



Jobs for college grads plentiful

By Stephanie Armour, USA TODAY
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College graduates are experiencing the best job market in four years as a stronger economy leads more employers to ramp up hiring.

Employers expect to hire 17.4% more new college graduates in 2006 and 2007 than in 2005 and 2006, according to a new survey by the Bethlehem, Pa.-based National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

Signing bonuses range from \$1,000 to \$10,000, with the average at \$3,568. And employers reported plans to boost their starting salary offers by 4.6% over last year, nearly a full percentage point higher than increases for the classes of 2006 and 2005.

"This is the fourth year in a row that employers have predicted an increase in hiring," says Andrea Koncz at NACE. "It really is because of the economy and more demand. Companies are growing."

For example:

- Companies are ramping up hiring. Accounting and tax firm KPMG typically hires about 2,500 new graduates, but they expect to boost that by about 10% in 2007. Manny Fernandez, national managing partner-campus recruiting, says competition for students is intensifying. Signing bonuses are being used in some markets, he says.

- Some colleges and universities are also seeing more employers offering internship programs for current students: Employers extended job offers to more than 70% of their interns, according to a separate study by NACE.

At St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., students are landing internships at large companies such as General Mills.

"It's optimistic," says Sandy Amy, assistant director of internships in the center for experiential learning at St. Olaf. "They're finding opportunities. (Internships) give them the background they need."

- Some soon-to-be graduates are finding they can be pickier about the jobs they accept and can take into account other priorities such as flexible work schedules or similar benefits.

Ashley Hall, 21, is graduating in May from Boston College with a B.A. in accounting and already has a full-time position lined up with KPMG. She earlier had an internship with the company and was drawn there in part because she says they value work-life balance.

"As long as you are willing to put in the effort to interview and network, there's definitely a job market out there," Hall says.

Stephanie Lee, 20, of Milwaukee, is a junior at Marquette University who has already gotten some contacts from potential employers. She expects to graduate in May 2008 with a major in information technology and marketing.

"The outlook for IT grads is going to be great. I get numerous e-mails from IT professors with opportunities," Lee says. "It's very positive."

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