

Preparing for the world of work

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What Do Employers Expect of HKU Graduates?

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The Most Preferred University Graduates

Amidst the gloom about the current employment situation, there is good news. For the past four years, HKU graduates have been ranked "The most preferred university graduates" by annual surveys conducted by Education 18.com. In addition, HKU graduates have the lowest unemployment rate (0.8% in 2002) among all local tertiary institutions. This is no small achievement, especially given the bleak economic climate and keen competition for jobs. Yet, it is not a time to rest on our laurels. Let's review employers' expectations, areas for improvement and what we need to do to further enhance our qualities.

Employers' Expectations

To meet the rapidly-changing employment environment, graduates are expected to be multi-skilled, flexible, versatile and keen to learn so that they can quickly adapt themselves to the workplace.

Apart from the hard skills such as IT skills, language proficiency and job-related knowledge, employers also expect you to possess core competencies. These include: effective communication skills, cultural sensitivity, creativity and original thinking, the ability to put knowledge into practice, leadership and teamwork spirit, negotiation skills and, above all, the ability to tackle and solve problems successfully.

To be successful in the world of work, the mere possession of skills is not enough. You must also have a positive work attitude - the readiness to face challenges and to take the responsibility for making decisions. In short, you must be able to translate ideas into reality and to apply knowledge to create financial and social wealth for the community.

Areas which need improvement

What does the feedback from your employers show? First the good news: they consider HKU graduates relatively strong in areas such as job-related knowledge, communication skills, English proficiency and preparation for selection interviews. They have good things to say



about your enthusiasm, manner, dress and grooming. However, they consider that improvement is needed in analytical reasoning, decision making, lateral thinking and practical orientation. So, now that we know our good and bad points, what can we do about it?

Ways to Develop Core Competencies and a Positive Work Attitude

While universities can teach professional knowledge and hard skills, core competencies can hardly be learned from books. These need to be nurtured: through participation in co-curricular activities, like general education, cultural exchange programmes or projects offering internship and mentorship opportunities. Through these channels you will have the chance to develop creativity, a sense of responsibility,

teamwork and other competencies. The CePc is working hard to increase the range of opportunities available to you through internships and placements.

What can you do to help yourself?

Internship programmes cannot be effective without your active participation. The University and the employer community can only provide the opportunities. The rest is up to you. Take the initiative and make good use of your chances. Competencies cannot be developed overnight; nurturing takes time. Start equipping yourself as early as possible. Also, be prepared to take up and learn from minor work, at the basic level, before you can gain insight into the complexities of most professions.

Conclusion

Today's world demands a wide range of skills from all of us. Knowledge alone is no longer adequate to meet the community's needs. HKU's emphasis upon Problem Based Learning (PBL) in your academic work, and the range of opportunities available in the co-curriculum can provide you with many advantages. It is hoped that the joint efforts of all the parties concerned will help to produce the crop of graduates ready to take on the challenges of the 21st century.

The Advice of an Employer: Plan for Your Career

What advice do employers have for HKU graduates? The following words are extracted from a speech given by Mr K C Law, a successful accountant and President of the ACCA (2002-03)

Career planning should begin with self-awareness and self-understanding.

Apart from evaluating our own skills and abilities, our personal traits, aptitude, values and interests are critical components to any career decisions. Only through this journey of self-assessment can we realistically establish career goals and identify areas for personal development.



Of course, decisions about career goals is not a one-time event. As time changes, our priorities will also change. Self-assessment is a continuous and life-long process.

I would like to share with you, from my past experience in the accounting profession, some tips which are common to a successful career in most professions.

1. Display a positive attitude towards work and a strong desire to succeed. People like to work with enthusiastic and positive people. This would certainly help expand your network.

2. Develop comprehensive knowledge and the skills necessary for a good start. To fit into the complexities of our world today, it is important to acquire multiple skills and "cross-functionality" rather than simply a specialization.

3. Be ethical. Accounting is not just a profession that calls for techniques and skills. It is one that is built on solid integrity, discipline and ethics. Whether working in a consulting or corporate environment, your clients and colleagues should regard you as a trustworthy, professional, truthful and prudent person.

4. Seek out experience. Quality experience enables you to analyse, understand and deal with different situations and their complexities. I would strongly advise you to look for jobs that will give you room to learn and accumulate experience at the beginning of your career. The accumulation of work experience surpasses any short-term monetary reward.

5. Build your network. Do stay in touch with old friends and those contacts you made at school, university and through your professional studies. Attend alumni and professional events, to gain friendship with those people who share your vision and values.

Your career is not just a matter of chance - it is a matter of choice. It is not to be waited for, but to be achieved. As Lao Tzu has said, "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." Step out now and the world will be yours.

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