

Job hunting strategies in the lion city

Michael Monahan
Frostburg State University

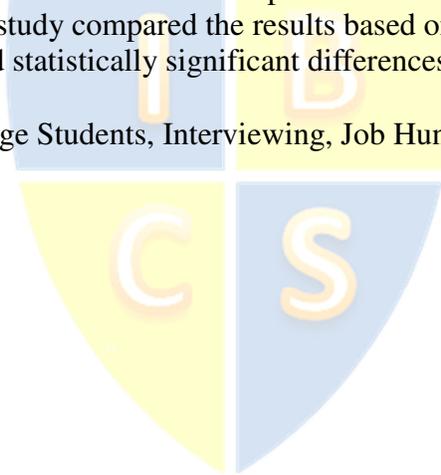
Amit Shah
Frostburg State University

Rainer Jochum
DHBW- Bad Mergentheim

ABSTRACT

The job-hunting strategies of college students in Singapore have been given scant attention. Does this population follow the same techniques as students in the USA? Do they have a resume? If so is it used for all applications or is it tailored for each job. Further how do they prepare for interviews? How long do they expect to be at their first job? How much money would they like to make and have this amount compared to how much money the students feel they will actually make. This study compared the results based on gender, ethnicity, personality type, age and major and found statistically significant differences.

Key Words: Singapore, College Students, Interviewing, Job Hunting, Salary Expectations



INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The uncertain global economic times have made finding employment challenging for college graduates in the United States. The question that must then follow is: does this hold true for college graduates in other countries? The researchers sought to ascertain the methods used by college students in the Lion City, Singapore, for finding jobs. As a result of the expanding Singaporean economy and the increasing outsourcing of businesses relocating to Singapore, the job-hunting strategies and expectations of Singaporean graduates are important to the global economy. In recent years, Singapore businesses' recruiting has strengthened and their economy has begun to recover. Singaporean employers are seeking young and ambitious employees now more than ever (Job Search Resources, 2011). This increased demand of Singaporean graduates is due to the world-class institutions that have developed in Singapore (Paul, 2011). However, this has led to a shortage of qualified job applicants for the positions offered. High demand has been developing for job applicants with skills in communications, media, public relations, technologies, and marketing (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010).

Due to improving economic conditions in Singapore, the demand for sales and marketing jobs is rapidly expanding. Companies are taking of the current conditions creating a high demand for sales and marketing professionals (Singapore Career Guide, 2006). Singaporean graduates should not be too worried about finding a job. Due to Singapore's booming economy, most every person who wants a full-time job can find one (Hwee-Hoon & Chwee-Peng, 2002). New graduates are more likely than their older competitors to find and hold steady employment (Appold, 2005). The unemployment rate of Singapore citizens was only 3% in 2011 (Economic performance, 2012).

Students use a variety of methods to find jobs. One of the most important ways students find jobs is by searching through advertisements in local newspapers (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010). Other ways students find employment include; networking, Internet sources, professional recruitment firms, and job fairs (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010). Although networking is common for job-seekers in Singapore, candidates with higher educational qualifications were less likely to use networking when applying for jobs. Networking ties are the most important to less advantaged job-seekers, as a 2007 study found that "low educated Singaporeans were almost three times as likely as their more educated countrymen to use personal contact when looking for a job, (Chua, 2007).

One of the ways Singaporean job-hunters prepare for employment is resumes. Resumes are important to employers in Singapore, just as they are in the United States. Prospective employers look at the presentation, clarity, skills and strengths of a job-seeker based on their resume. Because of this, job-applicants in Singapore should include previous work experience, complete educational background, exam results, scholarships, awards, as well as related abilities and interests (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010). Skills that will help Singapore students prepare for job searching include strong leadership abilities, clear communication skills, self-confidence and sound business judgment (Singapore Career Guide 2006: Sales/Marketing Employment Trends, 2006).

A 2002 study found a large number of temporary workers were between the ages of 15 and 30. Since younger students and recent graduates lack work experience, temporary jobs are a good place for young professionals to obtain work background. Young workers in Singapore are

most often interested in improving their situation and looking towards personal growth from temporary work (Hwee-Hoon & Chwee-Peng, 2002). Above all, job-applicants should keep in mind that Singapore businesses seek to make sure that the job applicant will fit into their firm before hiring the individual. Businesses will therefore be looking at personal traits, organizational skills and job abilities of the applicant, to ensure they are compatible with the company (Soo Siew, Hendrik, & Keng-Howe, 2009).

