

Finding a Summer Job is Tough, but Not Impossible

By Holly Culhane, Contributing Columnist



Ah, you can almost smell the cocoa butter in the air and hear the waves pounding the sand at the beach. As temperatures begin to heat up, many area college students' thoughts are turning to spring break – a chance to get away from textbook drudgery and celebrate with their friends.

But at the risk of sounding like a “party pooper,” I urge college students: Use your spring break to find a summer job, or internship.

The nation's economic recovery is slow and the job market “brutal.” This is especially true for California's young adults.

According to the state's Employment Development Department, the unemployment rate for young Californians is 35.2 percent. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that nationwide only 48 percent of people in the 18- to 24-year age bracket were able to find jobs last summer. It was the lowest summer youth employment rate since recordkeeping began in 1948.

But these grim statistics are not reasons to give up. Rather they are reasons to get serious and creative early in the game.

With the cost of attending college skyrocketing and job-hunting competition among college graduates intensifying, the importance of having a summer job or summer internship is increasing. They can provide much needed cash to pay for college and much needed experience to compete for full-time jobs after graduation.

Landing a summer job or internship is tough. But it's not impossible.

Certainly some of the “traditional” summer jobs have fallen to the budget-cutting ax. For example, there may be fewer city and county parks and recreation jobs than in the past because programs have been cut back.

Now is the time to think “outside the box.” Ask parents, family members and friends to help identify the industries, companies and non-profit organizations hiring summer workers.

As an example, weeds grow like crazy in the summer around here. City and county ordinances require “weed abatement.” There is a “big business” in clearing property of weeds. Ask government enforcement agencies and property managers for the names of companies that do this work.

“Social networking junkies” might be able to put their computer skills to work. Offer to help set up a company’s Facebook page, Twitter account, or blog. Who knows, when the summer is over, there may be the need for an “independent contractor” to continue updating the newly-created social networking site.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, northeast of Bakersfield, recently distributed an email inviting people to apply for summer jobs and student internships. Recruitment began in December and closes (for the most part) in March. Go to www.nps.gov/seki/parkmgmt/studentemp.htm or to www.sequoiahistory.org for more information. A list of seasonal federal job openings also can be found on www.usajobs.gov.

For those willing to look, job hunting resources exist.

College placement centers – Whether you are attending a Kern County college, or a school in another state, a good place to start looking for a job is the college placement center. In addition to job listings, centers can help identify companies and industries that add workers during the summer.

Campus job fairs – Not yet ready to graduate? Attend a campus job fair, anyway. You’ll learn about companies and industries that are hiring. Ask recruiters if they have summer job and internship openings. Get their business information and stay in contact with them.

Personal contacts – Mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, family friends, neighbors and teachers can help brainstorm and identify possible openings with local companies and non-profit organizations. LinkedIn connections, Facebook friends and other contacts through social networking may have job hunting ideas as well.

Classified advertising – Likely few summer jobs will be advertised in *The Californian’s* classified advertising section or on alternative websites, such as Monster.com or Craigslist. But read advertisements for full-time jobs carefully. They can help identify the companies and industries that are hiring and the skills that are needed.

Internship or job? – Should you take just any summer job, as long as it pays? Or should you take a non-paying internship, which will provide experience related to your college major? That really depends on how badly you need the money. Clearing weeds from a vacant lot may pay enough to buy textbooks next year. Although the specific type of work may not impress a Google recruiter interviewing computer science grads, a person’s willingness to work will...and work ethic matters. Still, it’s important to remember that non-paying internships can provide meaningful experience and advantages when you look for a job after graduation.

Begin the search for a summer job or internship now.

- **Research.** Where are the jobs? What skills do you need? Who can help open the hiring doors?

- **Resume.** Education is important. But as important are skills, experience and special qualifications, such as ability to speak a foreign language, computer skills, etc. What skills have you learned in your college classes that can be put to work?
- **Inquiry letter.** Send a letter to the company or non-profit organization expressing your interest in a summer job or internship. Do your research. Suggest how your skills are desirable. Include your resume. Ask to meet with a company representative during spring break, or during another trip home.
- **Keep in touch.** There is a fine line between being a “pest” and keeping in touch. But it is important to demonstrate your interest and initiative. .

Whether you land a grunt, hard-labor job, or impressive, non-paying internship, the important thing is that you spend your summer “productively.”

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