

d.n. soapbox

Man (or woman) does not exist by old tests alone

Who Needs College? is the headline blazing across the cover of one of the news magazines this week.

Who needs college indeed?

What a question to appear around UNL, which with graduation on May 8, must be one of the earliest schools to turn job-hungry masses into the streets.

Such articles forecast gloom and doom and dreadful unemployment problems for students, especially those in disciplines once regarded as the backbone of education—the liberal arts.

A dime a dozen, or perhaps worth even less on the current market, humanities majors face the roughest course—as today's Con/Pro column documents elsewhere on this page.

So another gloomy spring begins—as the starting salaries of American college graduates is only six per cent higher than the average American worker. In 1969, the figure was 24 per cent, which says something about the devaluation of the diploma.

What am I doing here, writing papers and taking tests and subjecting myself to all sorts of abuse with the excuse "I'm a student"? one might be tempted to ask.

The expectations that accompany one who chooses and completes a college education are part of the job market fiasco.

All traditional notions about the value of an educated man or woman are falling. And it isn't a disaster at that, that the world learn the value and reward of all people's skills and all people.

Intrinsic value remains, the meaning of a college education to the individual student. The rewards of academic work are few and seldom occur, but they remain enormously self-satisfying.

Economic realities await, though, because one can't live on a diet of old tests and paperback biology books. For graduates, job hunting will be a long trip.

Vince Boucher

ralph

by ron wheeler



con | You've heard story before; pro | job market no easy street

By Neil Klotz
(This is the first in a two-part series on how students can face the future job market.)

A good job is hard to find. You've probably heard it before, and even if you haven't you could have guessed.

This year's job offers to college grads are down 16 per cent from last year's, which were down 18 per cent from the year before. Unemployment among humanities B.A.'s runs 15 per cent, double the national average, but still better than the 20 per cent unemployment among non-college youth in their twenties, which is still better than the 43 per cent unemployment among Black teenagers.

Statistic piled on statistic boggles the mind. If you can face the numbers with the realization that a major crisis looms, you're doing a lot better than most professional observers of the economy, who are scrambling to find any comforting platitude in the storm.

"Young people who have to wait to find work learn patience and openmindedness," preaches Time, the weekly conventional wisdom magazine. And at a recent higher education convention in Chicago, one workshop came up with this gem: if nothing, a liberal arts education can help a student mentally through a period of high unemployment. As if Proust, Matisse and Stravinsky go better on an empty stomach.

Business Week is a little more realistic. It quotes the chief economist of Ford Motor Co. saying, "Unemployment insurance and welfare are the two reasons why there isn't blood in the streets with today's unemployment rates." And this year, about 2 million unemployed will exhaust their benefits. The economy must create enough jobs to absorb them and you—and all those Black teens who want to work. But the typical business response has been to head for the cellar to get out the steel shutters.

Unrealistic expectations
Much of the problem stems from the creation of unrealistic expectations. The United States and other rich nations hold out their success as a model to the developing countries, even though we already consume three-fourths of the world's resources with only one-fourth of the population. The poor nations couldn't follow into affluence no matter how hard they pulled on their bootstraps.

In the same way, we see displayed as a model of the "good life" the lifestyle of 4 per cent of all Americans who hold one-third of the cash and two-thirds of the stock. The carrot and the stick is used on everyone else to provide an incentive to work, but there aren't enough carrots to go around.

To keep the poor pacified, there's welfare. For the middle incomers, there's higher education. Formerly students were told that a B.A. would buy them a ticket to the ever-inflating good life. But after a short time there was standing room only. While college grads have doubled in the last ten years, professional and managerial jobs have increased by only one-third.

So most students are stuck in limbo land where they float about collecting more degrees and hoping to find someone scalping tickets for the big show. Or they settle for jobs that don't use their talents and push

non-college youth further down the economic scale and often out of the job market and into the streets.

The showdown at the job gap comes to this: either unlimited consumption of consumer goods will continue to be the measure of the good life and the aim of work, or the good life will center on the freedom to fulfill oneself personally through work. The desire for the switch is there. According to one estimate, 80 per cent of all Americans are underemployed: that is, they don't think their jobs utilize all their skills and talents.

Most of them have been told, probably as early as their first session with a high school counselor, that they must give up their idle dreams of satisfaction. Most probably realize that they don't enjoy their eight hour-a-day stint, but console themselves with the comfort of a few evening hours, a few weekends and a few years after retirement.

Even the economy wants the showdown at the job gap to come. As it turns out, the "realism" of searching out existing jobs and molding yourself to fit, not only is unsatisfying, but increasingly won't work.

Take, for instance, the transitional mass resume bombardment technique of job hunting. Some companies now receive as many as 250,000 resumes a year and according to one survey, even an average size company rejects immediately 246 out of every 257 resumes it receives.

The same roulette happens when you answer a newspaper ad for a job: 95 to 98 per cent of all answers are automatically chucked. The only way to even have a chance, say job consultants, is to tailor your resume or case history letter exactly to the ad's specifications and omit everything else so there's no excuse for screening you out. But even if you get the job, how many of your personal goals did you have to screen out in the process?

Employment agencies
Employment agencies are only a slight variation on the matching game. According to the Federal Trade Commission, private employment agencies place only about 5 per cent of their clients. Overall, they only get jobs for 4 per cent those entering the work force for the first time.

The agencies really are not into finding you a job. They have to match existing jobs with the most marketable job hunters, quickly, otherwise they can't financially stay afloat. High turnover is the name of the game, so if you don't promise a quick commission by being in one of the demand professions, you've filed in Never-Never Land.

As it is, almost half of the 4,000 employment agencies in America fold each year and are replaced by another 2,000 new ones who promise you the key to every executive washroom in town.

Instead of molding people to already existing jobs, the answer—for the pre-showdown economy as well as later—is molding jobs to fit people.

Far from being a utopian pipedream, this basic principle has been expanded into a comprehensive technique for getting jobs now by a small groups of career counselors who claim an 80 to 90 per cent success rate. A good job is hard to find, they say, but easier to create. Next week we'll look at how they do it.