In 2007, the median monthly gross wage for all professions in Singapore was \$4,030 (USD) (Ng, Sim & Tan, 2010). However, discipline and experience can significantly affect the amount of money a college graduate can expect to make. For example, in 2011, the highest median monthly gross wage was \$6,630 (USD), for managers, while those aged 25 to 29 were paid a median of \$3,808 (USD). When these two salaries are contrasted, the age salary gap becomes very clear (Ministry of Manpower, 2012). Unlike past generations, female Singaporeans are able to earn salaries the same as or very close to those of men. The existing wage gap between genders increases with age, therefore it minimally affects young Singapore women. In fact, Singaporean women in the 25 to 29 age group earned more than their male counterparts in five of the eight occupational groups (Ministry of Manpower, 2012).

The length of employment Singapore graduates can expect is variable. Many new employees often change jobs within their first year of work. In 2007, twenty-five percent of workers in their thirties and thirty-four percent of workers under thirty years of age changed jobs (Thang, 2011). Therefore, roughly a quarter of the Singaporean college graduates who find work, can expect to change jobs sometime during their first year. Young graduates in Singapore usually have little difficulty in finding employment quickly (with a median period of unemployment of five weeks) as opposed to their older counterparts whose median period reaches up to six months. In addition the 2002 unemployment rate for graduates under 30 was twice that as the unemployment rate for older graduates (Appold, 2005).

METHODS

A survey with 25 questions with questions concerning job preparation techniques and expectations was given to Singaporean university students. Students volunteered to complete the survey anonymously. The data was entered into SPSS for analysis. A total of 280 students volunteered to anonymously take the questionnaire and the responses were analyzed by SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic data of the 281 respondents is presented in Table 1. The respondents were homogeneous in a number of categories. In terms of ethnicity they were overwhelmingly Asian (89%), Business majors (91%), and of traditional college age (85%). The two factors of gender and personality type were used to ascertain if differences exist.

Most respondents (62%) felt the coming year would be better economically. This positive expectation was consistent by gender and personality type. Conversely, only 9% felt the upcoming year would be worse. However, no statistical differences emerged (see Table 2).

When asked about their resume, the majority (69%) stated they had a current one. Females and extroverts were slightly more likely to have a current resume; however the difference was not statistically significant. Approximately one-third used the same resume

regardless of the position they were applying for while two-thirds tailored their resume to different positions (see Table 3).

When university students were asked how long they expected to be at their first job nearly half of the respondents cited 6-10 years, with a third expecting to remain at their first position 1-5 years. Interestingly, one-sixth of the students were short termers expecting to be at their first job less than a year before moving to another job. The results were consistent among both genders and personality types and thus, no statistical differences were found (see Table 4).

Perusing the classified ads was used by nearly three-fourths of the respondents and was the most common method of finding a job. Over 80% of females used this method and while very slight, it was statistically significant over males. Internships ranked second among all respondents. Interestingly, Males sought out personal referrals at a slight, but statistically significant, manner over females. The least utilized method was unsolicited applications which were less than 10%. Introverts were more apt to utilize online resources such as Monster.com and Careerbuilder.com (see Table 5).

With regard to interviewing, nearly half of all respondents conducted research or had a portfolio of their work to take with them for interviews while one-third of the students conducted mock interviews. Less than one-fourth of respondents did no preparation whatsoever. Intriguingly, no statistical differences were found by gender or personality type (see Table 6).

Interestingly half of males and two-thirds of females desired employment with the government. Even though both preferred public sector work, females preferred this work in a statistically significant manner over men. Accordingly, men were more apt to work in the family business or work for a non-profit. With the low number of students desiring to work in the private sector, the researchers question if the students had a proper understanding of the term. The results by personality type mirrored gender with the exception of statistical differences (see Table 7).

The amount of money students would like to make and what they felt they would actually make yielded fascinating results. For the sake of clarity when comparing different currencies, the researchers converted the student's responses to USA dollars. According to the currency conversion site XE, the Singapore dollar is worth approximately 81% of the USA dollar. Thus, s100 Singapore dollars equates to \$ 81.65 USA dollars. At the end of 2011 the median monthly wage in Singapore was s1990, which converted to US dollars equates to \$1624.89. When \$1624.89 is multiplied by twelve, an annual income of \$19,499 US dollars is found (2012, Singapore households' median monthly income rises).

