Placement Data and Advising: Handle with Flair but Care

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Each winter, the Office of Placement Services at Michigan State University distributes on campus a publication entitled ***Follow-Up Report,*** which lists by college and major the names of all students who graduated, and degrees earned the previous academic year. In addition to salary data, the publication contains a wealth of information relevant to advising students interested in current employment prospects and trends. The annual ***Follow-Up Report*** and other excellent research studies prepared by the Office of Placement Services account for the frequent references in national publications to predictions and assessments made by its director. The ***Follow-Up Report*** is a valuable advising resource, but it should be used with caution, thoughtfulness, and a degree of imagination.

Data for the ***Follow-Up Report*** are supplied by graduates, faculty, and employers. All students graduating the preceding year were listed, although information about their status was not available prior to publication. Graduates who reported employment were listed with the name of their employers, the cities and states where they worked, and their job titles. Those graduates still seeking employment were listed as such, and blank spaces appeared next to the names of those who failed to forward information about their status. The most recent report (1982-83) included information on 7,026 students, a very substantial segment (about 70%) of last year's 10,043 graduates.

The ***Follow-Up Report*** contains a Table of Contents, and begins with a short General Statement about the number of reporting students; the total number of graduates the past year; the average salaries for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees; and these salaries are compared to those of the three preceding years. The next section (one of the report's distinctive features) is the All-University Career Distribution Summary, which lists the number and percentage of graduates at the threedegree levels that are employed in a broad range of occupational areas.

The career classifications are:

Accounting - Public
Aerospace and Components
Agricultural Industries
Art, Drama, and Related Arts
Automotive and Mechanical Equipment
Banking, Fiance, and Insurance
Chemicals, Drugs, and Allied Products
Construction and Building Materials Manufacturers
Education (with the subcategories of Elementary and Secondary, Community and Junior Colleges, Colleges and Universities)
Electrical Machinery and Equipment
Electronics and Instruments
Food and Beverage Processing
Glass, Paper, Packaging and Allied Products
Government (with the sub-categories of City, County, State, and Federal) (See Figure 1 on page 64)
Graduate School
Hotels, Motels, Resorts and Restaurants
Homemaker
Medical Services
Merchandising and Related Services
Metals and Metal Products
Military
Petroleum and Allied Products — Including Natural Gas
Printing, Publishing, and Advertising
Public Utilities
Recreation and Related Services
Research and/or Consulting Services
Self Employed
Tire and Rubber
Transportation
Volunteer Organizations — Peace Corps, Vista, etc.

Next is a table of the All-University Geographic Distribution Summary which lists the number and percentage of graduates (at all degree levels) working in each of the United States and in foreign countries. The remainder of the report classifies the available employment data major by major in a separate section for each of the University's fourteen colleges. Each listing of a major is followed by a summary of the number of graduates at the various degree levels who reported salaries, and the average salary of each group. Following the comprehensive listing of majors is a summary of the number of reporting salaries and the average salaries for the college as a whole. At the end of each college section, career and geographic distribution information is reproduced for the graduates of that college. (See Figure 2 on page 65).

The ***Follow-Up Report*** is useful to all University Advisors, especially advisor specialists in the Undergraduate University Division who are responsible for advising freshman and sophomore No-Preference students. Since the specialists are "back-up" advisors for freshmen and sophomores, they have a potential clientele of over 14,000 students. Further, all freshmen and sophomores wishing to change their majors must initiate the process with the staff of the Undergraduate University Division. Serving in these roles, advisors must be knowledgeable about approximately two-hundred undergraduate programs offered by the University. Being knowledgeable at a time when the typical student is vocationally and professionally preoccupied, requires familiarity not only with the academic requirements of all undergraduate programs and the career opportunities they may lead to, but also with the most current information about employment prospects for all majors. Obviously, in this situation, the ***Follow-Up Report*** is an important resource in advising students. But for this very reason it is imperative that advisors resist the temptation to rely on it exclusively, and the matter of average salaries be placed in a broader context during the advising session.

Used properly, the ***Follow-Up Report*** can aid the advisor to develop a broader outlook. The most obvious but least appealing use of the report in the advising situation is to answer students' questions about the going rate for graduates in this major or that. While such questions are inevitable and unavoidable, a good advisor can use the report's data to transcend merely monetary concerns. To do so, the advisor must be an expert on the report, not only by reading it, but studying it, looking for interrelated bits of information, trends, comparisons with the data in former reports, and revelations.

