

You've made it this far...

Making the most of your on-site interview

By Amanda Fazzino
CAREER SEARCH

Preliminary interviews, phone calls and e-mails have all led up to this — the company visit. Only the most qualified candidates make it this far, usually the last step before an offer is extended (or not).

Candidates are no longer wooed by big-budgeted recruiting departments as companies do more to identify top picks early.

"The technology industry is different today than three or four years ago," Hewlett-Packard business operations and planning analyst Peggy Cruse, said. "It used to be that there were two jobs for every candidate."

Instead, companies rely on phone interviews, recruit from schools close to their locations, and visit campuses for interviews more often. Many companies, Hewlett-Packard included, have reduced the number of schools targeted for recruiting by a third or more.

While companies are more selective about the candidates they invite for company visits, candidates can still expect travel and overnight expenses to be covered. It's not uncommon to be taken to lunch, but don't expect to be wined and dined.

"We hire a lot of remote candidates, but they have to come to Houston for interviewing," Universal Computer Systems (UCS) recruiting supervisor Kristina Lee said. "We pay for everything — the plane, hotel, food. We don't expect people to pay for anything."

UCS has company apartments and dining facilities on-site that candidates use on visits, reducing recruiting costs.

"Every expense from the flight to hotel and meals were covered," said Blake Cameron, a senior finance major, of his office visits. "I had no out-of-pocket

expenses going on the interviews unless I wanted a Coke at 2 a.m. in the hotel. Money I spent on gas, parking at the airport — everything was covered."

Cameron enjoyed social evenings before interviews at Ernst & Young and Ryan & Company, giving him an opportunity to assess the corporate cultures.

"It was just real laid back," Cameron said. "It gave you a chance to ask them questions about the company. Everyone was more than willing to answer questions, and they buy you drinks at the bar."

Observing employee interaction is an advantage interviewees have when on the company's turf.

"The dress and attitudes that recruiters and departments carry tell if people are laid back or uptight," Lee said. "The way you're treated during recruiting is the way they will treat you when you work there."

To save time and money, some companies have cut back on individual attention, inviting candidates to office visits in groups, observing their interaction and comparing them, side-by-side, against each other.

"It's very hard if you're not a competitor," Cruse said. "That's going to come across and you're going to get shut out."

For Cameron, the group visit made the entire process easier, since all candidates were on an even playing field.

"It probably would have felt more competitive if there was only one position, but the company didn't see it that way," he said. "They said they would hire qualified candidates that could fill their needs."

Candidates that have made it as far as a company visit are expected to know the company and department, and to ask thoughtful questions.

"You should prepare the same way for off- or on-site interviews," Lee said. "There's not much you can do differently to prepare

because you've probably never been inside."

Campus career fairs and personal contacts are one way to learn about the company, but the fastest and most comprehensive way to learn about a company is by browsing its Web site.

"I don't know what we did without it," Cruse said. "By going to the 'about us' or 'company history' sites, you can find out what the company does, how and by who it was started. HP, for example, started in a garage in the 1930s."

Candidates should also be familiar with the company's products, services and where it stands in the marketplace.

"Knowing the mission, CEO and background information is somewhat important," Cruse said.

Unlike interviews at the Career Center, which can be limited to 30 minutes, company visits include multiple interviews with no time limits. If the company hasn't properly coordinated interviewers, candidates may grow frustrated by repetitive questions.

"We're looking for consistency in answers," Lee said. "Those who answer inconsistently put a question in the recruiters' minds as to whether they're telling the truth."

But if you get the same questions again and again, "answer it like it's the first time, with the same enthusiasm," Cruse said.

Making it through a day or two of intensive interviews in an unfamiliar place is a success in its own right, but sealing this deal means landing the job.

Before leaving the office, thank those who interviewed and hosted you. "After you leave, always send a thank you letter to your recruiter," Lee said.

Want to make a bigger impression with a phone call?

It's OK if you do, and OK if you don't.

"Be persistent," Lee said, "but anything beyond one phone call would be too persistent."