Extroverts both wanted to make the most and also felt they would make the most. Conversely, introverts expected they'd earn the least. Males wanted to make an income 15% more than that desired by females. Interestingly, the difference between what the students would like to make and the amount they realistically thought they would make varied between 25 and 28%. However the introverts were much more pessimistic and felt their real earnings would be 38% less (see Table 8).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The respondents to the survey were remarkably homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, age, and major. Both the perceptions of the economy and methods of finding employment used by the respondents were also overwhelmingly uniform. The majority of respondents (62%) felt the economy of the coming year would be better than the previous year, which coincides with

current studies of Singapore's economy (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010).

In accordance with literature concerning the reliance on resume use in Singapore (Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore, 2010), nearly 70% of respondents used resumes. Two-thirds of university students in this study tailored their resume for different positions. Since resumes are so important, colleges should guide students in the creation and presentation of resumes.

Nearly three-fourths of the respondents searched the classified ads for jobs, making newspapers the most utilized method for finding potential employment. Internships were the second most prevalent method of job searches. It is apparent that these students understand the importance of internships as an avenue for employment. Universities could expand and enhance their relationships with potential employers to foster internships or require an internship experience as part of the curriculum in order to assist students with finding future work.

While Thang's study (2011) found 25% of workers changed jobs in their first year, only one out of six respondents anticipated spending less than one year at their first job. In contrast, approximately half of the students felt they would work at their first position for 6-10 years. Singaporean employers should investigate the reasons why so many workers are switching jobs after such a short time of employment, and determine if the cause is rooted with the companies or the new graduates.

Two thirds of the women surveyed and half of men desired government careers. More information is needed, however, on the reasons behind this trend. Future studies will be needed to determine if the pay, job security or other unknown factors are reasons for these findings. Men were more apt to work in a family business and were more than twice as likely as women to work for a non-profit organization. Our findings suggest that work in the private sector were not appealing to the surveyed students; further study will be needed to find the reason why.

The 2012 medium wage for managers in the 25-29 age bracket was \$37,014 (USD) (Ministry of Manpower, 2012). Coincidentally, the respondents to this survey sought to make a virtually identical amount: \$37,067 (USD). Extroverts and introverts had vastly different expectations of future salaries, with extroverts desiring higher incomes. Extroverts, however, had a 26% difference between the amount they wished to make and their starting salaries. However, when comparing what they would like to make and the reality of what they would make, the difference was approximately 26% with the exception of Introverts. These introverts were more pessimistic than extroverts and thought they would only earn 62% of their goal salary.

Students need to be aware of conditions in the job market to have more realistic salary expectations. When these students are offered positions at less money they may be disillusioned and may stifle their motivation which could negatively affect their performance thereby lowering their chances for career advancement. Further, this sudden realization of a lower-than-expected income may lead to lower job satisfaction and more job-hopping by these students.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Additional research could explore the importance of other non-financial factors such as benefits, advancement, relocation distances and autonomy. Further, longitudinal studies could determine what methods worked best for students, and finally compare the salary expectations of graduates to what wage they actually accepted would close the loop between expectations and reality.

Appendix

Table 1

Demographics

Gender	N	%	Age	N	%
Female	166	59.1	< 18	25	8.9
Male	114	40.6	18-22	239	85.1
No Response	1	0.4	23-30	9	3.2
			No Response	8	2.8

Ethnicity	N	%	Major	N	%
African American	8	2.8	Business	256	91.1
Asian	249	88.6	Education	5	1.8
Caucasian	2	.7	Natural Sciences	3	1.1
Hispanic	2	.7	Physical Education	1	0.4
Other	18	6.4	Social Sciences	8	2.8
No Response	2	.7	No Response	8	2.8

Personality Type	N	%
Introvert	121	43.1
Extrovert	146	52.0
No Response	14	5.0

Table 2

Expectations on the Economy

	Total	Female	Male	Introvert	Extrovert
Better than last year	62.1%	61.3%	63.2%	64.7%	60.0%
Same as last year	28.9%	30.7%	26.3%	24.4%	33.1%
Worse than last year	9.0%	8.0%	10.5%	10.9%	6.9%

Table 3

Resume

	Total	Female	Male	Introvert
Have a Current Resume	69.3%	72.3%	64.9%	66.9%
Use Same Resume for all positions	35.0%	33.7%	36.8%	34.7%
Tailor Resume for different positions	66.1%	68.7%	62.3%	65.3%

