



CAREER

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Where the Jobs Are

Working Aggies Share Their Wisdom

By Megan Orton
CAREER SEARCH

Where are the jobs? How do I find them? How can Texas A&M and the Aggie Network help me?

Many Aggies find themselves reaching a endless series of dead ends in the weakening job market, only to ponder a series of questions similar to these.

"Ninety-nine percent of Aggies find employment through networking or job search Web sites," said Paul Pausky, assistant director of placement at the Texas A&M Career Center.

But what happens when you've exhausted all of those possibilities?

Three students were willing to share their stories: how they got the career of their dreams, how they utilized their A&M backgrounds, and what you can do to follow in their footsteps.

The Industrial Distributor

Natalie Despaux, an industrial distribution graduate of the Class of 2004, used the Career Center to land her job as a procurement service adviser for Exxon-Mobil.

"The best advice I can give anyone is register through the Career Center your freshman year," she said.

The Career Center can then make available a list of jobs that apply to the student and he or she can sign up for interview times for the jobs that interest them, she said. Based on your resume, career center advisers decide whether you qualify for a particular interview, and the process begins there.

"The key thing is that even if you are not selected for an interview, you can still go to the company's presentation the night before the interviews begin," she explained. "There is a chance that if they have an extra opening, they will let you interview if you express interest in the company and the position."

Despaux set up her interview through the Career Center, landed a three-month internship with Exxon-Mobil, and a job offer followed. She stressed the importance her internship had in getting the job of her dreams.

"The internship and interviewing process allowed me to learn a lot about myself, and what I like and I don't like," she said.

Understanding this helped Despaux find the job that best suited her needs and the needs of the company. As a procurement service adviser, she handles different agreements between contractors and other divisions of Exxon-Mobil, mainly services and materials.

"I have the personality and the technical skills needed for the job, but I also have the determination to take on its challenges," she said. "Our work is different every day."

Despaux said the job has offered her the opportunity to interface with many different clients, including international companies. "As a global corporation, we have different laws and regulations we have to abide by to succeed," she said.

Despaux was hired by an Aggie, and said that although everyone in the workplace has been helpful, anyone with an Aggie ring is always more than willing to share experiences with her. Working with another Aggie gives you that "connection," she said.

The Entrepreneur

Steven Prince, a marketing graduate in the Class of 2003, met up with high school buddy Justin Rana six months ago and decided to start a business.

"I spent four-and-a-half months looking for jobs, was unsuccessful, and then decided to start my own business," Prince said. "My friend had some talent and was going in the right direction, so I applied my time and interest to his efforts."

And here they are.

The company, Miriam Media, is a small ad agency located in Denton, Texas, and currently employs only Prince and Rana themselves. They have been successful in working with Web sites, graphics, and ads for businesses in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

"We pretty much pitch to the businesses," Prince said. He said Miriam does business with some companies that have six metroplex locations, but also with some like the mom-and-pop store around the corner.

"It's a pretty wide spectrum."

Prince said he has been able to apply a lot that he learned in college, but he has since been shown a lot toward setting up his own business. He also did a lot of individual research and learning to successfully help launch Miriam Media.

Prince hopes to encourage other Aggies to strive for success in the advertising field.

"I think advertising is a weak area at A&M, and I hope one day I can buy my own building and make the ideas of advertising truly clear to Aggies," Prince said.

The Engineer

"Intern, intern, intern," said Sam Rodgers, Class of 2002. Rodgers was

hired by Halliburton Energy Services almost seven months before graduation. A petroleum engineering graduate from Katy, Rodgers had two internships with Halliburton while in school.

"My department was really good about bringing the interviews to us," Rodgers explained. "We didn't have to go through the Career Center, and that afforded us a little better opportunity." Rodgers said engineering students are simply told when and where the information sessions are, either by professors during classes or by company members during "lunch deals" in the petroleum engineering building. Then a list was made available to sign up for interviews.

