropriate tools in hand, it is time to begin identifying and using the resources acquired through the job search. Students should organize their job-search resources, plan the process and get résumés in circulation.

Potential employers' awareness of the candidate's availability and qualifications signal the beginning of the interview process. To prepare for an interview, ask the following questions: How do I fit into the organization and position? What are my career goals?

"Knowing the answers is not enough," said



Gazaway. "Candidates must be able to articulate the answers."

After each job interview, following up with the employers is essential, said Gazaway.

Initiative and genuine interest in the position are demonstrated through polite persistence after the interview.

Job seekers can remind employers of their qualifications by sending thank-you notes and follow-up letters to express appreciation for interviews. Phone calls and e-mails also can help candidates keep in contact with employers about the selection process.

### *When should I start?*

"It takes most people about six to nine months to find their ideal jobs once they actively begin pursuing positions and mailing out résumés," said Gazaway. "Students who are graduating in May really need to begin actively looking for most jobs at least by September, even though a few employers might not advertise or begin recruiting until later in the year."

### *How much is enough?*

Multiple factors must be consid-

ered when negotiating a salary. First and foremost is the market value for individuals graduating in a student's area of study and planning to work in the student's identified career. Location and cost of living also affect a salary's value, said Gazaway. A bigger check does not always mean more money. Additionally, benefits should be closely evaluated as part of the total compensation package.

"Students with bachelor's degrees earned an average starting salary of \$31,600 last year," said Gazaway. "This number usually increases by 3 percent to 5 percent every year, so students this year could average \$33,300. I would encourage all students to visit with career services about more accurate numbers for their career choice."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics cites the mean annual income of Oklahomans as \$28,630 compared to the national average of \$34,020 in 2001. While the average salary of Oklahomans is lower than the national average, the 2000 U.S. Census cites the median value of homes in Oklahoma as being considerably less than the average national value. An average home

in Oklahoma should cost about \$70,700, whereas the national average is almost \$120,000.

Doing employer research also can help students determine what kind of starting salaries are realistic for them to expect.

"It might also help to visit with fellow students, alumni, co-workers, faculty, advisers and other members of the student's network to gather this information," said Gazaway.

Additionally, CASNR Career Services provides a Web site designed to help students efficiently access career information and job-search resources.

"The Web site helps me to look into companies and employers a lot quicker than looking them up individually," said John Eric Denson, agribusiness junior. "It has really helped me pick out some of the better companies I would like to work for."

The CASNR Career Services Web site is located at <http://www.dasnr.ok-state.edu/casnr/career.html>. For more information about career development or assistance with finding a job, call Waldner or Gazaway at (405) 744-5395. ♦ *By Amy Jenkins, Bethel, Okla.*

## Planning for career fairs

### **Before the fair**

- Have a résumé prepared.
- Research organizations of interest.
- Develop a list of questions for potential employers.
- Identify personal experiences that demonstrate strengths.
- Think of examples to illustrate your skills.
- Determine why YOU should work for their organization.

### **During the fair**

- Make a good first impression.
- Dress professionally.
- Establish immediate eye contact.
- Give a firm handshake.
- Remember the company representative's name.
- Smile and be polite.
- Introduce yourself and establish rapport.
- Ask genuine questions.

- Listen carefully.
- Avoid filler words (i.e., "um" or "like").
- Sound confident.
- Offer résumé.
- Ask for business cards.
- Thank company representatives for their time.
- Speak with organizations you may not have previously considered.

### **After the fair**

- Mail thank-you notes.
- Send additional résumés.
- Ensure application is complete through a phone call.
- Know what to say before calling.

### **Career fair don'ts**

- Don't ramble on without asking questions.
- Don't expect recruiters to approach you to start a conversation.

- Don't leave your résumé with the excuse, "I don't have time to talk."
- Don't assume the representative will automatically remember you.
- Don't skip over a recruiter to visit with other company representatives to get information.
- Don't crush the recruiter's hand or offer a limp handshake.
- Don't expect representatives to tell everything about their company.
- Don't approach recruiters while they are talking with someone else.
- Don't start a conversation without introducing yourself.
- Don't leave without knowing more than when you came.
- Don't fidget or play with hair.
- Don't rock from side to side.
- Don't look around while talking or being spoken to.
- Don't chew gum.