It is not possible in a short piece to do more than suggest what an excellent placement report like Michigan State can contribute to advising because the possibilities are innumerable. Here in no order of importance are some illustrations drawn from my own and other advisors' experience. Some students are still genuinely interested in becoming teachers but fear that teaching positions will be scarce when they graduate. An advisor can tell such students that a year-by-year study of the ***Follow-Up Report*** shows clearly that the number of teaching majors has steadily declined and consequently that supply and demand are gradually coming into somewhat better balance. Also, the demand for special education majors remains relatively strong. Further, such students should be encouraged to develop national rather than provincial perspectives in their search for employment. They can be shown the Geographic Distribution chart for teaching majors which indicates that, while the vast majority of positions taken remain in-state, there appear to be increasing opportunities in other regions of the country. The Career Distribution chart provides the additional information on non-teaching occupations that some teaching majors may find considerably more than just menial positions.

Pre-law perenially intrigues a large number of students that are uncertain about which majors will best prepare them for law school. One can readily discover how many students in specifically designated pre-law programs (General Business Administration, Humanities, Political Science, Social Science) were admitted to law school the preceding year. But this information is not inclusive. The knowledgeable advisor can point out that the ***Follow-Up Report*** shows that many students with a range of majors apart from those in pre-law entered law schools. For example: Resource Development, History, Philosophy, Accounting, Economics, Financial Administration, Marketing, Communications, Journalism, Telecommunication, Psychology, Public Administration, and Social Work. This information might be of value to prospective law students who are not interested in the available pre-law options and would prefer to select their own major. When advising students, the advisor should be discreet in discussing data about average beginning salaries. Such information may be relevant if presented with all the factors in the situation. For example, some uninformed students, predominately women, expressed an interest in Nursing but were apprehensive because they thought beginning salaries in the field were low. They were surprised to learn that the average beginning salary reported by sixty-two Nursing graduates was $18,766, **$1,096** above the all-University average, and in terms of college averages, was surpassed only by Engineering graduates. Exclusive of Engineering majors, Nursing graduates placed eleventh in average salary throughout this University's numerous undergraduate programs. The Nursing average was lower than only four of the fifteen Business majors offered.

Average beginning salaries can be misleading. In reading the current ***Follow-Up Report,*** I noticed that salary was not reported for a major with only six graduates. Upon inspection of the listing for that major, I noted that one student reported his occupation as a profes-

sional football player who had recently completed a successful rookie season, winning one game by kicking a field goal with time running out. Without question his salary would have dramatically skewed the average for his major, since three of the six were graduate students and another was touring Europe. I want to see how the million dollar plus salary of Earvin "Magic" Johnson, superstar of the Los Angeles Lakers, will affect the average salary for his major when it is listed in the ***Follow-Up Report.***

Students who have studied and enjoyed foreign languages in high school, and continue taking language courses at the University, may wonder how these courses fit into major programs, since language is a rare requirement in the University's undergraduate programs. If these students want to continue their language training and not prepare for teaching, the major they should consider is Travel and Tourism Management in the School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management. This program requires three years of a major foreign language and provides the opportunity of combining interest in language study with a practical, business-oriented degree program. The ***Follow-Up Report*** reveals that Travel and Tourism is a small major and a majority of its graduates take positions related to their preparations at an average salary below the all-University average.

Occasionally I talk with students who have the capacity to perform competently in the sciences and are interested in medicine but would prefer to major in non-science areas. There are some medical schools that welcome graduates in the humanities and social sciences if they have met the minimum science requirements for admission. But the ***Follow-Up Report,*** shows an almost negligible number of non-science majors (Telecommunication and Psychology, e.g.) admitted to medical schools. In light of this information, it is best to be direct and honest in advising students interested in medicine but not as science majors. They must be told that it is possible to gain admission to medical school from any major, assuming they have satisfied the minimum science requirements, but on the basis of this institution's data, the odds of being admitted do not appear favorable. This is one example of how placement data can qualify information based on assumptions and hearsay.

Many students are vaguely interested in health-oriented careers but lack knowledge about the numerous majors in such careers. The ***Follow-Up Report*** is useful in exposing these students to opportunities that are available in health careers. After attempting to discern in what sort of work the students might be interested, I discuss several majors that might be attractive options to explore. They are:

> Animal Science - Food Science - Therapeutic Recreation - Music Therapy - Audiology and Speech Science - Health Education - Special Education - Biomedical Concentration in an Engineering Major - Dietetics - Family and Community Services - Foods and Nutrition - Nutritional Science - Medical Technology - Microbiology and Public Health - Psychology and Social Work.

The ***Follow-Up Report*** indicates that the prospects for these majors range from good to excellent.

A continuing problem confronting the Undergraduate University Division advisors is finding appropriate majors for a large number of students whose first preference is Business. Their chances are bleak to nonexistent because of that College's highly competitive admission requirements as a junior. We as advisors make maximum use of the

Follow-Up Report; in doing so we contribute significantly to student retention. The advisor can refer to a range of business-and-management-oriented majors in at least five colleges other than Business.

> 1) The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources offers majors in Agricultural Engineering Technology, Agri-Business, Building Construction, Food Systems Economics and Management, Packaging, Public Affairs Management, and the Administration, Commercial Recreation, and Program Management Emphases in Parks and Recreation Resources.
> **2)** The College of Communication Arts and Sciences offers Advertising, the Business Emphasis in Communication, and Telecommunication.
> 3) The College of Engineering offers an Engineering Arts program which allows a heavy concentration in Economics, Marketing, and Management.
> 4) The largest major in the College of Human Ecology is Merchandising Management (formerly Retailing with nearly one hundred percent women but now attracting a growing number of male majors). Finally,
> 5) the College of Social Science offers Public Administration, Urban Planning, Landscape Architecture, and an Employment Relations Emphasis in the general Social Science major.

The ***Follow-Up*** lists these majors as viable alternatives to majors in the College of Business.

Many more illustrations of how the ***Follow-Up Report*** can be effectively utilized in academic advising could be presented, but the examples above convey an adequate overview. Each year I study the report. I am saddened by the number of students who report such occupations as waitress, receptionist, hostess, secretary, bus driver, common laborer, switchboard operator, cashier, waiter, bartender, orderly, and janitor. I know that most of them will improve their lot, and I feel certain tha a two-year or three-year follow-up will bear me out. Many of the students working in those areas may be part-time graduate students; may be waiting for their spouses to graduate; or, may be doing exactly what they want to for the time being.

A close study of the ***Follow-Up Report,*** not a high priority item for many advisors, can be a rewarding, broadening, and enlightening experience. Indeed, I feel strongly that advisors whose responsibility is to assist students explore the bewildering range of options available at a large institution are derelict in their roles if they do not scrutinize placement data in a thoughtful manner and utilize the information effectively and imaginatively in the advising situation. This thoughtful approach is enhanced at Michigan State by maintaining a corps of highly trained and knowledgeable advisors in the Undergraduate University Division who report to the Assistant Provost for Undergraduate Education and therefore have no direct connection with particular departments, programs, or colleges. Their primary concern is for the welfare and success of the individual student. And the more they know about the University, including the most current placement data, the more effective they will be in actuating that concern. Also, on the administrative level, advisors contribute substantially to the high retention rate at this unversity. The challenge is to know the University well enough to assist students to discover the majors that most fully accommodate their interests, skills, intellectual abilities, and career aspirations. The ***Follow-Up Report*** is one of the most useful resources in accomplishing this objective.

FIGURE 1
ALL UNIVERSITY CAREER DISTRIBUTION SUMMARY

CAREER CLASSIFICATION	BACHELORS No.	BACHELORS Percent	MASTERS No.	MASTERS Percent	DOCTORS No.	DOCTORS Percent	TOTAL No.	TOTAL Percent
Accounting-Public	159	3.23%	14	.97%	0	.00%	173	2.46%
Aerospace & Components	41	.83%	11	.76%	3	.45%	55	.78%
Agricultural Industries	95	1.93%	16	1.10%	8	1.21%	119	1.69%
Art, Drama, & Related Arts	75	1.53%	16	1.10%	2	.30%	93	1.32%
Automotive & Mechanical Equipment	201	4.09%	50	3.45%	3	.45%	254	3.62%
Banking. Finance and Insurance	181	3.68%	26	1.79%	1	.15%	208	2.96%
Chemicals. Drugs. & Allied Products	71	1.44%	18	1.24%	15	2.27%	104	1.48%
Construction and Building Materials Manufacturers	51	1.04%	8	.55%	0	.00%	59	.84%
Education	21	.43%	17	1.17%	0	.00%	38	.54%
Elem. & Secondary	235	4.78%	360	24.83%	49	7.42%	644	9.17%
Comm. & Jr. Colleges	11	.22%	14	.97%	10	1.52%	35	.50%
Coll. & Universities	95	1.93%	101	6.97%	192	29.09%	388	5.52%
Electrical Machinery &Equipment	187	3.80%	31	2.14%	0	.00%	218	3.10%
Electronics & Instruments	88	1.79%	6	.41%	3	.45%	97	1.38%
Food & Bev. Processing	91	1.85%	17	1.17%	5	.76%	113	1.61%
Glass, Paper, Packaging & Allied Products	66	1.34%	13	.90%	0	.00%	79	1.12%
Government	0	.00%	10	.69%	3	.45%	13	.19%
Government-City	22	.45%	13	.90%	2	.30%	37	.53%
Government-County	24	.49%	10	.69%	1	.15%	35	.50%
Government-State	52	1.06%	24	1.66%	4	.61%	80	1.14%
Government- Federal	47	.96%	39	2.69%	10	1.52%	96	1.37%
Graduate School	873	17.76%	240	16.55%	24	3.64%	1137	16.18%
Hotels, Motels, Resorts &Restaurants	217	4.41%	9	.62%	4	.61%	230	3.27%
Homemaker	24	.49%	11	.76%	0	.00%	35	.50%
Medical Services	256	5.21%	79	5.45%	257	38.94%	592	8.43%
Mrchndsng. & Related Svcs.	399	8.12%	15	1.03%	1	.15%	415	5.91%
Metals & Metal Prod.	17	.35%	1	.07%	0	.00%	18	.26%
Military	68	1.38%	13	.90%	2	.30%	83	1.18%
Petroleum & Allied Products - Incl. Nat. Gas	24	.49%	15	1.03%	5	.76%	44	.63%
Printing, Publishing & Advertising	103	2.10%	15	1.03%	0	.00%	118	1.68%
Public Utilities	61	1.24%	22	1.52%	3	.45%	86	1.22%
Recreation and Related Services	50	1.02%	10	.69%	0	.00%	60	.85%
Research and/or Consulting Svcs.	176	3.58%	35	2.41%	9	1.36%	220	3.13%
Self Employed	41	.83%	14	.97%	6	.91%	61	.87%
Tire and Rubber	2	.04%	1	.07%	0	.00%	3	.04%
Transportation	37	.75%	5	.34%	0	.00%	42	.60%
Volunteer Organizations - Peace Corps, Vista, etc.	33	.67%	11	.76%	3	.45%	47	.67%
Other	17	.35%	22	1.52%	10	1.52%	49	.70%
Deceased	3	.06%	0	.00%	1	.15%	4	.06%
Unemployed - Seeking Employment	674	13.71%	109	7.52%	24	3.64%	807	11.49%
Unemployed - Not Seeking Employment	28	.57%	9	.62%	0	.00%	37	.53%
Total Students Reporting	**4,916**	**100.00%**	**1,450**	**100.00%**	**660**	**100.00%**	**7,026**	**100.00%**
No Response	**2,310**		**534**		**173**		**3,017**	
Total Graduates	**7,226**		**1,984**		**833**		**10,043**	

FIGURE 2.
ALL UNIVERSITY GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION SUMMARY

	BACHELORS		MASTERS		DOCTORS		TOTAL	
STATE	**No.**	**Percent**	**No.**	**Percent**	**No.**	**Percent**	**No.**	**Percent**
ALABAMA	7	.14%	1	.07%	3	.45%	11	.16%
ALASKA	1	.02%	1	.07%	1	.15%	3	.04%
ARIZONA	31	.63%	4	.28%	6	.91%	41	.58%
ARKANSAS	3	.06%	1	.07%	2	.30%	6	.09%
CALIFORNIA	198	4.03%	36	2.48%	26	3.94%	260	3.70%
COLORADO	49	1.00%	9	.62%	5	.76%	63	.90%
CONN.	24	.49%	9	.62%	4	.61%	37	.53%
DELAWARE	5	.10%	3	.21%	2	.30%	10	.14%
DIST. OF COL.	37	.75%	13	.90%	5	.76%	55	.78%
FLORIDA	70	1.42%	15	1.03%	11	1.67%	96	1.37%
GEORGIA	31	.63%	2	.14%	5	.76%	38	.54%
HAWAIIAN ISL.	3	.06%	5	.34%	4	.61%	12	.17%
IDAHO	4	.08%	0	.00%	1	.15%	5	.07%
ILLINOIS	239	4.86%	44	3.03%	21	3.18%	304	4.33%
INDIANA	73	1.48%	13	.90%	9	1.36%	95	1.35%
IOWA	16	.33%	6	.41%	3	.45%	25	.36%
KANSAS	8	.16%	5	.34%	3	.45%	16	.23%
KENTUCKY	8	.16%	4	.28%	1	.15%	13	.19%
LOUISIANA	7	.14%	4	.28%	1	.15%	12	.17%
MAINE	6	.12%	3	.21%	1	.15%	10	.14%
MARYLAND	29	.59%	8	.55%	8	1.21%	45	.64%
MASS.	51	1.04%	10	.69%	13	1.97%	74	1.05%
MICHIGAN	3164	64.36%	942	64.97%	319	48.33%	4425	62.98%
MINNESOTA	28	.57%	13	.90%	2	.30%	43	.61%
MISSISSIPPI	2	.04%	3	.21%	1	.15%	6	.09%
MISSOURI	49	1.00%	6	.41%	7	1.06%	62	.88%
MONTANA	0	.00%	0	.00%	4	.61%	4	.06%
NEBRASKA	3	.06%	1	.07%	4	.61%	8	.11%
NEVADA	0	.00%	2	.14%	1	.15%	3	.04%
NEW HAMPSHIRE	6	.12%	0	.00%	1	.15%	7	.10%
NEWJERSEY	42	.85%	7	.48%	6	.91%	55	.78%
NEW MEXICO	4	.08%	3	.21%	2	.30%	9	.13%
NEWYORK	136	2.77%	41	2.83%	20	3.03%	197	2.80%
N. CAROLINA	23	.47%	7	.48%	7	1.06%	37	.53%
N. DAKOTA	2	.04%	1	.07%	0	.00%	3	.04%
OHIO	119	2.42%	32	2.21%	21	3.18%	172	2.45%
OKLAHOMA	16	.33%	2	.14%	5	.76%	23	.33%
OREGON	1	.02%	3	.21%	7	1.06%	11	.16%
PENN.	55	1.12%	11	.76%	18	2.73%	84	1.20%
R. ISLAND	2	.04%	2	.14%	0	.00%	4	.06%
S. CAROLINA	9	.18%	1	.07%	2	.30%	12	.17%
S. DAKOTA	1	.02%	3	.21%	1	.15%	5	.07%
TENNESSEE	9	.18%	3	.21%	4	.61%	16	.23%
TEXAS	155	3.15%	30	2.07%	14	2.12%	199	2.83%
UTAH	5	.10%	3	.21%	2	.30%	10	.14%
VERMONT	6	.12%	3	.21%	0	.00%	9	.13%
VIRGINIA	32	.65%	7	.48%	8	1.21%	47	.67%
WASHINGTON	9	.18%	9	.62%	3	.45%	21	.30%
W. VIRGINIA	3	.06%	1	.07%	3	.45%	7	.10%
WISCONSIN	48	.98%	13	.90%	15	2.27%	76	1.08%
WYOMING	4	.08%	1	.07%	0	.00%	5	.07%
FOREIGN	78	1.59%	102	7.03%	47	7.12%	227	3.23%
OTHER	5	.10%	2	.14%	1	.15%	8	.11%
Total Students Reporting	4,916	100.00%	1,450	100.00%	660	100.00%	7,026	100.00%
No Response	2,310		534		173		3,017	
Total Graduates	7,226		1,984		833		10,043	