"I tried to be outgoing, attentive and personable when I was put in a business/interview environment," Rodgers said. "I also never stopped asking questions. I felt like the better I knew my job, then the better I could present myself later." Rodgers said he felt that he showed dedication to his work and tried to emphasize those qualities when he interviewed. Once he accepted the internship, Rodgers said he attributed his success to hard work.

"I can't stress enough how important experience is," Rodgers said. He said that in the petroleum engineering department at A&M, internships weren't just encouraged, but required. "I think that is a big edge we have over other schools."



Rodgers also said that the Aggie connection is alive and well in the petroleum engineering field. "In the oil field Aggies are well thought of and all around you," Rodgers said. "When I meet other Aggies in the industry, it is almost as if there is an immediate connection — an understanding. I look out for him or her and vice versa."

Halliburton has offered Rodgers exactly what he was seeking. He said once he got his offer, he knew a career at Halliburton was what he wanted to pursue, and he didn't feel the need to look elsewhere. The career path flexibility, the daily challenges and the people he works with are all advantages of working with Halliburton. "And of course, the pay!" he joked. Opportunities included, for him, "hopefully seeing the world" and "feeling a part of something."

It's a Jungle Out There

Hunting jobs when they're hiding in other prospective bushes

By Shannan E. Johnson
CAREER SEARCH

Have you ever rolled out of bed early, put on your Sunday's best, made several copies of your resume that you revised more than a million times, and arrived at a career fair that wasn't up to par? This happens to eager job seekers far too often. The average student depends on his or her college or university to help them network with the right companies at the right time — usually the career fair. These students put all their effort into trying to make themselves look like the best candidate for the recruiting companies. But when they show up, they can hear their heels clicking on the newly waxed floors because of the lack of hustle and bustle from the would-be competition practically jogging from booth to booth. The only table in the entire exhibit hall is occupied by a pimply-faced teenager from the fast-food chain who is looking for an assistant manager. What a waste of time!

For those students who are willing to go above and beyond, here are some alternative paths to finding a career:

Crashing Career Fairs

Sssss! Fellow Aggies are thinking. But when it comes to a career, seekers have to broaden their minds past "Goodbye to Texas University," and instead say "hello." The Texas A&M chapter of the American Advertising Federation (AAF) plans trips annually to the UT Communications Career Fair. The vice president of programs visits the UT Communications School Web site and calls its career center for information on when and where the career fair will take place, what companies will be present and for what positions they'll be hiring. Then university-excused slips are passed out and the Aggies road trip down Highway 21.

"We are disadvantaged by not having the actual advertising degree (which can be obtained from UT and many other smaller state schools), and agencies do not normally actively pursue employees from A&M," said Melissa Scates, current vice president of programs for AAF. "Going to events (tours, companies, speakers) help us form contacts and learn from the best in the business."

Never underestimate the career fairs of neighboring schools. Aggies might hate rival teams when it comes to football, but after the Big XII game graduating seniors still need jobs. So, when you've been misled into thinking career fairs at A&M are the only place for resources, travel, travel, travel.

The Hidden Job Market

According to the Career Center, 80 percent of all jobs are found through networking — contacts and referrals. Texas A&M Career Center's Pat Alexander advises: "Inform everyone in your

network of your on-going job search and be sure to provide them with specific details about your job objective, qualifications and skills."

Call and set up a tour at various companies of interest. Besides crashing career fairs, AAF also sets up tours at advertising and design agencies in close proximity to Texas A&M. "HAF (Houston Advertising Federation) has proved to be a good connection for our group as they host the competition we attend every fall. From there we are able to meet with representatives from 15 to 20 agencies in one day," Scates said. "Each person then brings back their information and we share it, and grow our network."

