

FUNDING

Donation expectations

US higher-education institutions reported that the value of charitable donations they received grew 5.2% for the 2013–14 academic year, according to survey results from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) in Washington DC. The institutions also predicted a growth of 5.7% for 2014–15. Community colleges, which offer basic tertiary education, reported a 7.2% growth in giving for 2013–14, compared with 5% for public and private universities that offer full, four-year degrees. The average yearly growth over 20 years is 5.9%. CASE polls institutions twice a year on actual and predicted giving.

TEACHING

Mentoring programme

The New York Academy of Sciences and Sister Cities International in Washington DC are collaborating on a mentoring programme in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) that will match graduate and undergraduate students with STEM professionals. The STEMentoring Program will draw mentors and students from Sister City volunteers around the world and match them through an online platform. Students will be able to connect with their counterparts and professionals globally through a virtual network, in which they can also participate in seminars and complete coursework. The programme will also foster collaboration in real-world STEM-related issues, such as water availability, in communities worldwide.

JOB APPLICATIONS

Lies have consequences

Early-career researchers looking for positions in industry can probably wave goodbye to a job if they lie on their CVs, finds a survey of US hiring managers and human-resources executives. Conducted online from 13 May to 6 June by Harris Poll in Rochester, New York, on behalf of the jobs website CareerBuilder, the survey polled 2,188 respondents across various industries and company sizes. Some 51% of respondents said that they would dismiss an applicant on whose CV they found a lie, whereas 7% said that they would overlook it if they liked the candidate. Respondents said that 33% of detected untruths involved an applicant's academic degree, and 57% were used to embellish skill sets.



KENNAN WARD/CORBIS

Primatologist Jane Goodall observed a young chimpanzee making a bold move to earn social status.

believe that their careers will progress only if they patiently work their way up the ladder, with advancement coming as the 'silverbacks' — people reaching retirement age — retreat. Sudden elevations in status are virtually unheard of in the slow-moving, heavily circumscribed academic universe, even after publication of a world-class discovery.

In the academic culture, graduate students learn that to qualify for positions in their disciplines, they must be widely recognized experts, and that the only positions that they should consider are those closely aligned with their areas of research. The academic establishment views self-promotion with deep suspicion: the work should speak for itself. If graduate students try to draw attention to themselves or their work, some faculty members and department heads might see those efforts as a signal that the work is sub-par.

Although these cultural norms may be de rigueur in academia, they leave early-career researchers maladapted to the job market outside it. Expertise is the foremost qualification for a job inside academia, but in the outside world, attitude is at least as important to potential employers. In academia, a researcher can spend years focusing on a single problem or technical area. But in other, profit-driven sectors, employers know that priorities, opportunities and technologies change quickly. As an employee, adaptability and willingness to learn are more important to career success than is technical expertise.

If a young PhD-holder is modest about his or her talents when applying for non-academic jobs, it can reinforce the perception

among potential employers that he or she is uncertain, hesitant about taking the initiative and poorly suited to any job other than academic research — for which, of course, few open positions exist.

A bold move is, of course, inherently risky: a potential employer may view your attempt to set yourself apart as inappropriate. There is no way to know for certain whether your bold move is on target, but discussing it with a few friends or a mentor may help you to craft a gesture that is distinctive without being bizarre. As a science-trained PhD-holder, if you seek employment outside academia — and greater economic reward for your years of investment in graduate school — you need to be able to retain the qualities of honesty and intellectual integrity while adapting to the cultural norms of the non-academic working world. Understand that your graduate-school experience has given you a broad set of transferable skills that, when combined with your intelligence and resourcefulness, will enable you to succeed in a wide range of jobs and roles.

Some amount of self-advocacy is essential. If you do not assert what you believe you are capable of doing — and project a positive, confident attitude — employers will not take the risk of overlooking your lack of experience. Sometimes it is important to make that bold move and to take what might feel like a risky step. Young PhD researchers tend to be risk-averse, but what may seem like a risky move to them is probably not that risky at all. The occasional bold move sends the signal to potential employers that you are more than just your PhD — and that you are ready to move up and beyond the rest of the pack. ■

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