

May 2015

Turning the Tassel

Traer Schon
Iowa State University

Mackenzie Geary
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Journalism Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Schon, Traer and Geary, Mackenzie (2015) "Turning the Tassel," *Ethos*: Vol. 2015 , Article 8.
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2015/iss3/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ethos by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

Turning the TASSEL

WHEN THE ADVENTURE ENDS
AND THE REAL WORLD BEGINS

BY TRAER SCHON DESIGN MACKENZIE GEARY

We go to college with the hopes of earning a degree that will one day get us a job. Although for most of our four (or more) years here, that seems like a distant and far-off achievement, but in our last year we eventually succumb to the unavoidable and begin the search. After the endless preaching from advisors, the non-stop flood of emails from Career Services and the relentless pimping of successful alumni in our department, we may start to get the idea that our dream career is just one great cover letter away. It can feel like getting hired is inevitable—if everyone is talking about it, surely it can't be that hard to find a job?

But what if it is? What if we walk off the commencement stage with a piece of paper worth four years and \$30,000 in student loans and are still uncertain about our professional future? For some recent Iowa State graduates, that is exactly the reality they faced.

One of these graduates is Kara Landhuis, who graduated in May 2014 with a degree in advertising. After beginning her job search in January, she was unemployed until she received a part-time job with the Riverside Bible Camp in August. Landhuis says she was surprised by how long the process took.

"It was kind of hard," she says. "I was just like, 'How long is this gonna take?'"

When Landhuis was looking for employment, she found that hearing back from companies she applied to wasn't always a guarantee.

"Waiting to hear from employers was really hard," she says. "If it's an online application or something, you sometimes won't even hear anything at all—even if they [don't want to hire you], they just don't say anything."

Mark Hamilton, a May 2014 graduate who majored in technical communications, found the process of job searching equally frustrating.

"I had no idea it was going to be quite this difficult to get a 'regular' job," he says.

Although Hamilton recently got what he calls his "dream job" as an Instructional Media Specialist at the University of Iowa, he spent a lot of time after graduation doing several other jobs, including work for his father, freelance videography and substitute teaching. He says that he also had the additional challenge of seeking employment with his relatively uncommon technical communication major and unique interests, which include videography and E-learning (developing electronic educational technology for use in classrooms).

"If you have a unique major you may have more of a problem," he explains. "I would [look at] jobs, and I would be qualified for them in every respect but I didn't have the right major or degree title."

He also mentioned that, as a general rule, most companies don't want to consider relocating you, and opt for local hires—most of the roughly 100 out-of-state jobs he applied for didn't even call him back.

Hamilton says that the employment gap that appeared in his resume, which was due partly to the wording he used, was brought up in some interviews as "concerning" to his potential employers.

"It's a vicious cycle," he says. "You can't get a job because you haven't had a job, and so you can't get a job to make it look like you have had a job."

In the months after graduation, both Hamilton and Landhuis became accustomed to the tedious, often unrewarding process of job hunting.

According to Landhuis, finding employment can be a job in itself.

"For those three months it was just endless amounts of time on the computer, Google searching, looking at the newspaper, Craigslist, everything," she recalls.

Hamilton went through a similar process, although he got more and more dedicated as time went on.

"I started out being pretty chill," he says, recalling that he felt confident knowing he had some video gigs lined up. "I would go online every couple of days and find 10 or so jobs I might be interested in or capable of doing."

As the weeks went by, his search started to become more organized and intense.

"By the end of the summer, I was doing Excel spreadsheets and splitting up my job search into five different categories of jobs that I might meet the qualifications for," he remembers.

He says he got to the point where he would do a job search everyday in which he would type out the location, application date, job description, company and a link to the job in his spreadsheet, which he had broken up into four different categorical tabs: writing, instructional design, video and photography. Hamilton says he still has the spreadsheet, which is filled with almost 2,000 jobs for which he applied or planned on applying. He says this is a good habit to get into regardless as it helps to show you've been searching for jobs in the event that you need to declare forbearance on your loans.

While the process was frustrating and at times they considered giving up, both Hamilton and Landhuis decided they didn't want to pursue jobs out of their field after spending tens of thousands of dollars for education.

Landhuis considered doing other jobs to fill her time, but opted instead to focus on her career search, fearing that an irrelevant part-time job would distract her from finding a better job.

"I knew that if I took work in a coffee shop or retail it would be harder or maybe take longer to get work in my field," says Landhuis.