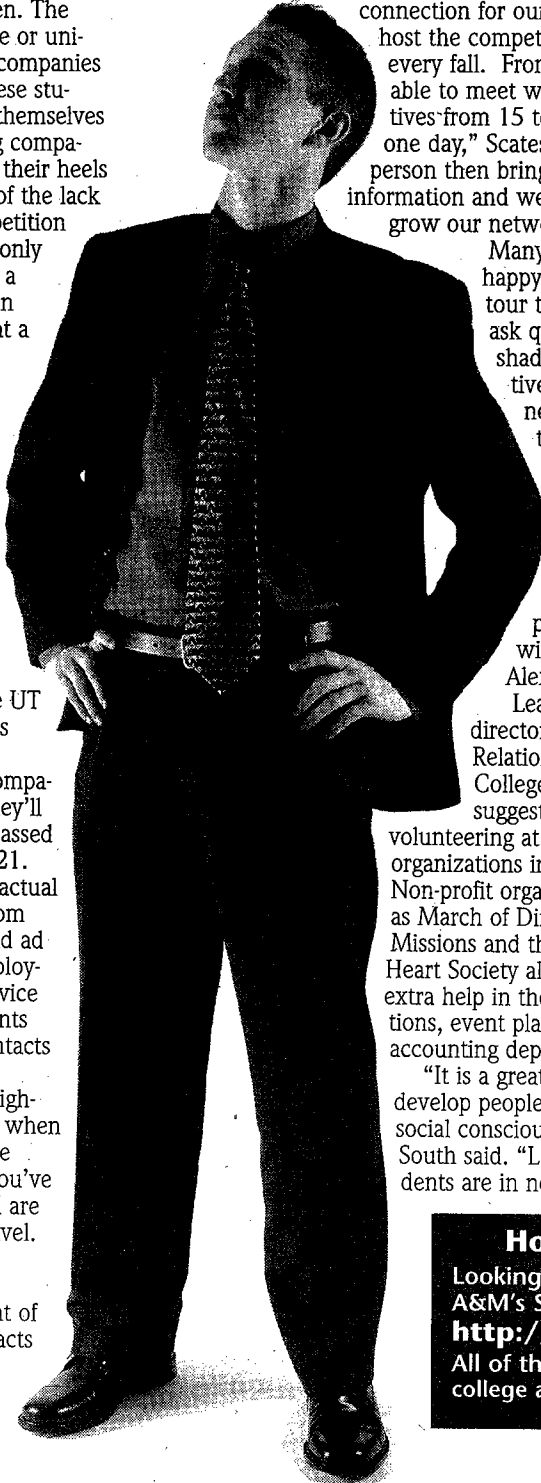
Many companies are happy to let students tour the company, ask questions, or shadow an executive for a day. One never knows, there might be an Aggie working at the company. "Remember, you must ask for help and people will be willing to do so," Alexander said. Leanne South, director of College Relations in the College of Liberal Arts, suggests students try volunteering at non-profit organizations in their area. Non-profit organizations such as March of Dimes, Twin City Missions and the American Heart Society always need extra help in their public relations, event planning and accounting departments.

"It is a great opportunity to develop people skills and social consciousness of life," South said. "Later when students are in need of jobs, they will remember your work."

What is the motto of this article, boys and girls? Don't give up if the jobs aren't pouring in for you like they seem to be for everyone around you. It will take some work on your behalf.

"You must be diligent and have a well-organized plan of action. This helps you to stay focused and helps you to not give up," Alexander said. The Career Center teaches students to start early, giving themselves six months to a year to find what they want. Just remember, don't settle for the empty exhibition hall — do something about it.

