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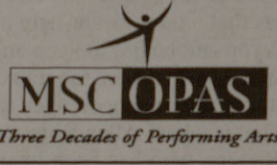
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# Recent grads face bleak job market

By Diane Carroll  
 KRT CAMPUS

**KANSAS CITY** — Spring break traditionally is a time for college students to escape their burdens and loll on sunny beaches.

Amanda Denning has friends at the University of Kansas who will carry out that custom in Acapulco, Mexico, and she could go with them. But with the job market for college graduates shaping up as the worst in a decade, Denning instead decided to visit companies in Austin, Texas.

She is setting up "informational interviews" in the public relations field, hoping they will lead to job interviews.

"I have friends who graduated with the very same major as mine last year, and they still are looking," said Denning, 22, who will graduate in May. "It's very scary."

The booming job market of the late 1990s started to give way early in 2001 and soured significantly last year. This year it is even tighter. The bumpy economy and war with Iraq have dissolved earlier hopes that things might turn around this spring, said Philip Gardner, director of the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University.

"Everything is on hold," Gardner said. "I have employers who say they have intentions to hire. They just don't know when."

Some companies are hiring, they said, but not in the numbers of the past.

Graduates are in relatively the same fix as their counterparts were 10 years ago with the recession of the early 1990s, according to Gardner and others. The difference, they said, is that 10 years ago everyone knew that the econ-

omy would turn around, companies restructured.

This time, it is harder to see when things will shake out, Douglas Buchanan, director of career services at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

"Now it's like everybody is waiting on something," Buchanan said. "Everything depends on everything else."

That inability to predict a turnaround also weighs on Gardner. Because of it, he said, "in all my (20) years of doing this, I haven't been quite as pessimistic."

In August, a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers showed employers expected to hire 1 percent fewer graduates this spring. When the survey was updated in December, one of the respondents said he planned additional cutbacks.

"A lot of kids are trying to hard and still coming up short," said Camille Luckenbaugh, the association's employment information manager.

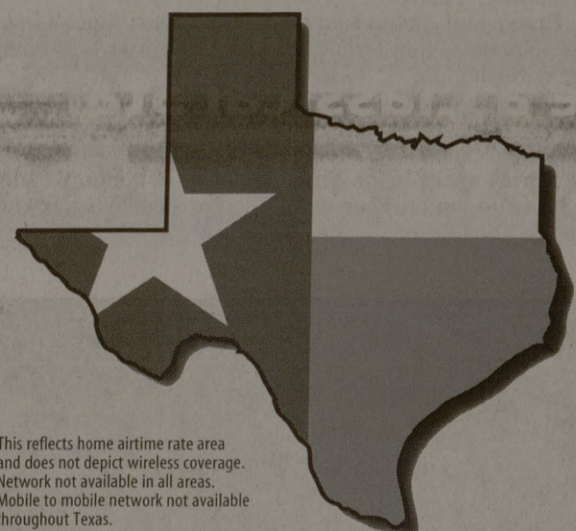
"Last year people were hoping the first quarter of this year would be a turning point, but that is not happening. We keep hoping to see a spark somewhere, but just haven't seen it yet."

The average offer to computer science graduates sank 13.7 percent, from \$51,429 in January 2002 to \$44,678 this January. Starting salaries slipped in many engineering disciplines and increased about 1 percent for liberal arts graduates.

Although the overall picture looks grim, graduates in education, health care and the food industry are among the areas who should fare better than most, area universities reported. Graduates in computer science, technology and consulting have bleaker prospects.

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<b>Menu</b> CAMPFIRE BAR-B-QUE (BEEF, CHICKEN, OR SAUSAGE) EDDIE PREPARES EACH NITE'S DINNER IN A DUTCH OVEN COOKED OVER HOT COALS.	<b>Menu</b> TEXAS FAJITAS (FOR THE LITTLE ONES, HOT DOGS, CAMPFIRE CHILI, AND TRIMMINGS) DUTCH OVEN PEACH COBBLER (WITH BLUEBERRY ICE CREAM) COWBOY COFFEE MARSHMALLOW ROAST	<b>Menu</b> COWBOY CHICKEN FRIED STEAK MARINATED CHICKEN BREAST COWBOY RIBEYE STEAKS (14 TO 18 OZ STEAK, ADD \$5.00 FOR ADULTS, ADD \$2.50 FOR CHILDREN)
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