

Teaching Job-Search Skills To Agricultural Seniors

Ginny L. Stephens, Theresa Brockman, and Joe T. Davis

The job market for college graduates in the 1990's is filled with uncertainty and difficulty. The world economy is changing daily. New countries and governments are emerging with ever increasing frequency resulting in changing domestic and world labor markets. There are larger number of college graduates each year. Large increases in unemployment has propelled increased numbers of experienced individuals into the job market. Technological advancements are reducing the number of jobs in certain industries and shortages of skilled employees threaten the future of other firms (Pappas).

These type of market conditions require that graduates entering the job search process have all the necessary inter-


Stephens is counselor at the University of Kentucky Career Center, Brockman is the director of Student Placement for the College of Agriculture, and Davis is professor and director of Student Services, College of Agriculture.

(Continued from previous page.)

grams designed to improve the academic performance of these students.

Finally, the results of this study give preliminary support to the admission standards currently being used by MSU. However, additional study of these standards is warranted before definite conclusions can be formulated.

References

- Baker, H.R. & Baker, B.M. (1984). *Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA: A practical guide to its use in scientific decision making*. University, AL: The University of Alabama Press.
- Brinkley, W.L., Jr. (February 1985). The true role of tests in admissions decisions. *NAASP Bulletin*, 60-64.
- Campbell, D.T. & Stanley, J.C. (1966). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally Publishing.
- Dilts, S.W. (1989). (Ed). *Guide to four-year colleges*, 1990. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides.
- Friske, E.B. (1991). *The Friske guide to colleges*, 1992. New York: Times Books.
- Hamilton, D.J. & Hinkle, D.E. (1990). Multiple regression analysis and predication of GPA upon degree completion. *The College Student Journal*, 24 (1), 91-96.
- Johnson, D.M., Taylor, W.N., & Kohler, E.T. (1991). A comparison: Native and transfer students. *NACTA Journal*, 35 (2), 41-45.
- Mississippi State University. (1991). *1991-1992 bulletin of the Mississippi State University*. Mississippi State, MS: Author.
- Oliver, J.D. & Hinkle, D.E. (1982). Occupational education research: Selecting statistical procedures. *Journal of Studies in Technical Careers*, 9, 199-207.
- Owens, T.O., Jr. (1986). *An analysis of selected variables related to student program choice and student performance in Mississippi public junior college agriculture programs*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Mississippi State: Mississippi State University. 

viewing skills and job search tools in order to compete. Students are finding that an effective job search requires sophistication and is not chance, hearsay, or a best friend's advice. Experience has shown that students that are eager, honest, directed, confident, poised and knowledgeable usually fare best in the job search and interview process.

Noting these market conditions and the need to provide students with additional interview skills, the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture joined forces with the University Career Center to offer a six-week non-credit seminar to teach job-search strategies to seniors who were getting ready to embark on their first professional job-search (Stephens and Reynolds).

Seminar Design

The course, which is entitled "Senior Job-Search Seminar," meets twice a week for six weeks. During the length of the course, students are exposed to both lectures and experiential activities related to six key elements of the job-search: job search strategies, resume writing, professional image, professional etiquette, interviewing, and networking (Stephens). The course instructors are members of the College of Agriculture and University Career Center staffs and is rounded out by visiting professional etiquette and image instructors, recruiters, and interested alumni.

The first part of the seminar involves a review of "job-search language", and completion of required steps needed to participate in on-campus interviews. This includes completion of the registration forms required by the University Placement Center, review of a video tape outlining the basic interview process, and a clarification of some of the jargon regarding placement and interviewing.

Students are provided information and lectures regarding resume writing (Holley, Higgins, and Speight). After the formal instruction on resume preparation, students are required to write their own resumes and bring them to a second session for critique. During this time, recruiters and alumni from various agricultural industries visit the class and spent the session critiquing student's resumes. Students gain invaluable input as to what Agriculture professionals are looking for on a resume and have the opportunity for personal interaction with these industry representatives.

