

Job seekers: How do you rate with employers?

February 22 2011

Finding employment can be a daunting task. Millions of college graduates, new to the professional work force, face this challenge every year after receiving their degrees. Many have sacrificed and toiled for perfect grades, worked at internships to prepare for careers, and filled their schedules with university affiliated clubs and activities. The belief that these attributes will enhance a resume and impress an employer is widespread, but does it really reflect what employers seek in a new hire?

To answer this question, researchers at Oklahoma State University conducted a study of more than 450 college graduate employers. Examining not only what attributes employers look for but also the mechanisms with which employers measure these attributes, researchers were able to determine an attribute ranking system based on career path. For example, the top three qualities employers value in the agribusiness industry are communication [skills](#), critical thinking skills, and writing skills.

Employers were asked which signals best illustrate the five attributes being tested: number crunching ability, character, communication skills, problem solving skills, and ability to work well with others. Seventeen signals were listed including grades, major, coursework, and others. However, employers were only to rate five signals for every attribute.

Overall, internships and majors related to the job were highly rated signals, as well as foreign [language skills](#) and interviewing skills. While excellent grades were not ranked as high as other skills and experiences,

they are still important.

"Each student should strategically acquire accomplishments and qualifications which are both valued by employers and consistent with the student's preferences, goals, and talents," says Bailey Norwood, one of the study's authors.

Norwood suggests students should tailor their career choices to their personal strengths and aspirations. Grades, [extracurricular activities](#), leadership positions, internships, and awards speak for an individual as a whole. Also, Norwood advises that interview skills are an invaluable asset.

However, researchers at Oklahoma State remind students and graduates that the study is not infallible.

According to Norwood, "It is important not to allow summaries of survey statistics obscure the fact that each employer is different, and there is no one perfect college graduate."

More information: The full study is published in the January – February 2011 issue of the *Journal of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Education*.

Provided by American Society of Agronomy

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