

THE JOB CLUB

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Students can become quite frustrated when they graduate and find no job waiting for them, but in the early 1980s and the mid-1990s, as few as ten percent of our graduates were placed in related employment when they graduated. To help rectify this situation, and in addition to the usual job placement offices and services, we created a "Job Club" to encourage and assist our students during the difficult transition from graduation to employment as entry-level engineers. In this paper we describe what we did and the results we achieved.

By the time they graduate, students have already participated in workshops on identifying their personal uniqueness, on stress management, on goal-setting and decision-making,^[1] and have submitted resumes so that they can work in a mock company during a senior-level course.^[2,3] In addition, our faculty of engineering and the McMaster Engineering Society financially support a two-person office on Engineering Career Services that runs workshops on resume writing, conducts mock interviews, and gives information on how to prepare for entry-level employment.

Between thirty and forty-five chemical engineering students graduate from our department in May of each year. Some plan to go to graduate school in the fall, some plan to relax and travel, some have already accepted employment by that time, and some are still looking for employment. Typically, between 10% and 30% are looking for employment, but in some cases the percentage has been as high as 61% (1983). In the years from 1992 to 1994, we saw 54%, 39%, and 40%, respectively, who were still on a job search at graduation time. It is in those high-percentage years that we ran the "Job Club."

STRUCTURE OF THE JOB CLUB

Unemployed students are invited to join a "Job Club." There are no dues, and it meets on campus on the first Mondays of June, July, and August. The meetings offer a chance for the students to network, to obtain support and encouragement, and to get ideas, suggestions, and leads.

Between meetings, the graduates are asked to keep on file in the department an up-to-date resume, their current address, and their contact telephone number. We in the department serve as informal brokers in bringing employers and graduates together and provide a support system for the students during their search for employment.

We do not focus on the ever-changing specifics about what types of jobs are available, the different ways companies recruit (for example, with fewer visits to campuses), the global market, or the needs of smaller companies. The career service office helps our students exploit those unique situations each year. Rather, the focus of the Job Club is to provide encouragement, support, and networking.

One way we show our support is simply by having an activity such as the Job Club. It demonstrates to the students that we are concerned about them. We emphasize activities in the meetings that encourage and support, that help man-

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M.H.I. Baird was chair of the Chemical Engineering Department in the early 1980s when the need for a Job Club first arose. His research interests are in mixing, solvent extraction, and mass transfer.

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J.F. MacGregor was chair of the Chemical Engineering Department in the late 1980s. His research specialties are in statistical process control and polymer reaction engineering. He received an award as outstanding graduate student supervisor at McMaster University in 1996.

S. Gallo-O'Toole is Departmental Coordinator. In addition to overall administration of the department, Sara creates and maintains the vital links between job opportunities and the students. She is an avid sports fan and manages to find time in her busy schedule to watch hockey games her sons and husband participate in.

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age stress and change.

The first meeting is fairly structured (see Table 1) and has a main objective of providing moral support and encouragement. It helps students to see the job-search process as a job in itself and to set appropriate goals. During the workshop the students identify their five-year goals as well as their one-month to two-year goals; they list the uniqueness of the program and of themselves, and they note the skills they wish to develop. Most of the other activities during that first meeting involve information sharing. The "Action" section is a series of mini-workshops reviewing key points the students have previously covered in their program.

TABLE 1
Agenda for the First Job Club Meeting

Yes, There Is Life After Graduation
Workshop

1. Your Short-Term Goals and Long-Term Goals

versus

Your Short-Term and Long-Term Situation

- ▶ Long-Term Goals
- ▶ Short-Term and Long-Term Situation as We See It
- ▶ Your Short-Term Goals

2. Be Ready

- ▶ Unique You
- ▶ Job Application Form
- ▶ Update/New Personal Horizons

3. Identify Short-Term Alternatives Consistent with Long-Term Goals

- ▶ Brainstorm
- ▶ Criteria

4. External Resources

- ▶ Governmental
- ▶ Professional Societies
- ▶ Advertising
- ▶ Career Assist Agencies
- ▶ The Companies
- ▶ McMaster
- ▶ Lists, Directories, Yellow Pages
- ▶ What is Happening?

5. Actions

- ▶ Make Goal Achievement a Full-Time Activity
- ▶ Pyramiding Your Contacts
- ▶ The Job Club
- ▶ Periodic Reassessment
- ▶ Teamwork
- ▶ Managing Stress
- ▶ Making Decisions

The second meeting is less structured. Students share their experiences and pass on leads to others when possible; we report on the placements that have taken place and focus on what can be learned from them. We also provide details on how to become systematic and organized in the job search. This includes a ten-point checklist for the solicited job, a daily calendar record of job-search activities, company research checklists, a job search plan/record sheet, and an interview summary sheet. The students are encouraged to learn from every job application and every interview—regardless of the outcome.

The third meeting, in August, offers the same kind of support, but quite often is not needed—most of the students have found a job by that time!

RESULTS

The response has been positive. The students appreciate knowing that we are concerned about them after graduation and that we will work with them to gain appropriate entry-level employment. The most rewarding result is that by September most of the students are employed or are attending graduate school. In one of the more difficult years for employment, for example, nineteen graduates attended the June meeting, eleven the July meeting, and three the August meeting. This pattern is typical. About 10 to 20% of the placements occurred through the department.

SUMMARY

A Job Club holds informal, monthly meetings for still-unemployed students after graduation. The purpose of the meetings is to share ideas and to provide moral support and encouragement. The club is instituted only during those times when finding employment is particularly difficult, and we feel it has been extremely effective.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Doreen Knol, Engineering Career Services, for her work with our students, and Mary Dubel for sharing her ideas with us on getting organized for the job search. The suggestions of the reviewers were also useful.

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