Now employed with jobs in their field of study, Landhuis and Hamilton are, shockingly, in the minority. According to a study done by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, in 2010 just 27 percent of college graduates had jobs that were closely related to the degree they had earned.

Hailey Gross is a December 2014 graduate of Iowa State who currently exists in that other, discouragingly large 73 percent.

After graduating with an English literature major, she now has a job at international avionics and information technology systems giant Rockwell-Collins as an Engineering Project Assistant. Gross graduated a semester early and sees this 6-month job, which she took with no prior engineering or coding experience, as a chance to figure out what she's doing—while earning a paycheck. The job is in her hometown of Cedar Rapids, and she says it was the “easy choice.”

“When you're so busy with school, that feels like it matters more,” she says. “I didn't really think about what was going to happen after I graduated, which was dumb.”

As the job-hunting process goes on, Hamilton admits that you eventually may have to lower your standards.

“You have to eat, and you have to pay off your student loans at a certain point,” he says.

Gross also offers a more optimistic view—sort of.

“You can't expect to get your dream job right out of college—it's not going to happen,” she says. “There's nothing wrong with trying to get that job, but you're not going to get a job with no experience. You have to earn your way up.”

Both Landhuis and Gross are currently living with their parents as they try to maneuver into full-time careers. Landhuis doesn't seem to mind the situation, however Gross acknowledges it isn't ideal.

“It's terrible,” she says with a laugh. “Honestly, living with my parents isn't that bad, but the social life in Cedar Rapids is nil.”

When she was looking for jobs, Landhuis says she experienced a lot of pressure from friends and family—and not always intentionally. She says she often had similar conversations with people who would consistently ask the same questions about her job search when she had nothing new to report. This combined with seeing the “really cool jobs” her peers were getting made her feel the increasing weight of other people's expectations.

“With Facebook, everybody posts about when they get their first job, or their dream job right out of college,” she says. “People aren't posting about the other things, like ‘I'm working part time,’ or ‘I'm doing another internship.’”



All of these graduates enjoyed their time at Iowa State, but some were still unhappy about a few things they experienced—or didn't experience—while here.

Gross says that she didn't feel like she had many people in the English department who were telling her about potential job opportunities, which she thinks may be a result of the limited options available in her major for those not wanting to teach.

“It is different as an English major,” she admits. “Either you're smart and you go to grad school, or you give up and become a Starbucks barista.”

Hamilton felt that Iowa State left him unprepared for a career, and found that some of the career information they supplied was misleading.

“They [posted information] about technical communicators making \$60,000 a year,” he says. “A lot of jobs I found [in that pay range] required significant experience and skills that weren't necessarily taught at Iowa State.”

He says that in his experience, the proper way to go about searching for jobs, writing cover letters and interviewing was not properly addressed. He also suggested that each major offer a version of its freshmen introductory or orientation class to seniors to refresh their minds of positions available in their field.

Gross also questions the usefulness of her education at Iowa State.

“It feels like a lot of [college] is learning knowledge that you're not going to need instead of skills you're going to use,” she says. “And then you're just stuck out there with a huge f--king debt.”

Looking back on their time at Iowa State, these graduates have some advice on how to avoid an unemployment situation like theirs after graduation. They recommend getting involved in clubs or societies, building relationships with professors (who may have connections in the industry you don't know about) and starting to job search early on in your senior year.

Hamilton suggests looking for companies you are interested in and keeping an eye on them because a lot of times they won't advertise outside of their website or Facebook page. He also advised sitting down at least six months to a year before graduation and trying to figure out what you want to do and what the job titles are as well as the necessary skills, so you can work on developing them.

“That was problem I had—trying to find jobs I wanted to do, but I didn't know what the job title was,” he explains. “Especially because different companies may use a different title for something.”

During college we are constantly slapped in the face with career placement statistics and stories about outstanding alumni who have solved some global crisis, or inundated with calls from well-meaning relatives inquiring about our future. Sometimes finding a career is easy, but sometimes it requires months of searching after graduation. Landhuis offers one more piece of advice for anyone worried about their professional future.

“There isn't one certain way you have to go about finding a job,” she says. “I felt some amount of pressure to get the right kind of job, in the right place, get a car and do all of these things—and now I know that that's not necessarily how it needs to go for everyone.”

She stresses that the job-hunting process is unique for every person, and things usually work out—eventually. ☺