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# Upgrading the Employment Scene in Chicago

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Appalled at the degree to which employment interviews at the annual AACTE convention too often seem cold, aloof, and negative, educators Bailey and Wilson offer suggestions to help rehumanize the process.

## upgrading the employment scene in Chicago

By Gerald D. Bailey and LaVisa Wilson



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Dr. Wilson, an assistant professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University, is particularly interested in early childhood education and elementary remedial reading programs. She taught extensively in these areas, including kindergarten, first grade, and day care centers in Nebraska, Maryland, and South Dakota from 1959 to 1967, when she joined Dakota State College, Madison, South Dakota, as an instructor in elementary education. In 1971 she entered the University of Iowa, earning her Ph.D. there in 1972. She is a member of the Manhattan (Kansas) Day Care Center Board of Directors.

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The annual trek to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) meeting has become as ritualistic as the holy pilgrimage to Mecca for those seeking employment as well as those seeking employees in higher education. Thousands of prospective employees, recruiting officials, and placement officers throng to Chicago in order to facilitate the "matching process" of candidate with institution. Job market glut<sup>1</sup> and curtailed institutional operating budgets<sup>2</sup> have made employment procedures increasingly difficult for both prospective employee and employer. As a result, the degree of human anxiety and frustration have skyrocketed to almost intolerable heights during the last two years. The gravity of the situation is reflected in a lamentable comment heard from almost all graduate candidates returning from the AACTE meeting: "That damn experience was totally dehumanizing in nature."

The present complex placement process in Chicago portends no easy solutions for either the graduate candidates or hiring institutions in the future. While a majority of educators feel that the placement process at the annual AACTE meeting is crucial in making initial employer-employee contacts, they also sense an urgency to assess the existing structure to improve conditions for those who are to follow. In an attempt to enhance more efficient and less dehumanizing placement procedures at the annual meeting of AACTE in Chicago, we feel that graduate candidates, hiring institutions, and placement officers need to address themselves to at least four major items of concern:

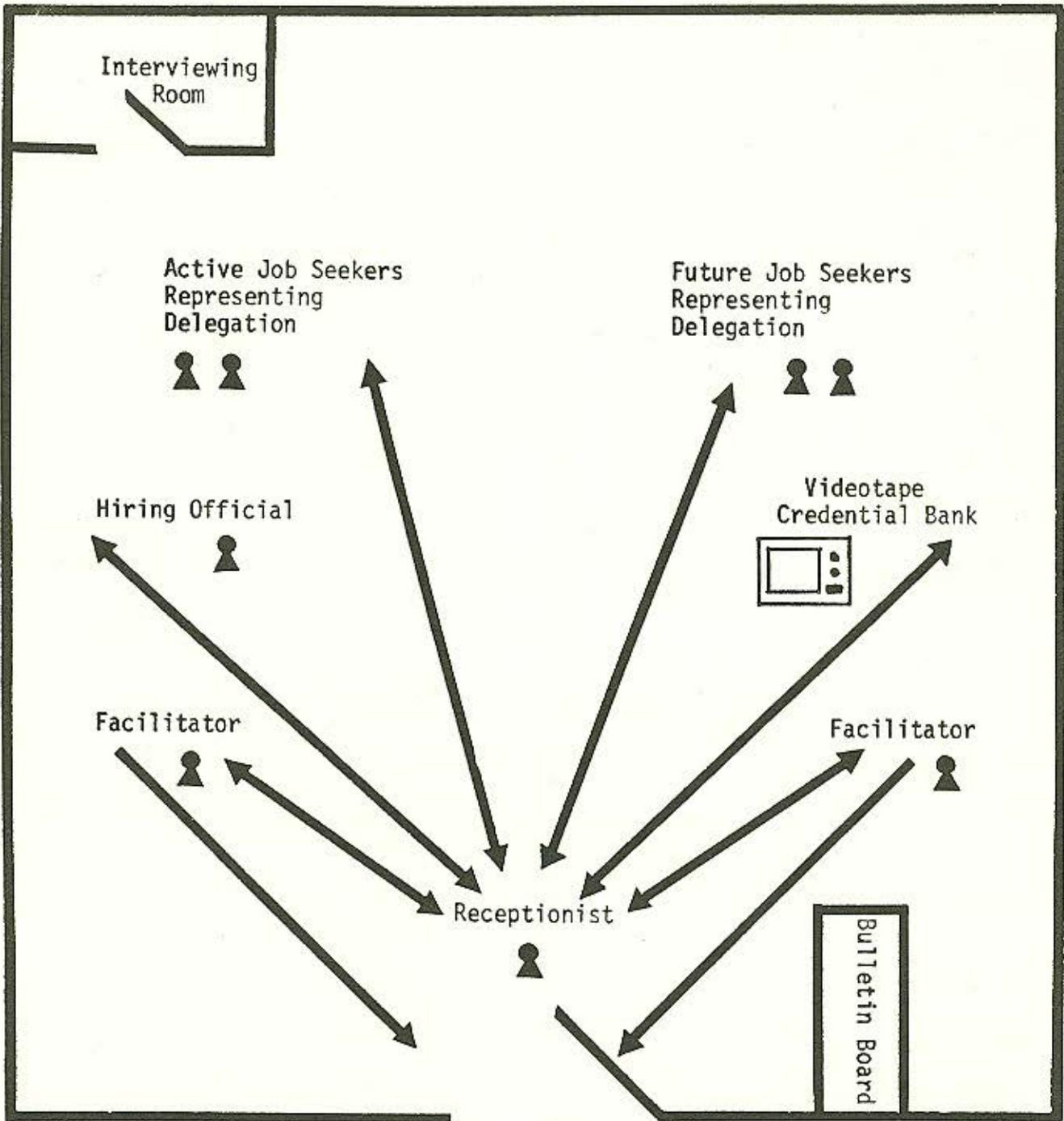
1. Delineating the goals of the local placement service.
2. Organizing local delegations into mutually helpful groups.
3. Organizing the university suite into an effective environment for employer and prospective employee (both from the university and to the university).
4. Humanizing the selection process.

### Delineating the Goals of the Local Placement Service

One of the major reasons for prospective employee "cultural shock" is a wide lack of knowledge concerning the total recruiting process and placement services provided by AACTE and ASCUS (Association for School, College, and University Staffing). Information concerning placement procedures needs to be disseminated to the graduate candidates or prospective employees well in advance of the annual meeting.

An orientation session for all graduate students planning to attend the AACTE meeting would be extremely helpful. The local placement service may choose to present specially prepared slide/tape information concerning the conference and/or hold a series of discussions dealing with the upcoming event. Written or verbalized information should

include the following points: (1) How the AACTE meeting works, (2) Purpose and services of ASCUS, (3) Exemplar letters of application necessary for obtaining interviews at AACTE, (4) Procedure of operation in the local delegation's suite and possible procedures being utilized in other delegation suites, (5) Suggestions for interviewing, viewing videotaped in-



Possible suite arrangement for a Differentiated Delegation. (See page 9.)

interviews, participating in videotaped interviews, and (6) General suggestions.

It is extremely important for local placement officials to inform graduate candidates of the various hiring procedures used by participating universities. Some college deans do all the hiring out of their breast pockets, while many department heads have complete control of hiring their own personnel. Yet another mode of operation involves a few college representatives collecting vitae and conducting interviews which are then submitted to a faculty advisory selection committee.

Graduate candidates also need to be cautioned about their sense of urgency in obtaining a position at the meeting or immediately thereafter. Certain institutions and hiring officials do not share this urgency. Since the annual AACTE meeting occurs in February, there are many special conferences upcoming in the spring. Rather than commit themselves to a candidate, some hiring officials hold the position open as they await budget commitments or continue to seek the "perfect choice."