CAREER SEARCH

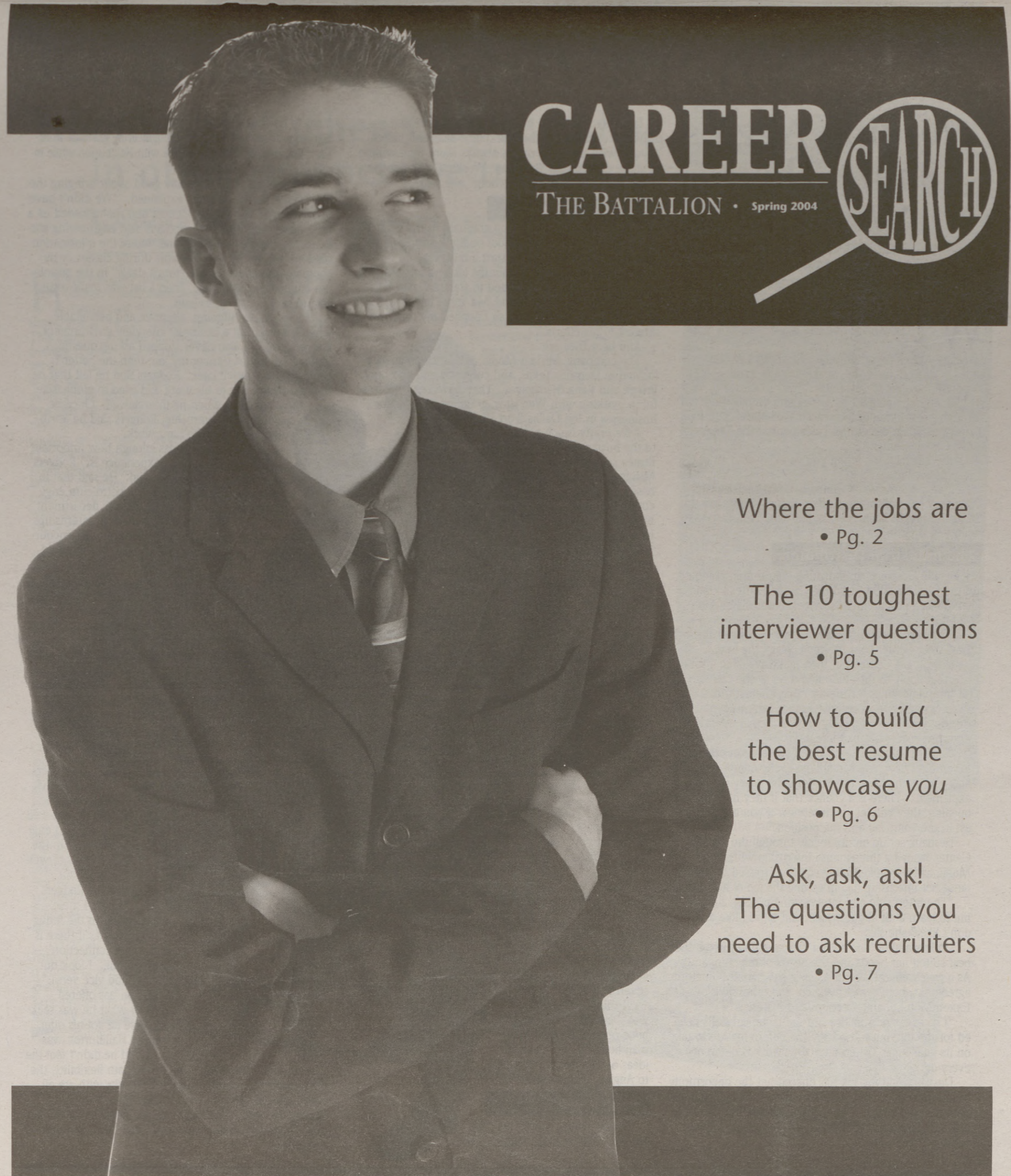
THE BATTALION • Spring 2004

Where the jobs are
• Pg. 2

The 10 toughest
interviewer questions
• Pg. 5

How to build
the best resume
to showcase you
• Pg. 6

Ask, ask, ask!
The questions you
need to ask recruiters
• Pg. 7



■ From the Editors

The Spring 2004 Journalism 309 magazine editing class created this magazine as a guide to putting your best foot forward in your job search. In a competitive job market, we hope to help Texas A&M students feel more prepared and more at ease as they graduate and hunt for the perfect job. We recommend stopping by the Career Center's Web site (careercenter.tamu.edu) to plug in to the employer-search network designed to match you up with employers searching for your major.

Copy Editors: Lydia Adams, Leigh Ann Downey, Lisa Clyde, Emily Conner, Lisa Ramirez, Jennifer West
Designers: Cassandra Bennett, Whitney Morris, Casey Reeves, Alicia Svetlik

Writers: Ashley Ingels, Amanda Fazzino, Shannan Johnson, Amy Kellers, Megan Orton, Jeremy Osborne, Jonathan Todd

■ Photos

Battalion photographer Randal Ford contributed the photos of Texas A&M business majors preparing to face the job market. To see more of Ford's work, visit his Web site at www.randalford.com.