

State and Local

A&M co-op students get work experience, edge in job market

By JEANNE ISENBERG
Reporter

Some of the largest companies in the nation, including IBM, NASA and even the CIA, are eager to provide college students with a competitive edge in the job market over other students in the same field.

According to the cooperative education office at Texas A&M, these companies and many others are excited about hiring students through the University's co-op program, thus giving them the chance to develop that competitive edge earlier than their peers who choose not to co-op.

"If a student joins the co-op program, he can work three terms and have 12 months' experience on a job related to his major, prior to graduation," says Steve Yates, director of the co-op program at A&M. "That's what gives them the competitive edge."

Scott Sodoma, a junior computer science major co-oping with IBM, agrees.

"It's tough to get a job these days," Sodoma says. "Everyone comes out of college pretty equal and the experience gives you a needed edge."

Yates says that edge is the basic goal of the co-op program, which works on an alternating degree plan. Students work a semester, then go to school a semester, work, go to school — usually for three work terms, he says — and then, upon graduation, they can receive the Cooperative Education certificate, which notes that the students have

about one year of work experience. But the edge isn't simply because of the prior work experience, Yates says.

"The people we deal with in the industry who are contacts for co-op students are invariably the same people down here recruiting graduates," Yates says.

"Co-op is basically a long-range recruiting tool for companies," Yates says. "They have the first chance at identifying potential bright talent at an early stage, they can participate in the students' educations and, of course, they are hoping to employ the students they discover after graduation."

Susan Lee, a graduate assistant who co-oped with NASA, conducts orientation programs several times a week for students considering co-oping.

"Co-ops receive more money and more job offers in comparison to other students with similar grades who have not co-oped," Lee says. "Recruiters say the best students have a three-way triangle: experience, good grades and activities. But experience in the major and grades usually come first."

Students not only earn credit while at work, but salaries as well. Students surveyed by the co-op office said the money earned by co-oping paid an average of 50 percent to 75 percent of their college expenses.

But not all students co-op for the technical experience, the salary or even for the competitive edge. For some, it's simply a chance to experi-

Warped



by Scott McCullar

ence life away from the academic atmosphere.

Scott Cloud, a senior economics major who co-oped with the CIA, says "The thought of getting to the end of four or five years in college and being dumped on the world with nothing but an undergraduate degree in economics is a little frightening."

"I co-oped for the broadening effect of it. It's a chance to go out there and do something challenging. You get away from the University environment and get knocked around a little. That way it won't be such a big shock later."

Lee says it also helps increase classroom motivation by seeing how the theory one learns in class really can be applied to a job.

"It lets you get away from school, get your perspective in focus and reminds you of what you're working toward," she says.

Yates says co-oping also can help students decide what they want to do with their degrees.

"Most students find their major appropriate," he says, "but co-oping does help them better identify what they want to do within their majors."

"The co-op program tries to help them find out what they can do with

their majors, narrow down their alternatives and even what the demand for areas within their major is and what it will be," Yates says. "What may be a hot academic major today may not be one tomorrow."

Yet, the co-op program also has its share of disadvantages.

Lee says the biggest disadvantage is the delay of graduation.

"Still," Lee says, "most students work three or four work terms and are rarely set back more than one or two semesters."

Jocelyn Koh, a senior computer science major, says another problem for some students is moving back and forth every semester.

"It's difficult, especially the first semester, but you just have to stick with it," says Koh, who has just completed her last work term in the program with IBM.

"Moving away from your friends is hard, the being away from home, but you do meet a lot of other co-ops and it's like being in a small family. You're all away together."

But students say the advantages outweigh the disadvantages by far.

Sodoma says, "No class can substitute for co-op experience. You learn things about the real world that you can't learn in class."

Committee considering sophomore test

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The Select Committee on Higher Education will look at requiring college sophomores to pass an exam in order to become juniors, the committee chairman said Monday.

Larry Temple of Austin said several states have adopted the sophomore testing program.

"It's just to be sure students are getting the education they think they are getting and we hope they are getting," Temple told a Southern Legislative Conference meeting.

The Austin lawyer was picked last week by Gov. Mark White as chairman of the special committee that will scrutinize the state's higher education system. The committee will hold its first meeting within two weeks in Austin, according to Temple.

