

Datestamp: 05/10/2008

New grads face tighter job market

Finding work could be a lesson in perseverance

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Jesse Northway, 22, has one thought on his mind right now: "Where am I going to get a job that will pay me enough to live?"

He's not alone asking that question.

Careerbuilder.com's Annual Forecast, released in April, shows the nationwide job market for this year's college graduates is tighter than a year ago, as some employers slow their hiring pace amid economic uncertainty.

Of 3,147 hiring managers surveyed, 58 percent plan to hire recent college graduates this year, down from 79 percent in 2007.

Northway, one of 4,540 University of Arizona undergraduates receiving degrees at commencement May 17, knows what he's up against.

"The reality for my field is I don't have much hope for a good-paying job, so I wasn't expecting much," the psychology and religious studies major said. "I knew I wasn't going to get \$100,000 right away, but the scariest thing was when the governor said there'd be a hiring freeze. Luckily, the job I'd be qualified for - caseworker - was kept open."

Gov. Janet Napolitano ordered a hiring freeze in February for all state agency positions except those involved in the collection and investment of state revenues and those vital to "providing for the health or safety of the public."

The downturn isn't just local. In March, the U.S. Labor Department reported the largest job loss since 2003, with 63,000 slashed in February.

While politicians and pundits argue whether the country really is in a recession, UA career counselor Jack Perry said recruiters are keeping a recession-minded mentality.

"All of the sources and the job market data point to a slowdown," he said. "We have a job survey out there to the graduates to determine the effect of the economic downturn, but we won't have that data till the fall.

"What I can say is, our career fairs this spring were well attended, but the employers seem to be doing a lot of talking, but not a lot of hiring."

Perry said that at UA's fall career fairs it wasn't unusual to see employers conduct interviews right on the UA Mall where the fair was set up. Not so during the one in April.

"They are still recruiting, but they have more of a wait-and-see attitude," Perry said. "I've been around for 12 years and I've seen the ups and downs - the dot-com boom of the '90s and the shutdown after 9/11. This isn't anything like 9/11, but students are having to work a bit harder to sell themselves. Jobs aren't falling out of the trees like they have in the past."

Breann Mauldin, who will graduate with a bachelor's degree in elementary education, was working hard last week promoting herself at a UA recruiting fair for potential teachers. She visited representatives from dozens of the more than 100 school districts, passing out her résumé and trying to get interviews.

"I'm not fearful I won't get a job," Mauldin said during a break. "But I am stressed about finding one, if that makes sense. When I went into education, there were lots of job opportunities, but then everyone went into education and now there are fewer opportunities."

Meghan Wells was hunting for a high school history teacher opening and coming up empty-handed.

"I'm looking to stay in Tucson," Wells said, "but history teachers don't seem to be in high demand. I'm finding that charter schools and alternative schools have more openings, so I'm looking that way. And I've been told there are plenty of openings in Phoenix, so if I get desperate, I'll look there."

That might be a wise move, according to estimates from the Arizona Department of Economic Security 2006-08 work force reports.

DES estimates 1,889 positions statewide will open this year for elementary school teachers, but only 63 of them will be in Tucson.

Susan Centers, principal of Tanque Verde Elementary School, said that in spite of taking open enrollment students from TUSD, her school is "in a holding pattern" where hiring is concerned.

"Our district is facing a big (budget) deficit in '09 and so we're replacing positions when people leave, but we're not adding any positions like we have in the past," Centers said.

Elementary education is one of the most popular undergraduate majors at UA, along with psychology, political science, communication and marketing.

These "soft majors" might be more affected by the economic downturn than are nursing, engineering or accounting - which DES estimates as having 37,600, 31,000 and 29,600 openings statewide, respectively - but Perry said it isn't impossible for liberal arts graduates to find employment.

"Liberal arts majors can successfully compete for jobs, but you have to be assertive about professional development and if you're going into a tight field, you may have to move," he said. "One student I met with was a journalism major and he said there's nothing in Arizona, so he's looking out of state."

Or, Perry said, liberal arts graduates might have to look outside their desired field.

Enterprise Rent-A-Car is the top employer of college undergraduates in entry-level jobs, according to Stacey Kretzmann, group recruiting manager for the company.

The business encourages all majors to apply, Kretzmann said, and because the company has a policy of promoting from within only, "we always have entry-level positions."

"College graduates want to work here because they have the chance to move up into an assistant management role within a few years," she said, adding that the company provides a wealth of benefits to employees.

"I've heard a lot of our fellow recruiters are not hiring as much as they were last year, but we're still on track and haven't put hiring on hold," Kretzmann said.

Northway would prefer to find a job in counseling, but he said he's "looking into different options."