Graduate candidates need to be admonished that effective placement practices would be greatly enhanced if they apply **only** for those positions for which they are most qualified. An increasingly common practice among graduate students is to make as many applications and appointments as there are openings. This "shotgun approach" causes hiring officials to expend considerable effort and time in sorting out those candidates whose qualifications are not suited or matched to the job opening description.

#### **Organizing Local Delegations Into Mutually Helpful Groups**

Much of the awkward behavior exhibited by attending delegations is due to the limited personal relationships existing among faculty and graduate candidates. Opportunities for getting acquainted prior to the AACTE meeting would be tremendously beneficial. Faculty members attending the AACTE meeting should be well acquainted with each graduate candidate's needs and interests. Faculty familiarity with the graduate candidate's capabilities would make that person's endorsement much more genuine during the placement activities. Only when the local delegation is aware of the positions sought by its own graduate candidates and faculty openings available in their own university can there be proper functioning of the delegation at the meeting.

A number of universities sponsor a special breakfast, dinner, or conversation hour as a rallying point for candidates, faculty, and alumni. Such meetings should be held at the earliest possible date during the convention. A planned program introducing candidates with special emphasis on their qualifications should be made and a concerted effort should be made to enlist alumni with the responsibility of helping place those candidates seeking employment.

#### **Organizing the University Suite Into an Effective Environment for Employer and Prospective Employee (Both from the University and to the University)**

A fundamental suggestion for every school represented at the AACTE meeting is to organize its delegation on a Dif-

ferentiated Staff basis. Job seekers coming into the suite as well as job seekers operating out of the suite are cognizant of the organizational problems within the delegations. For purposes of examining a possible method of organizing staff responsibilities, let us identify the team members by the following titles: (1) Receptionist, (2) Facilitators, (3) Hiring Official, and (4) Videotape Credential Bank Specialist. Other possible representatives could be identified as follows: (1) Active Candidates Seeking Positions and (2) Future Candidates Attending the AACTE Meeting for Experience.

The diagram on page 8 shows how a team could be differentiated in an attempt to become more effective. The receptionist could act as a coordinator for the entire team. Basic assignments would include assisting visitors, assigning appointments, giving directions, answering procedural questions, and disseminating incoming and outgoing messages. An efficient system of message dissemination is essential if administrators' and candidates' needs are to be best served. Facilitators could greet the visitor and acquaint the individual with the operating procedures within the suite. The facilitator's duties would also include introducing other delegation representatives and the institution's hiring officials.

The videotape credential bank is a multi-purpose and **optional** feature that delegations could employ at the AACTE meeting. This service could be operated by a Specialist and utilized by job seekers to show pre-recorded interviews or selected episodes which demonstrate certain professional competencies. The makeshift viewing area could be used by both candidates seeking employment with the institution and those active job seekers operating out of the delegation suite.

An important feature of the delegation suite is the bulletin board. The bulletin board, which should have a prominent position in the room, might display a comprehensive listing of available candidates. Other individual flyers with vita information could be made available for interested persons upon request. For any of the universities not committed to secrecy, a listing of the university's job openings could also be shown on the bulletin board.

Future job seekers representing the delegation could perform a variety of tasks for the Differentiated AACTE-Delegation as well as familiarize themselves with the total placement process. One of the principal tasks of these delegation members would be actively to seek new and creative ideas from other delegates and suites. This information could then be relayed to their own institutions and to college placement officials of AACTE-ASCUS. These persons could also function quite effectively in helping those active job seekers by conveying messages concerning possible job openings and other announcements relative to placement procedures at the AACTE meeting.

#### **Humanizing the Placement Process**

No set rules presently exist which would instantaneously solve the problems with the placement procedures in Chicago. At the present time, however, far too many job seekers see the placement experience as cold, aloof, and a

*(continued on page 12)*

were not to depend upon the physical presence of the student, educational flexibility should increase and programs relevant to the student or at least aesthetically and personally exciting could develop. As one example, a program such as this, funded by the State of Missouri to provide career, job, vocational, and training information on the streets of St. Louis to teenagers who were unable to find rewarding employment, was so successful during the summer of 1972 that its workers were employed by the school system during the regular school year to assist school counseling personnel.