The sophomore test is used in Florida as a requirement for a junior college degree and as a prerequisite toward a four-year degree.

"We need to look at that to see if that fits in the state of Texas," said Temple.

The purpose of the test of "basic, rudimentary skills" would be "to be sure the students that want to go to the junior year in college get there in a competent and qualified way," he said.

The special committee also will review high school graduation requirements to see if a standard course load should be mandated for college entry. Under the current system, unqualified students are getting into college, said Temple, chairman of the College and University Coordinating Board.

"We are finding students in college now who are not prepared for college," he said. "They can't do college work."

Committee members also will look for more efficient ways to use facilities, he said, mentioning early morning and Saturday classes.

The "structure" of the higher education system will be a "threshold question," Temple said.

"Do we have enough individual institutions?" he asked. "The quick answer is yes. Do we need any more? The quick answer is no," he said.

State employees' pay raise 'embarrassing,' official says

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The executive director of the Texas Public Employees Association said Monday the average salary increase for state employees of about \$1 a day is "embarrassing" and "demeaning" to professional workers.

"In the brightness of the Sunbelt growth, that amount of money is a

throwback to the dark days of our Great Depression," Gary Hughes told a news conference.

The 1985 Legislature granted state employees pay raises of 3 percent for each year of the biennium that started Sept. 1, but Hughes said about 10 percent of the workforce would receive less money because of higher health insurance rates.

"State employees were not a No. 1 priority for the governor or the Legislature — or not even close to being a No. 1 priority — and that's going to change in these races coming up or we will be supporting the people who are going to make that happen," Hughes said.

He said the association for the first time in its 40-year history "will

most likely endorse in statewide races, so that 185,000 state employees and 20,000 retirees, plus their families and friends, will know who to support for their state representatives, senator and governor."

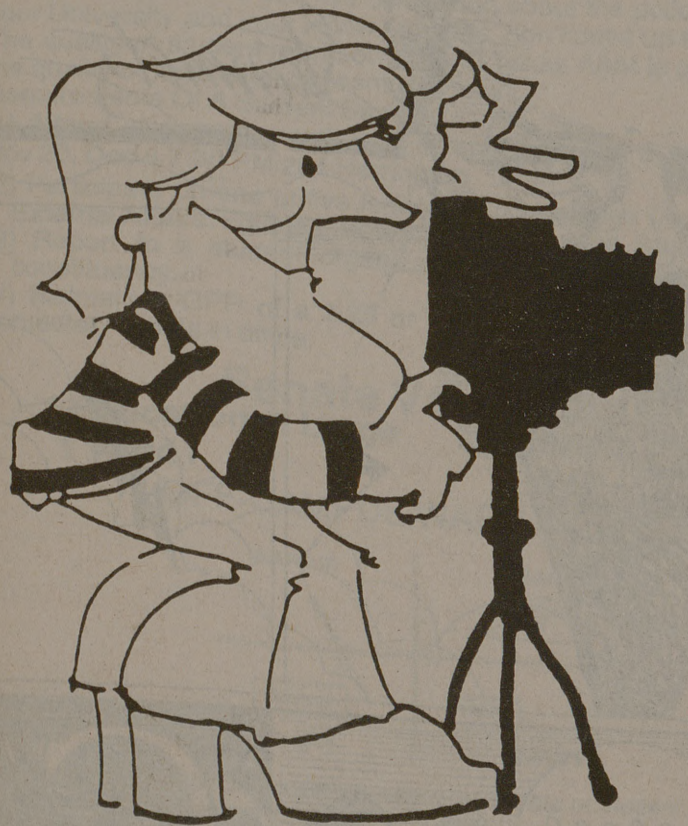
Hughes said the association would ask the 1987 Legislature for raises of about 22 percent to 24 percent over

two years. Each percentage point equals about \$50 million, so the total request would be \$1.1 billion or \$1.2 billion.

Asked where the money would come from, Hughes said, "We're going to have to make an issue in this next session, a No. 1 priority."

Freshmen & Sophomores!

LAST CHANCE



The schedule for Freshmen and Sophomore photos for the 1986 Aggieland has been extended to October 1-11.

Photos will be taken at Yearbook Associate's studio located above Campus Photo Center at Northgate.

Office hours are 8:30-12 and 1-4:30.