The next segment of the course allows students to learn helpful hints from local image and etiquette professionals. This includes presentations on "Professional Image" and "Professional Etiquette." Lectures conducted by the visit-

ing professionals address body language, voice projection, how to dress for an interview, business etiquette, and basic manners. The finale of the "Image and Etiquette" segment was a hands-on activity called "Let's Do Lunch."

"Let's Do Lunch" allows students to actually participate by eating a full-course meal while an etiquette consultant "walks" them through the proper procedures. During this session, students are given helpful hints, such as, what foods to avoid, what price range to order in, how to follow the interviewer's lead, what to do when the check arrives, as well as basic table manners. Since corporations often take candidates out to lunch at some point during the interview process, there is a full discussion of how to successfully interview during the meal.

The seminar provides students extensive training in interviewing skills and techniques (Jenks and Zevnik). Once again the students first attend a lecture about interviewing and then participate in a mock interview activity. On "Mock Day" students go through a practice interview with a company recruiter. Everyone knows that this is only a rehearsal, not a real interview, but the interview was conducted like the real thing. Students are given materials (recruiting brochures, annual reports, etc.) on the companies with whom they will be "interviewing". They are expected to study the material as if they are really applying for a position. In the mock interview, students get an opportunity to practice everything they have learned so far in the seminar: resume development, professional image and etiquette, and interviewing skills all come into play during this exercise. To make this session even more educational, the entire "interview" is video-taped. Following the interview the interviewer and the interviewee view the tape together and the interviewer points out the interviewees weak and strong points. Local business and government agency representatives are invited to serve as interviewers for this portion of the course. Their participation provides an additional dimension of reality to the mock interview process. They conduct their interviews as though they were actually interviewing the students for a position with their firm.

The final part the course focuses on "networking." During the first session the students learn about the "hidden job market" and the importance of networking to both the productive job-search and a successful professional career. The final session of the course is either a dinner with prospective recruiters or a networking reception with recruiters and alumni, whichever can be arranged. During this session students are given the opportunity to showcase everything they have learned during the course to potential employers and network contacts. They are also very aware that this "event" is essentially the beginning of their professional job-search.

Program Results

The immediate success of the program has been seen in the professional behavior and image that the students are projecting. Recently, students from the class attended a course finale, dinner with recruiters. As the evening progressed, recruiters commented on the students preparedness

and how well they handled themselves during the dinner. Several of the recruiters attending a career day held shortly after conclusion of the course, some indicated that our students were better prepared than they had been in previous trips to campus. The overall success of this project cannot be determined for several years. However, there are a number of benefits that seem to accrue to students enrolled in the course.

Students often have difficulty in selling themselves into a particular position. In today's competitive job market, the ability to highlight one's strengths while minimizing weak is necessary in order to land the more attractive job offers. Because of this competitive nature of the market, some students avoid job-hunting activities while others tend to oversell themselves to the company. This seminar assists the students in identifying their own strengths and weak. It also helps the students develop a strategy in presenting their abilities and talents to the company.

The seminar provides students an opportunity to integrate much of the information and materials that they have received regarding the job-search and interviewing process. Many seniors have attended career seminars regarding various aspects of the job-search process. These tend to be disjointed and not integrated into a cohesive set. This seminar makes the linkages between the resume and the first interview.

The seminar also provides basic techniques and ideas that will be useful after the person has secured the first job. Many of the concepts and practices covered in the seminar will assist the individual throughout their professional career.

References

- Holley, W. H., E. Higgins, and S. Speights, "Resumes and Cover Letters: What do HR Managers Really Want?", *Personnel*, December, 1989, V65 (12), 49-51.
- Jenks, J. M. and B.L. Zevnik, "The ABC's of Job Interviewing", *Harvard Business Review*, 1989, V67 (4), 38-42.
- Pappas, Vasil J., "The New Job Market", *Best of Managing Your Career, The Big Picture: An Overview*, Dow Jones and Company, 1991.
- Stephens, G. L., "Teaching Job Search Skills with Clubs, Riots, and Mocks", *Journal of Career Planning and Employment*, 1991, Fall V52 (1), 25-27.
- Stephens, G. L. and J. Reynolds, "Helping Students Make Decisions with the Help of Eqans Model", *Journal of Career Planning and Employment*, 1992, V 52 (2), 48-52.

