

Petroleum engineer grads drilling for job alternatives

By Tesslyn R. Mustain
Reporter

John Robert Rayne isn't sure what he'll be doing after graduation in May. As a petroleum engineering major he hopes, but doubts, that he'll be working in the oil industry right away.

Rayne is one of many petroleum engineering students who have been forced to reevaluate future plans in the wake of falling oil prices.

A mail survey conducted each year by the Placement Center reported 84 job offers for December 1985 and May 1986 petroleum engineering graduates, as compared to 158 offers reported for 1984-85 and 122 offers in 1983-84.

As a result of the shrinking market for their skills, graduates entertain other job possibilities. They may work awhile in jobs unrelated to oil, attend graduate school or accept non-engineering jobs in the oil industry.

William N. Mosley, a visiting professor in the Department of Petroleum Engineering, said this is a good time for students to get more education.

"More students are going to graduate school than at the height of the boom (during the '70s) simply because of the reduced demand for students (graduates)," he said.

Dr. William D. Von Gonten, head of the petroleum engineering department, said the masters program in petroleum engineering has seen significant growth. This semester, about 100

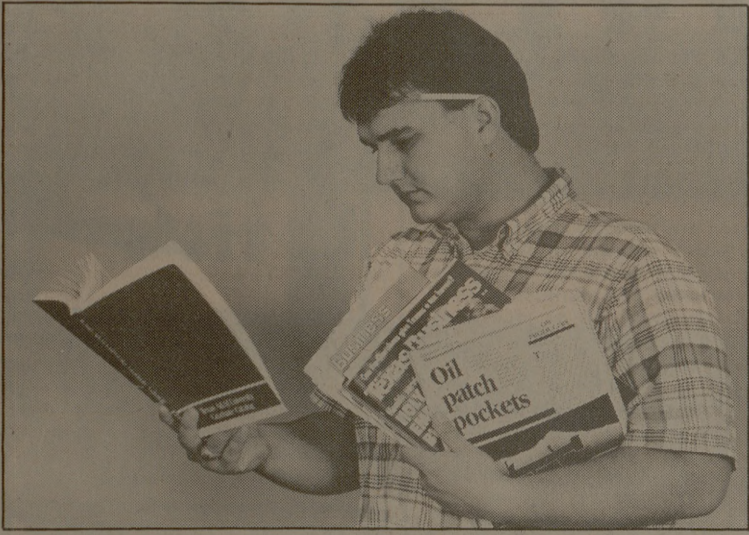


Photo illustration by Greg Bailey

students are enrolled as opposed to 25 five years ago, he said.

Von Gonten said students who don't find jobs often choose this alternative while they wait for the economy to improve. Also, he said, oil is getting increasingly hard to find, so students with specialized training and advanced degrees probably will do better in the job market.

He said graduates may also become "roustabouts," those who work in non-engineering positions in the oil industry.

He said roustabouts get good experience and can usually move into engineering jobs.

Mosley, however, said that while the total number of jobs has

lessened, the number of students seeking these jobs also has declined; the class that will graduate in May is less than half the size of a senior class during the boom.

"Fewer applicants mean fewer that walk away unemployed," he said.

He added that even though companies have fewer openings, salary levels have remained constant. Starting salaries for petroleum engineers range from \$33,000 to \$38,000 per year — among the highest for any profession, he said.

The oil industry will pick up, he said, but it will probably never boom again as it did in the '70s.

Gulf shores plagued by toxic red tide

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND (AP) — A toxic red tide continued southward Thursday, leaving dead fish along deserted beaches and forcing tourists who complained of eye and throat irritation to stay away from the shore.

The red tide began near Galveston in late August and slowly has moved south. Thousands of fish have been killed by the heavy concentration of marine micro-organisms.

Officials in Corpus Christi, 120 miles to the north, have been forced to close beaches to swimmers.

The Texas Health Department has suspended oyster harvests for 300 miles of coast from San Louis Pass to the mouth of the Rio Grande because the organism that causes the toxic red tide builds up in shellfish, said Hector Herrera, regional engineer for the health agency in Harlingen.

Small fish began washing ashore on beaches in this South Texas resort late Wednesday. Don Hockaday, an educational assistant at the Pan American University's coastal studies laboratory, said large fish can also be killed.

The beaches were deserted Thursday afternoon as toxins from the red tide caused people to complain of burning eyes, numbness of the mouth or extremities, and irritation of the nose, throat or lungs.

"It's bothering me," said Emilio Morales of San Marcos, who was sitting by the pool of the Hilton Inn.

"I think it's some kind of gas," said Morales, who complained of an irritated chest and lungs. "I'm sick because of this."

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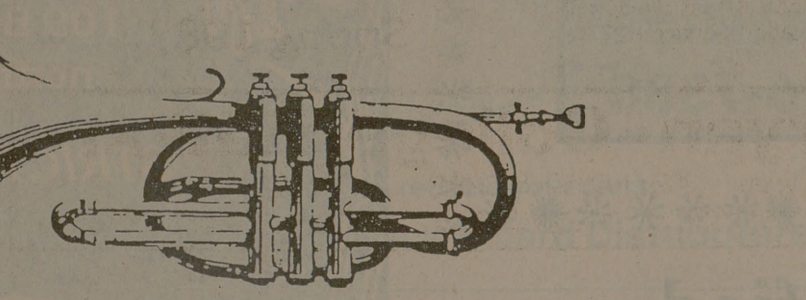
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