Table 4
*Length of Time
Expected to be at
First Position*

	Total	Female	Male	Introvert	Extrovert
Less than a year	16.1%	17.6%	14.0%	19.1%	14.5%
1-5 years	31.9%	31.4%	32.5%	29.6%	32.4%
6-10 years	49.1%	49.1%	49.1%	48.7%	50.3%
Over 10 years	2.9%	1.9%	4.4%	2.6%	2.8%

Table 5
*Methods
Used to
Find Jobs*

	Total	Female	Male	r	p	Introvert	Extrovert	r
Classified	73.9%	80.1%	64.9%	0.170	0.004	71.9%	74.0%	
Internships	45.7%	41.6%	51.8%			45.5%	45.2%	
Agencies	35.0%	33.7%	36.80%			41.3%	30.1%	
Monster, etc	38.2%	38.6%	37.70%			42.1%	35.6%	0.124
Referral	44.3%	38.0%	53.50%	-0.154	0.001	39.7%	47.9%	
Unsolicited Apps	9.6%	9.6%	9.60%			8.3%	11.0%	

Table 6
*Interview
Preparation*

	Total	Female	Male	Introvert	Extrovert
No prep	23.2%	22.3%	24.6%	22.3%	24.7%
Mock	33.9%	31.9%	36.8%	33.9%	33.6%
Practice	13.9%	13.3%	14.9%	14.9%	13.0%
Research	46.4%	48.8%	43.0%	43.8%	47.9%
Portfolio	46.1%	46.4%	45.6%	44.6%	44.5%
Other	3.6%	4.8%	1.8%	2.5%	4.8%

Table 7
Work Preference

	Total	Female	Male		Introvert	Extrovert
Public sector	58.9%	66.5%	49.6%	$\chi^2=7.94$, df 1, p .005	58.7%	58.7%
Family Business	27.0%	22.0%	33.6%	$\chi^2=4.66$, df 1, p .031	28.9%	25.2%
Private Sector	1.5%	1.2%	1.8%		2.5%	.7%
Start own business	4.8%	5.5%	3.5%		4.1%	5.6%
Non-profit	7.8%	4.9%	11.5%	$\chi^2=4.19$, df 1, p .041	5.8%	9.8%

Table 8
Comparison of what graduates would like to make vs will what they feel they will make (in USA dollars)

	Like to Make	Will Make	Difference
Total	\$37,067	\$29,336	26%
Female	\$34,970	\$28,004	25%
Male	\$40,193	\$31,306	28%
Introvert	\$27,484	\$19,969	38%
Extrovert	\$45,180	\$35,558	27%

REFERENCES

- (2012). Currency Converter retrieved Nov 13, 2012 from www.xe.com/ucc/convert/?Amount=4611&From=SGD&To=USD
- (2012). Economic performance *Country Report. Singapore*, (4), 12-14.
- (2012). Singapore households' median monthly income rises retrieved Nov 13, 2012 from www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1182869/1.html
- Appold, S. J. (2005). The weakening position of university graduates in singapore's labor market: Causes and consequences. *Population & Development Review*, 31(1), 85-112.
- Chua, V. (2007). The conditional effects of social networks on job earnings in highly meritocratic singapore. *Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association*, 1.
- Going Global Career & Employment Resource Guide for Singapore. (2010). *Singapore Career Guide*, 1-116.
- Hwee-Hoon, T., & Chwee-Peng, T. (2002). Temporary employees in singapore: what drives them? *Journal of Psychology*, 136(1), 83.
- Job Search Resources. (2011). *Singapore Career Guide*, 1-15.
- Ministry of Manpower. (2012) Report on wages in singapore 2011. *Manpower Research and Statistics Department Report*

- Ng, I. H., Sim, H., & Tan, R. Y. (2010). The pay challenge: The case of social workers in singapore. *Asia Pacific Journal Of Social Work & Development (Department Of Social Work, National University Of Singapore)*, 20(2), 36-48.
- Paul, E. (2011). Lecturers' job satisfaction in a public tertiary institution in Singapore: ambivalent and non-ambivalent relationships between job satisfaction and demographic variables. *Journal Of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 33(2), 141-151.
- Singapore Career Guide 2006: Sales/Marketing Employment Trends. (2006). *Singapore Career Guide*, 1.
- Soo Siew, C., Hendrik, H., & Keng-Howe, I. (2009). Life values and job satisfaction: Comparing local managers to the japanese and chinese expatriates in singapore. *International Journal Of Business Studies*, 17(1), 61-106.
- Thang, L. (2011). Population aging, older workers and productivity issues: the case of Singapore. *Journal Of Comparative Social Welfare*, 27(1), 17-33.

