

Perspectives and Prospects By Kirrin Coleman

2008 has introduced a whole new vocabulary to people under 35: Bailouts and bursting bubbles. Meltdowns and foreclosures. Unemployment and recession. For many of us, previous downturns in the economy were news blips we barely noticed. And when our parents shared stories of standing in gas lines or paying 18% interest rates, or when our grandparents shared their stories of scrimping and saving to meet basic needs, it seemed like ancient history or even science fiction.

But here we are, with a new awareness of our place in the economy, and lots of questions about what all of this means to us and to the people around us. There are no simple answers and certainly no crystal ball to tell us exactly what the future will hold, but one thing is certain to help: perspective. And one of the first places a new graduate or soon-to-be-new-graduate can go to get perspective is...college. Specifically, the college career center and alumni office.

If you've already taken advantages of these resources, you know just how valuable they can be. If you haven't yet, now's a great time to check them out. In fact, according to *Life After Graduation*, a handbook for people making that critical transition from school to life after school, your college is the first place to look for career planning advice, networking opportunities, continuing education opportunities, and even deals on everything from insurance to cell phone service.

A simple Internet search on any one of those economic terms mentioned in the introduction reveals that college and university alumni offices were among the first organizations to respond to the current financial crisis. Some alumni offices invited experts from various sectors to forums to share ideas and discuss the historical background and future repercussions of the present situation. Others produced online seminars to provide information and perspective to current and former students. They also adjusted their current networking and recruitment services to reflect recent graduates' and alumni's changing needs: Wall Street's not hiring right now? Well, here are some opportunities in Austin, Seattle, and Madison. Higher education is, after all, in the business of information and preparation of all kinds.

If your most pressing questions are personal—What kind of job should I be pursuing in the current market? How do I make myself more marketable now that I'm competing with more experienced workers? Should I enroll in graduate studies now or later?—you'll find your school's career and

alumni office invaluable. If you are still on campus, check them out in person. If you have moved away from your alma mater, you're still just a few clicks away from truly helpful resources.

Here are just some of the opportunities you can find at your school's office or website:

- Internship opportunities
- Continuing education guides, advice, and placement
- Extensive and exclusive online career networking
- Mentors in your field or areas of interest
- Critical advice on conducting an effective job search, including resume writing, interviewing, and networking

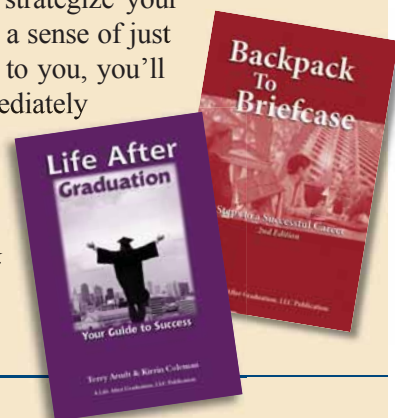
One link on Duke University's alumni website, for example, opens up a world of information and specific, up-to-date helpful suggestions. Students or graduates can click on a list of majors and—eureka!--comprehensive lists of types of employment available, potential employers, and detailed strategies for finding a job in particular fields, including suggestions on professional organizations to join, skills to develop, and supplemental classes to take.

Many people don't realize or take advantage of one of college's most important resources: its deep pool of graduates. If you're not connecting with them yet you're in for a very pleasant surprise when you find out how much you actually got for all the work you did in college. First a degree and now easy access to all sorts of services as well as a dynamic network of alumni.

While you're planning your job search or scooping out your prospects, you can also take advantage of the deals available to help you manage everyday expenses. You probably have access to reduced rates on everything from big expense items—health insurance, auto insurance, and auto purchases—to smaller-but-they-add-up expenses, such as cell phone service, credit card interest rates, hotel rates, and even, of course, pizza.

So if you feel the need for some perspective on all the downturning, bailouting, and bubble bursting, turn to your college first. You'll find people to help with the big picture as well as resources to help you strategize your next move. And once you have a sense of just how much support is available to you, you'll notice that your prospects immediately brighten.

For more career tips, read *Life After Graduation: Your Guide to Success* or *Backpack To Briefcase: Steps to a Successful Career*



Kirrin Coleman is the co-author of *Life After Graduation: Your Guide to Success*

