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- **Oregon City church issues statement in faith-healing trial** 12:43 p.m. PT
- **Oregon Legislature doesn't increase cigarette tax** 12:01 p.m. PT
- **Lawyer blames his BMW for speeding and loses** 11:31 a.m. PT
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2009 Oregon graduates become resourceful in dismal job market

by Suzanne Pardington, The Oregonian
Thursday June 11, 2009, 8:55 PM

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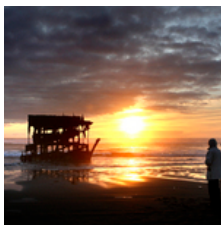
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OREGONIAN GALLERIES

Photo of the day



News photos



Thomas Boyd/The Oregonian

Ngan Nguyen, who is graduating from Oregon State University on Saturday, is collaborating with friends on two start-up companies: Beaver Biodiesel near Albany and an eco-friendly, all-natural cosmetics line. Nguyen and other new graduates are coping with a tough job market by pursuing alternative career paths.

Graduation day is not desperation day.

This year's college graduates are entering the toughest job market in a quarter-century. Oregon's unemployment rate is 12 percent. Campus recruitment is down. And many doors to traditional career paths are closed for now.

That doesn't mean all graduates have to give up all hope of putting their new degrees to work. But career counselors say it might take more time, creativity and persistence to get hired.

More new graduates are turning to alternative ways to gain work experience and, if all goes well, make a living. They are taking internships, joining service organizations and even starting their own businesses.

"A college-educated person is still a lot better off in the work place than a lot of people who are struggling with employment and have lost their jobs," said Deb Chereck, director of the University of Oregon's career center. "What I'm worried about are those who are putting their heads in the sand and giving up."

Ngan Nguyen, who will graduate from Oregon State University on Saturday, sees the recession as an opportunity.

Diploma day

Nearly 17,000 students will graduate from Oregon's public universities Saturday. University of Oregon President Dave Frohnmayer will address graduates at his final commencement ceremony, and Portland State University President Wim Wiewel will preside over his first.

- Eastern Oregon University: 669 graduates, 10 a.m., Community Stadium, La Grande

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The biochemistry, biophysics and bioengineering major is collaborating with friends on two start-up companies: a biodiesel manufacturer and eco-friendly, all-natural cosmetics lines. She turned down a job offer in San Diego and a chance to go to graduate school at MIT.

"It's an ideal time to be an entrepreneur because the big companies are getting hit harder by the economy," Nguyen, 22, said. "It's a good chance because people are open to new opportunities."

Nguyen emigrated from Vietnam with her family at age 7, dropped out of high school at 16, got a night-school diploma at 17 and went to Linn-Benton Community College before transferring to Oregon State.

She thought she was really bad at science and math until she took them in college and excelled. She had grants and a lab job lined up at MIT but decided to stay in Corvallis instead.

"I'm really eager to really apply the knowledge I learned in school," she said. "I don't want to go to school for five more years before I try."

She's not typical. Nationally, about 20 percent of this year's college graduates who applied for jobs got one, according to a spring survey of seniors by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. That's down from 51 percent in 2007 and 26 percent last year.

The survey also showed more graduating seniors this year put off their job searches than in the past two years.

Accounting, computer science and economics majors are the most likely to have job offers by graduation, although the numbers in those fields are down this year, according to the survey.

"A lot of people are hiring, but they are hiring less," UO's Chereck said.

- Oregon Institute of Technology: 695 graduates, 10 a.m., John F. Moehl Stadium, Klamath Falls

- Oregon State University: 4,484 graduates, 10:30 a.m., Reser Stadium, Corvallis

- Portland State University: 5,049 graduates, 10 a.m., Rose Garden, Portland

- Southern Oregon University: 947 graduates, 9 a.m., Mountain Arena, Ashland

- University of Oregon: 4,065 graduates, noon, McArthur Court, Eugene

- Western Oregon University: 1,032 graduates, 11 a.m., McArthur Field, Monmouth

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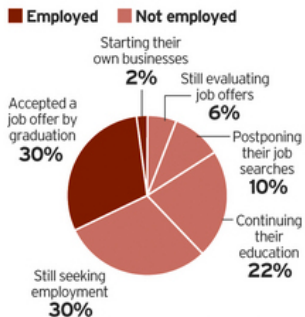
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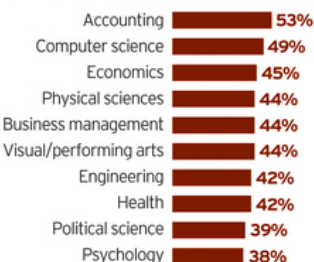
The University of Oregon surveyed 842 students about their post-graduation plans in June 2008. Here are the results.



Source: The University of Oregon, National Association of Colleges and Employers ERIC BAKER/THE OREGONIAN

2009 majors with best job prospects

College majors ranked by the percentage of graduating seniors who applied for jobs and received job offers by April 30, according to a national survey of more than 16,500 students.



Dee Thompson, director of Portland State University's career center, said she urges students who are anxious about the job market to look at alternatives, such as internships, that improve their chances of permanent employment when the economy improves.

"Maybe their first job out of college isn't the exact job they wanted, but how can they get the skills to enhance that goal?" Thompson said.

And students seem to be doing just that.

Justin Tandingan, a 22-year-old graduating from UO on Saturday, is one of 4,100 new teachers chosen from a record 35,000 applications for Teach for America.

He will teach at a charter elementary school in San Jose, Calif., with the goal of helping low-income students. He hopes teaching will be "a good break from school that will still be productive."

A lot of his friends also are doing volunteer, non-profit or activist work instead of finding a traditional job or going straight to graduate school.

Minda Heyman, director of Lewis & Clark College's Center for Career and Community Engagement, said the challenge for new graduates is to focus on a particular area and make connections with alumni and others in the field.

Lewis & Clark graduates "tend to take some time to figure out where they are going and what they are doing." A lot of them want to stay in Portland but that might not be realistic in this job market, Heyman said.

"We try to be very honest with them," Heyman said.

Euphrates Dahout, a dance and theater major who graduated from Reed College in May, will start a one-year internship at Berkeley Repertory Theater in July that pays \$400 a month, plus free housing and classes and opportunities to understudy.

Dahout, 22, said she wants to learn the administrative side of running a theater in hopes of directing her own company someday. She will get the added perspective of how to survive a recession.

"For artists, it's always been hard," she said. "It just changes how hard."

-- *Suzanne Pardington*; spardington@news.oregonian.com

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Posted by **tdcowboy** on [06/11/09 at 10:10PM](#)

So if some of these 17000 college graduates stay in Oregon and can't find a job, they'll just add to the unemployment rate???

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Posted by **dudeinnep** on [06/12/09 at 12:14AM](#)

Most will find jobs...eventually. Its just the terrible luck of graduating college during a recession. And really, having a large class of educated people dedicating time to public service for a while sounds like a good thing.

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Posted by **grossmeyer** on [06/12/09 at 12:19AM](#)

"We try to be very honest with them," Heyman said.

Before or after they matriculate?

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Posted by **tehpeople** on [06/12/09 at 1:04AM](#)

Welcome to the new economy.

thousands of jobs lost and thousands more looking for work

but don't worry, the creative class is creating millions of new jobs every day

but seriously now...

I think it was a big mistake for high schools to abandon teaching the trades back in the 70s and focus only on college prep.

For many college graduates, they wasted a lot of money and four years of their life for nothing.

If you end up working at Burger King, it doesn't matter if you have a phd or a