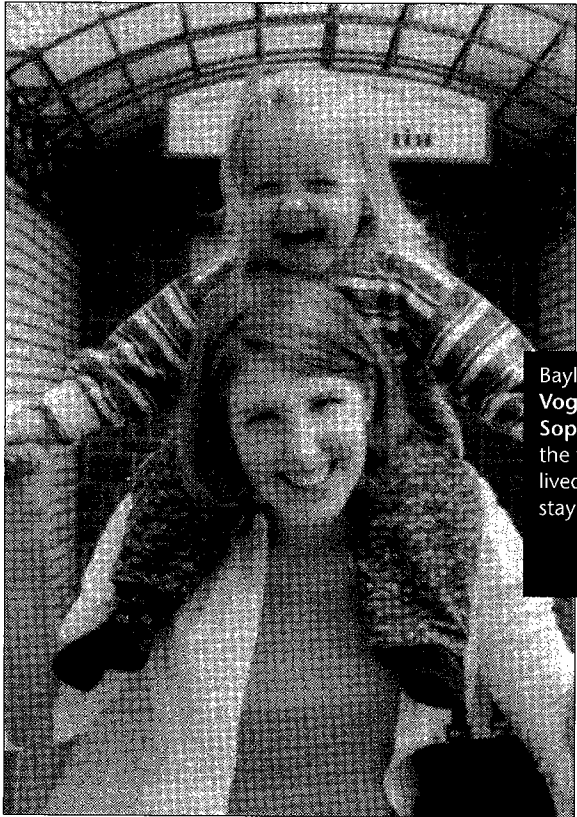
How to find professional societies at Texas A&M
Looking for a professional/academic organization to join? Go to Texas A&M's Student Activities page:
<http://studentactivities.tamu.edu/stuactweb/search>.
All of the academic societies are listed by schools. Click on your respective college and find the group that best suits your interests. Good luck!



The Internet Is Your Friend

The people resources listed below can be tapped into for referrals and secondary contacts in your job search.

- Check out the Web sites of interesting companies such as:
National Basketball Association
<http://nbateamjobs.teamworkonline.com/teamwork/jobs/default.cfm>
Random House Publishing
<http://www.primapublishing.com/careers/FOX>
FOX
<http://www.foxcareers.com/>
- Check out the career center Web sites of schools in which your area of expertise is accredited.
Harvard University
(<http://www.law.harvard.edu/ocs/>)
Florida A&M University (<http://career-center.famu.edu/>)
University of Texas at Austin
(<http://communication.utexas.edu/ccs/>)
- Surf the job banks on the sites of societies and associations in your career field. For example:
American Society of Magazine Editors
(http://www.magazine.org/Editorial/MP_A_ASME_Job_Bank/)
American Society of Mechanical Engineers (www.asme.org/jobs)
American Sociological Association
(www.asanet.org/sectioncbasm/jobs.html)
- Click on sites such as:
www.jobs.com
www.monster.com
www.career.com



Baylor intern Larissa Vogelaar with Sophia, a member of the family Vogelaar lived with during her stay in Ukraine.

Photo courtesy of Larissa Vogelaar.

By Amy Keilers
CAREER SEARCH

It took Baylor University senior Larissa Vogelaar a month to make her decision. Sure, the opportunity wasn't exactly a stop on her path to becoming an occupational therapist, but she accepted the internship anyway.

When most students were donning their business best and flocking to career fairs to get face time with recruiters and land that coveted intern position, Vogelaar took a different route to gain work experience. Over the course of eight months, she would do absolutely nothing related to occupational therapy, but would cross the Atlantic several times, immerse herself in a new culture and test her diplomatic skills to establish a foster care system in poverty-ridden area of Ukraine.

Vogelaar interned as a foster care coordinator for New Hope International, a missionary organization founded by her father and dedicated to mobilizing churches and outreach ministries in Eastern Europe. New Hope had been exploring the possibility of establishing a foster care system in the Ukraine for several years, but when Vogelaar accepted the internship, it was up to her to design and implement the system.

The internship began in May 2002 as Vogelaar worked alongside case workers at Buckner Orphan Care in Dallas. She followed the workers on home visits, made notes and gathered resources, and after she had enough information, she flew to Ukraine. There she lived with a family involved in New Hope and, without any established guidelines, devised an approach to organize the foster care system.

"I traveled to meetings with government officials, church pastors and families interested in fostering," she said. "I did not have specific requirements, so I had to set up guidelines and goals for myself to get my major task accomplished."

The challenge laid not only in building a social system from scratch, but in the unfamiliarity of her

surroundings.

"I had to adapt to cultural differences. Things moved a lot slower in the Ukraine because it is a third-world country. Government officials were very slow and not very cooperative. Working with a translator and making sure she had enough work to keep her busy was a constant challenge."

