Timeless Answers to Age-Old Questions

Steve Jungst
Iowa State University

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Timeless Answers to Age-Old Questions

by Steve Jungst

What kind of employment can I find after I graduate? How much can I expect for a starting salary? Where are forestry jobs located? Will I need a Master's degree to get a job in forestry? How fast will I get promoted in a forestry job?

These questions, and numerous others like them, are common during freshman and transfer student orientation sessions, or any time prospective students are considering forestry as a major at Iowa State. They also reappear as Seniors get closer to graduation time and begin to realize that the time they have spent in school now needs to be translated into a paying job. Answering the questions is difficult because ISU forestry graduates get into so many different jobs with so many different employers doing a myriad of different things. To help us do a better job of giving students sound guidance, the faculty decided to implement an annual survey of past graduates to obtain information about many of the things new students want to know. The survey was conducted for the first time during the summer of 1998 and will be repeated annually for the foreseeable future to give us the necessary information.

Questionnaires were mailed out to all forestry graduates who graduated 2 years, 5 years, or 10 years previous to the summer of 1998. By using these graduation times, we believe we will get good information on entry level jobs as well as information from graduates who have been in the workforce for a longer period. As we begin to accumulate more than one year’s worth of data, we should be able to put together an accurate picture of what graduates are doing after graduation, as well as how the typical career progresses. The information that follows will begin to provide some insight into the career tracks of ISU forestry graduates. As we repeat the survey during the coming years, the information should become more reliable. Further, since new information will be com-

Table 1. Salary ranges for ISU forestry graduates surveyed.

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<td>Under $20,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>$20,000 to $30,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>$30,000 to $40,000</td>
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<td>$40,000 to $50,000</td>
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<td>$50,000 to $60,000</td>
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<td>$60,000 to $70,000</td>
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ing in annually, we will be able to answer student questions with current information from our graduates.

Survey Responses

The number of respondents for the first year’s survey is low, so it would be unfair to say that the information is truly representative at this time. With the addition of information from ensuing years, the information should become more trustworthy and, therefore, useful.

Salary information for the respondents is shown in Table 1 on the previous page. Numbers in the table are number of graduates reporting a salary in the particular category.

We have always told students that there are many different employment opportunities in forestry because there are so many different employers. Information coming back from our graduates confirms that. Among the respondents who graduated in 1996, employers included:

- U. S. Forest Service: 1
- Private industry: 3
- Private consulting: 1
- State agencies: 2
- Arboriculture companies: 2
- Graduate school: 1
- Other: 1

Graduates from 1993 reported the following employers:

- U. S. Forest Service: 1
- Private industry: 2
- Private consulting: 4
- Other: 1

Graduates from 1988 are employed by:

- U. S. Forest Service: 1
- Private industry: 3
- Private consulting: 1
- Other: 1

Perhaps some of the most useful information from the surveys for students currently in forestry comes from comments submitted by respondents. They were asked, “If you had an opportunity to speak to our students who are just beginning their study of forestry, what message would you give to these new students?” The following are excerpts from comments provided by the respondents. Although the comments were originally intended for current students, many are also very applicable to all of us who will continue to be students of forestry throughout our lives.

“Be very passionate in your field. The enjoyment comes from a love of the outdoors and nature. This will make any task enjoyable, no matter how bad it gets.”

“Be humble. Want to learn. Want to understand. Welcome challenges. Change and grow.”

“Learn all you can in a variety of subject areas because you never know what skills you’ll need in the future.”

“A command of basic technical aspects of forestry is a must for graduating foresters. However, that is the minimum requirement. You are expected to be competent. What sets you apart from other grads is your ability to communicate effectively and work with others in a professional manner.”

“Communication! Be able to present yourself well and talk to people from different backgrounds.”

“Get forestry related jobs every summer to pick up as much hands-on experience as possible.”

“Get as much experience as possible before you graduate. It will give you a leg up on others.”

“Be an active student in both the curriculum and the Department. Be a team leader. Obtain practical job experience as soon as possible.”

“Be sure to get summer job or internships in the area of forestry you are most interested in.”

“Communication skills are essential. Working in groups and being able to communicate with others...
(through programs, speeches, etc.) is vital. Knowing the forestry information is always a good thing, but communicating this information to others in important. Get involved with forestry club and other activities. These experiences are always helpful.”

“Really work on public speaking and giving presentations. No matter what area of the profession you choose, these are two areas that will truly aid you in “climbing the ladder” as well as providing a solid communications background for you.”

“Don’t think that because you just graduated that you know it all. What you will learn in the first three months of working will surpass half of the things you learned in college.”

For those of you who have graduated from forestry in the last 10 years, you can expect to be hearing from us with a request to provide similar information so we can continue to add to our database. We hope you will be willing to spend a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire. The information you provide to us will be very helpful in keeping prospective and current students advised of the trends in forestry employment, and of the need for particular kinds of course work to supplement their technical forestry background. ☺