The success of non-compulsory attendance alternatives such as the St. Louis experience are making an increasingly strong case that our required attendance education laws should be modified to include funding and sanction for programs geared to meet individual needs and cultural differences. If educational programs can succeed in meeting these needs and differences, many a now potential dropout probably will stay in his or her innovative school, will learn, will earn a diploma, and will become a productive member of our American society. Whether a "butcher, a baker or candle stick maker," he or she will then no longer be doomed to public welfare and to a life of alienation from the societal mainstream. His or her diploma can be a passport from an essentially non-productive to a productive community. With his or her diploma and—more importantly, with developed social and occupational skills—the student who now finds irrelevance and lack of motivation in schooling will be able to meet the set of demands for productivity that the technological system of business, industry, and bureaucratic rationality has developed. Coupling modifications of compulsory school attendance laws with innovative educational alternatives might yet help students effectively

achieve the ideal individual integration of freedom and responsibility educators have talked about for so many years. Dare we have enough faith in our older children, in ourselves, to work for the day when students will stay in school not because they have to, but because they want to?

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Frances Caston, "Will Compulsory Education Laws Be Abolished or Modified," *The Education Digest*, vol. XXXVIII (January 1973), p. 10. Condensed from *Scholastic Teacher*, Junior/Senior High Teacher's Edition (October 1972), pp. 20-24.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
3. *State v. Yoder*, 182 N.W. 2d 539 (Wis. 1971) aff'd 40 U.S.L.W. 4476 (U.S. May 15, 1972).
4. Alton Harrison, "The Educational Suppression of Freedom," *Educational Forum*, vol. XXI (May 1967), p. 466.
5. Caston, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
6. Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Dignity of Youth and Other Atavism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 137.
7. Such is this educator's opinion.
8. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 15.
9. Donald Warren's opinion is cited by James Krohe, Jr., "School Is Something You Put Up With," *Illinois Journal of Education*, vol. LXIII (September 1972), pages 29, 32.
10. James Krohe, Jr., "School Is Something You Put Up With," *Illinois Journal of Education*, vol. LXIII (September 1972), pp. 29, 32.
11. Peter H. Wagschal, "The Free Enterprise Teacher," *School and Society*, vol. XCVII (April 1969), p. 228.
12. Caston, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
13. Tom O'Connell, as quoted by Caston, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
14. Caston, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

## upgrading the employment scene in Chicago

(continued from page 9)

negative approach to secure a position in higher education. In fact, some would contend that the procedures in Chicago are not too far removed from Flaubert's *Agriculture Show in Madame Bovary*, where animals are described in terms of people and people are described in terms of animals.

Much of the inhumanness may be attributed to lack of organization by the attending institutions, inappropriate expectations on the part of applicants, and, from a select few, an elitist condescendence to go through the motions of an interview. Our primary task is to recognize the complexity of the placement process in Chicago and that it revolves around human interaction. Human interaction at the AACTE meeting is a group problem that must be solved by those seeking employees and those seeking employment. Only by extending ourselves as courteous and concerned human beings can we hope to translate our truly humane character into a visible professional atmosphere.

The suggested steps of action for graduate candidates, hiring institutions, and placement officers have been engendered with the belief that the placement process can be a much more productive and satisfying experience for all people involved. In light of the pressing employment problems, however, additional cooperative efforts must be sought if we are to find viable solutions. The need for making placement procedures more systematic in order to insure well-adjusted and satisfied personnel in professorial ranks of higher education has never been greater than at the present time.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Enrollment of graduate students should double by 1980. See Lewis B. Mayhew, *Graduate and Professional Education, 1980*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1970).
2. See Earl F. Cheit, *The New Depression in Higher Education*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971).