In August, armed with preliminary knowledge from her first five weeks in the Ukraine, Vogelaar traveled back to the United States and spent a month writing financial support letters and material for foster parent training programs. She flew across the Atlantic again in September to train foster care workers, translate training materials and promote the foster program. The next two months of Vogelaar's internship were spent between the United States, where she continued fund-raising efforts, and the Ukraine, where she helped three parents complete training programs and made sure the foster care system was ready to hand over to the Ukrainian workers. This presented challenges of its own, but carefully woven between the obstacles was the tiny voice of pure willpower that Vogelaar never expected.

"There would be days where I felt like I was hitting a brick wall, and then we would have a big break-

through. The whole process taught me to persevere, and I was amazed by how much I was capable of," she said. "There would be a huge task to accomplish, and I would wonder how I was going to get it done, but somehow I was able to look back a few days later and not believe that I had gotten through an important meeting with a government official, or taught training sessions to foster parents, or written up training materials, or even fired a social worker."

Vogelaar said the firing incident was definitely the low point in her experience. She had no one else to fill the vacancy, but the person appointed to the position just didn't meet the demands of the job.

"I had to hire a person to take over the foster care program, and the first person that we hired I had to fire. This was just a difficult decision that I had to make and take full responsibility for."

But hidden between the thorns, Vogelaar was able to see the fruits of her labor.

"The best part of the whole experience was the last week in the Ukraine when I visited two of our foster parents at their homes and saw them with their foster children. It was so rewarding to see that my eight months of hard work had paid off."

For Vogelaar, the internship had real-world benefits. She came away with leadership, management, administrative and public speaking skills — things Marti Boerema, the associate executive director at Texas A&M University's Career Center, said are an important part of any intern experience

"Learning goes beyond the academic scope to practical skills of being an employee within an organization, or what the industry refers to as 'soft skills,'" Boerema said. "Those include oral and written communication, presentation skills, interpersonal communications, the ability to work in teams, cultural awareness and the ability to work with diverse populations, flexibility, initiative and leadership."

Vogelaar has even spoken to student organizations, challenging others to step out of their comfort zones and accept opportunities that provide these skills even though the work environment may be a little less traditional.

"I have always perceived internships as being cut and dry, but college is a time for testing the water," said Rhiana Titus, a Baylor University junior who heard Vogelaar speak at a Campus Crusade for Christ event. "Experience doesn't just come from sitting behind a desk. I can choose the adventurous over the practical and still reap the benefits of an internship."

While Boerema, who has worked in career services since 1989, advocates any opportunity that allows students to gain work-related experience, she said international experiences provide their own benefits.

"With the emphasis on the global economy and diversity in all forms, experiences that demonstrate intercultural awareness such as international intern-

ships or study abroad are becoming more valued by employers," Boerema said.

Brad Collet, the assistant director of experiential education at A&M, also stressed the important of internships, both traditional and nontraditional.

"Our recruiting employers tell us that relevant work experience is one of the most important things they look for when they are evaluating a potential candidate," Collet said.

"What better way to find out what people with your major do than to actually experience it firsthand?"

Collet also stressed that students can learn pertinent skills even if their internship experiences ven-

ture outside of the scope of their major.

"In fact, (students) may have an opportunity to learn even more because they can often times be given more experiences. (Nontraditional internships) may not be as structured as a 'traditional' internship, but they can offer at least as many benefits," Collet said.

So, hobnobbing with investment bankers in a prestigious firm may be the route for some. Others may prefer thrashing around the set of a Hoobastank video like the MasterCard intern. But Larissa Vogelaar chose to leave her impression on Ukrainian soil. By the end of 2003, 13 children found homes with the first 10 New Hope foster families, and 10 more families were preparing to open their homes to orphaned children.

Sure leaving school for a semester had its costs, including putting occupational therapy on hold, but accepting a challenge and causing change. Now that is truly priceless.

"College is a time for testing the water. Experience doesn't just come from sitting behind a desk. I can choose the adventurous over the practical and still reap the benefits of an internship."

— Rhiana Titus,
Baylor University junior