"I need a graduate degree to do well, but I'm stuck at a point where I have to go out and work for a couple of years to get money to go to grad school," he said. "I've been in the process of securing a position . . . since February and I'm hopeful, but I guess we'll see." Top five degrees awarded at UA in 2007: (The latest year for which figures are available)

Undergraduate	Master's	Doctoral
1. Psychology (391)	Business Administration (145)	Anthropology (24)
2. Political Science (278)	Information Resources and Library Science (103)	Chemistry (21)
3. Elementary Education (276)	Public Health (60)	Management (21)
4. Communication (219)	Teaching and Teacher Education (46)	Optical Sciences (21)
5. Marketing (201)	Optical Sciences (44)	Electrical and Computer Engineering (20)

Largest number of Tucson job openings, 2008, based on DES figures:

1. Customer service reps	700
2. Retail sales	496
3. Cooks/food prep	447
4. Registered nurses	393
5. Nursing aides, orderlies, attendants	344

Top employers for college graduates, nationwide, with estimated entry-level hires, 2008:

1. Enterprise Rent-A-Car	8,500
2. AmeriCorps	6,000
3. Walgreen Co.	5,924
4. Internal Revenue Service	5,000
5. Progressive Insurance	4,208

Source: UA enrollment management: collegegrad.com

Re-nesters enjoy comforts of home

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Jason Horn graduates from Arizona State University this month with an engineering degree, but with no plans to move out of his parents' Glendale home.

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He's not the only one staying with mom and dad after college.

The U.S. Census report from 2006 estimated 65 percent of college graduates had moved back in with their parents. The federal figures showed 56 percent of men and 43 percent of women ages 18 to 24 lived with their folks.

It's not a bad deal, really. With the economy the way it is and the high cost of housing, the price is right - typically, free.

Horn has his own bedroom and bath. His mom cooks dinner nearly every night. And unlike the previous generation, which couldn't wait to strike out on its own, the 22-year-old is content to remain in the nest.

University of Arizona senior Jesse Northway, 22, doesn't have a mother who cooks his dinner every night, but he, too, is content to stay at home - at least for now.

"I live with my dad, my brother and my stepmother in a triplex," he said. "I pay my food bills, but they cover the rent."

Northway said he would have moved out of his dad's house - where he lived throughout college - right after graduation if he wasn't engaged.

"We're getting married in January and our parents aren't paying for anything, so we need to save up money to fund the wedding, and we don't want to go into debt in any way, shape or form," he explained.

Northway's fiancée, Angie Aguiar, also lives with her parents. The UA junior studying communications pays 40 percent of rent and utilities at her mother's place, "but I don't have to worry about food."

"Having hot meals every day" is one advantage of staying home, she said. "And, this may sound bad, but my mom picks up after me and does my laundry when I get behind, which is also good."

Most often, graduates stay home to save money, said Aaron Krasnow, a psychologist who also is assistant director of counseling services at ASU.

Many feel that, financially, they must return home, especially if they are having trouble finding a job after graduation.

In a survey by MonsterTRAK, an online job search service for recent college graduates, 42 percent of 2007 graduates reported student-loan debt exceeding \$25,000; 33 percent admitted to credit card balances of more than \$5,000.

UA's Northway, who is trying to get a job with Child Protective Services, said he has heard of many students who live beyond their means.

"I've had different friends move in and out of home all through college, and it seems to me that they're just living beyond their resources," he said. "They find out they aren't quite as grown up as they thought they were."

Does allowing a 20-something to stay at home handicap them in some way? Students aren't so sure.

"I've heard the case that in past years, parents weren't as supportive," Northway said. "They just wanted the

kids out. I find it good that your parents are your rock, but still, living at home might facilitate a lack of taking responsibility in individual cases. In general, I think 22 used to mean a lot more than it does now."

Arizona Republic reporter Karina Bland contributed to this article.

Biggest mistakes recent college graduates make during the application and interview process, according to CareerBuilder.com's Annual Employer Survey:

- * Acting bored or cocky
- * Not dressing professionally
- * Coming to the interview with no knowledge of the company
- * Not turning off cell phones/PDA
- * Not asking good questions during the interview
- * Asking about pay before the company offers a job
- * Spamming employers with the same résumé and/or cover letter
- * Not removing unprofessional photos/content from social networking pages such as MySpace or Facebook or from personal blogs.

Commencement Basics

UA's 138th commencement ceremony will be held May 17 at either 9 a.m. or 1:30 p.m., depending on the college from which students are receiving their degrees.

The ceremonies will be at McKale Memorial Center, 1721 E. Enke Drive.

UA will award 4,540 undergraduate degrees, as well as 74 pharmacy degrees, 97 medical degrees, 821 master's/specialist degrees, 296 doctorates of various disciplines, 137 juris doctorates and six master's of law each in international trade law and indigenous peoples law.

U.S. astronaut Frank Borman, the commander of the first manned mission to orbit the moon, will be the keynote speaker.

Caption: Jesse Northway, 22, holds a sign to illustrate his need of a job now that he's graduating.

Publication: Tucson Citizen

Section: Local

Source: Citizen Staff Writer

Edition:

Page: 1A

Book: A

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From: