

Job hunting strategies in the Lion City

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Abstract

The job-hunting strategies of college students in Singapore have been given scant attention. Does this population follow the same techniques as students in the USA? Do they have a resume? If so is it used for all applications or is it tailored for each job. Further how do they prepare for interviews? How long do they expect to be at their first job? How much money would they like to make and have this amount compared to how much money the students feel they will actually make. This study compared the results based on gender, ethnicity, personality type, age and major and found statistically significant differences.

Key Words: Singapore, College Students, Interviewing, Job Hunting, Salary Expectations

Introduction and Literature Review

The uncertain global economic times have made finding employment challenging for college graduates in the United States. But, what about college graduates in other countries. The researchers sought to ascertain the methods used by college students in the Lion City-Singapore. As a result of the expanding Singaporean economy and the increasing outsourcing of businesses there, the job-hunting strategies and expectations of Singaporean graduates are important to the global economy. In addition, Singaporean graduates are more sought after than ever (Job Search Resources (2011)). In recent years, Singapore businesses' recruiting has strengthened and their economy has begun to recover. In fact, Singaporean employers are seeking young and ambitious employees now more than ever (Job Search Resources, 2011). Singaporean graduates are in high demand around the world, due to the world-class institutions that have developed in Singapore (Paul, 2011). Consequently, leading to a shortage of qualified job applicants for the positions offered. High demand has been placed on job applicants with skills in communications, media, public relations, technologies, and marketing (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010).

Due to the improving economic conditions in Singapore, the demand for sales and marketing jobs is rapidly expanding. Companies are taking of the current conditions creating a high demand for sales and marketing professionals (Singapore Career Guide, 2006). Interestingly, Singapore graduates should not be too worried about finding a job, mostly due to Singapore's booming economy. In fact, most every person who wants a full-time job can find one (Hwee-Hoon & Chwee-Peng, 2002). The unemployment rate of Singapore citizens was only 3% in 2011 (Economic performance, 2012). Interestingly, new graduates are more likely than their older competitors to find and hold steady employment (Appold, 2005).

But how do these students find the jobs available to them? Job advertisements in local newspapers are still one of the most important ways students to find jobs (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010). However, networking, Internet sources, professional recruitment firms, and job fairs, are all ways students find jobs (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010). Although networking is common for job-seekers in Singapore, candidates with higher educational qualifications were less likely to use networking when applying for jobs. Networking ties are the most important to less advantaged job-seekers, as a 2007 study found that "low educated Singaporeans were almost three times as likely as their more educated countrymen to use personal contact when looking for a job, (Chua, 2007).

Singaporean job-hunters prepare in many different ways. Resumes are important to employers in Singapore like they are in the United States. Prospective employers look at the presentation, clarity, skills and strengths of a job-seeker based on their resume. Because of this, job-applicants in Singapore should include previous work experience, complete educational background, exam results, scholarships, awards, as well as related abilities and interests (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010). Skills that will help Singapore students prepare for job searching include strong leadership abilities, clear communication skills, self-confidence and sound business judgment (Singapore Career Guide 2006: Sales/Marketing Employment Trends, 2006).

A 2002 study found a large number of temporary workers were between the ages of 15 and 30. Since younger students and recent graduates lack work experience, temporary jobs are a good place for young professionals to obtain work background. Young workers in Singapore are most often interested in improving their situation and looking towards personal growth from temporary work (Hwee-Hoon & Chwee-Peng, 2002). Above all, job-applicants should keep in mind that Singapore businesses seek to make sure that the job applicant will fit into their firm before hiring the individual, and will therefore be looking at their traits, organizational and job abilities and compatibility with the company they are applying for (Soo Siew, Hendrik, & Keng-Howe, 2009).

In 2007, the median monthly gross wage for all professions in Singapore was \$4,030 (Ng, Sim & Tan, 2010). However, discipline and experience can significantly affect the amount of money a college graduate can expect to make. For example, in 2011, the highest median monthly gross wage was \$6,630, for managers. Contrast this to the median monthly gross wage for managers aged 25 to 29 was \$3,808, and the age salary gap was very clear (Ministry of Manpower, 2012). Unlike in the past, female Singaporeans are able to earn salaries the same as or very close to those of men. The wage gap between genders increases with age, so that it minimally affects young Singapore women. In fact, women in the 25 to 29 age group earned more than men in five of the eight occupational groups (Ministry of Manpower, 2012).

Now Singapore graduates will have flexibility in the length of employment they can expect from their jobs. Even working for the same firm for one entire year is questionable. In 2007, twenty-five percent of workers in their thirties and thirty-four percent of workers under thirty years of age changed jobs (Thang, 2011). Therefore, roughly a quarter of the Singaporean college graduates who find work, can expect to change jobs sometime during their first year. Young graduates in Singapore usually have little difficulty in finding employment quickly (with a median period of unemployment of five weeks) as opposed to their older counterparts whose median period reaches up to six months. In addition, in 2002, the unemployment rate for graduates under 30 was twice that as the unemployment rate for older graduates (Appold, 2005).

Methods

A survey with 25 questions with questions concerning job preparation techniques and expectations was given to Singaporean university students. Students volunteered to complete the survey anonymously. The data was entered into SPSS for analysis. A total of 280 students volunteered to anonymously take the questionnaire and the responses were analyzed by SPSS.

Results and Discussion

The demographic data of the 281 respondents is presented in Table 1. The respondents were homogeneous in a number of categories. In terms of ethnicity they were overwhelmingly Asian (89%), Business majors (91%), and of traditional college age (85%). The two factors of gender and personality type were used to ascertain if differences exist.

Table 1*Demographics*

Gender	N	%	Age	N	%
Female	166	59.1	< 18	25	8.9
Male	114	40.6	18-22	239	85.1
No Response	1	0.4	23-30	9	3.2
			No Response	8	2.8
Ethnicity	N	%	Major	N	%
African American	8	2.8	Business	256	91.1
Asian	249	88.6	Education	5	1.8
Caucasian	2	.7	Natural Sciences	3	1.1
Hispanic	2	.7	Physical Education	1	0.4
Other	18	6.4	Social Sciences	8	2.8
No Response	2	.7	No Response	8	2.8
Personality Type	N	%			
Introvert	121	43.1			
Extrovert	146	52.0			
No Response	14	5.0			

Most respondents (62%) felt the coming year would be better economically. This positive expectation was consistent by gender and personality type. Conversely, only 9% felt the upcoming year would be worse. However, no statistical differences emerged (see Table 2).

Table 2*Expectations on the Economy*

	Total	Female	Male	Introvert	Extrovert
Better than last year	62.1%	61.3%	63.2%	64.7%	60.0%
Same as last year	28.9%	30.7%	26.3%	24.4%	33.1%
Worse than last year	9.0%	8.0%	10.5%	10.9%	6.9%

When asked about their resume, the majority (69%) stated they had a current one. Females and extroverts were slightly more likely to have a current resume; however the difference was not statistically significant. Approximately one-third used the same resume

regardless of the position they were applying for while two-thirds tailored their resume to different positions (see Table 3).

Table 3*Resume*

	Total	Female	Male	Introvert	Extrovert
Have a Current Resume	69.3%	72.3%	64.9%	66.9%	71.2%
Use Same Resume for all positions	35.0%	33.7%	36.8%	34.7%	34.9%
Tailor Resume for different positions	66.1%	68.7%	62.3%	65.3%	65.8%

When university students were asked how long they expected to be at their first job nearly half of the respondents cited 6-10 years, with a third expecting to remain at their first position 1-5 years. Interesting, one-sixth of the students were short termers expecting to be at their first job less than a year before moving to another job. The results were consistent among both genders and personality types and thus, no statistical differences were found (see Table 4).

Table 4*Length of Time Expected to be at First Position*

	Total	Female	Male	Introvert	Extrovert
Less than a year	16.1%	17.6%	14.0%	19.1%	14.5%
1-5 years	31.9%	31.4%	32.5%	29.6%	32.4%
6-10 years	49.1%	49.1%	49.1%	48.7%	50.3%
Over 10 years	2.9%	1.9%	4.4%	2.6%	2.8%

Table 5*Methods Used to Finding Jobs*

	Total	Female	Male	r	p	Introvert	Extrovert	r	p
Agencies	35.0%	33.7%	36.8%			41.3%	30.1%		
Monster, etc	38.2%	38.6%	37.7%			42.1%	35.6%	0.124	0.041
Referral	44.3%	38.0%	53.5%	-0.154	0.001	39.7%	47.9%		
Unsolicited Apps	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%			8.3%	11.0%		

Perusing the classified ads was used by nearly three-fourths of the respondents and was the most common method of finding a job. Over 80% of females used this method and while

very slight, it was statistically significant over males. Internships ranked second among all respondents. Interesting, Males sought out personal referrals at a slight, but statistically significant, manner over females. The least utilized method was unsolicited applications which were less than 10%. Introverts were more apt to utilize online resources such as Monster.com and Careerbuilder.com (see Table 5).

With regard to interviewing, nearly half of all respondents conducted research or had a portfolio of their work to take with them for interviews while one-third of the students conducted mock interviews. Less than one-fourth of respondents did no preparation whatsoever. Intriguingly, no statistical differences were found by gender or personality type (see Table 6).

Table 6

Interview Preparation

	Total	Female	Male	Introvert	Extrovert
No prep	23.2%	22.3%	24.6%	22.3%	24.7%
Mock	33.9%	31.9%	36.8%	33.9%	33.6%
Practice	13.9%	13.3%	14.9%	14.9%	13.0%
Research	46.4%	48.8%	43.0%	43.8%	47.9%
Portfolio	46.1%	46.4%	45.6%	44.6%	44.5%
Other	3.6%	4.8%	1.8%	2.5%	4.8%

Interestingly half of males and two-thirds of females desired employment with the government. Even though both preferred public sector work, females preferred this work in a statistically significant manner over men. Accordingly, men were more apt to work in the family business or work for a non-profit. With the low number of students desiring to work in the private sector, the researchers question if the students had a proper understanding of the term. The results by personality type mirrored gender with the exception of statistical differences (see Table 7).

Table 7

Work Preference

	Total	Female	Male		Introvert	Extrovert
Public sector	58.9%	66.5%	49.6%	$\chi^2=7.94$, df 1, p .005	58.7%	58.7%
Family Business	27.0%	22.0%	33.6%	$\chi^2=4.66$, df 1, p .031	28.9%	25.2%
Private Sector	1.5%	1.2%	1.8%		2.5%	.7%
Start own business	4.8%	5.5%	3.5%		4.1%	5.6%
Non-profit	7.8%	4.9%	11.5%	$\chi^2=4.19$, df 1, p .041	5.8%	9.8%

The amount of money students would like to make and what they felt they would actually make yielded fascinating results. For the sake of clarity when comparing different currencies, the

researchers converted the student's responses to USA dollars. According to the currency conversion site XE, the Singapore dollar is worth approximately 81% of the USA dollar. Thus, s100 Singapore dollars equates to \$ 81.65 USA dollars. At the end of 2011 the median monthly wage in Singapore was s1990, which converted to US dollars equates to \$1624.89. When \$1624.89 is multiplied by twelve, and annual income in \$19,499 US dollars is found (2012, Singapore households' median monthly income rises)

Extroverts both wanted to make the most and also felt they would make the most. Conversely, introverts expected that they'd earn the least. Males wanted to make an income 15% more than that desired by females.

Interestingly, the difference between what the students would like to make and the amount they realistically thought they would make varied between 25 and 28%. However the introverts were much more pessimistic and felt their real earnings would be 38% less (see Table 8).

Table 8

Comparison of what graduates would like to make vs will what they feel they will make(in USA dollars)

	Like to Make	Will Make	Difference
Total	\$37,067	\$29,336	26%
Female	\$34,970	\$28,004	25%
Male	\$40,193	\$31,306	28%
Introvert	\$27,484	\$19,969	38%
Extrovert	\$45,180	\$35,558	27%

Conclusions and Implications

The respondents to the survey were remarkably homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, age, and major. In addition, their perceptions and methods of finding employment were overall uniform as well. The majority, (62%) felt the economy of the coming year would be better than last year. This find coincides with current studies of Singapore's economy (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010).

Resumes were used by nearly 70% of respondents and this find supports the previous literature concerning the prevalence of resumes in Singapore (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010). However this study found two-thirds of university students tailored their resume for different positions. Perhaps more training at the collegiate level to create and improve resume presentation would benefit students.

Nearly three-fourths of the respondents scrutinized the classified ads making it the most utilized method for finding potential employment. However, the second most employed method

was internships. It is apparent these students understand their value as an avenue for employment. Perhaps universities should expand and enhance their relationships with potential employers to foster internships or require an internship experience as part of the curriculum.

Approximately half of the students felt they would work at their first position for 6-10 years but one out of six anticipated being at their first job less than one year. Interestingly, this finding was less than Thang, (2011) who found 25% of workers changed jobs in their first year. Employers should investigate the reasons why so many workers are with them for such a short time and determine is the cause the employer or the student.

Two thirds of females and half of males were desirous of having careers with the government. More information is needed on the reasons for this. Is it the pay, security or other factors? Males were more apt to work in the family business and were more than twice as likely to work in for a non-profit. It appears that the private sector is not appealing to these students and that begs the question of why.

The medium wage for managers in the 25-29 age bracket was \$37,014 (USD) (Ministry of Manpower, 2012). Coincidentally, the respondents to this survey sought to make \$37,067 (USD) which is virtually identical. The extroverts desired the highest incomes. However, when comparing what they would like to make and the reality of what they would make, aside from the Introverts, the difference was approximately 26%. The Introverts were more pessimistic and thought they would only earn 62% of their goal.

Students need to be cognizant of the conditions in the job market and have more realistic salary expectations. Perhaps the sudden realization of a lower than expected income leads to less job satisfaction and consequently more job hopping by these students. Conversely, in a warming job market, employers should realize the importance of being a salary leader in attracting the best talent.

Future Research

Additional research could explore the importance of other non-financial factors such as benefits, advancement, relocation distances and autonomy. Further, longitudinal studies could determine what methods worked best for students, and finally compare the salary expectations of graduates to what wage they actually accepted would close the loop between expectations and reality.

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