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## Those Low Grades in College May Haunt Your Job Search

By DAVID KOEPPPEL



When employers consider job applicants who are just out of college, they will probably look for evidence of leadership, teamwork and flexibility. But if you ask Johnny C. Taylor Jr., senior vice president of human resources for the IAC/InterActiveCorp, the factor that matters most to him is a graduate's grade-point average.

In his 15 years as a human resources professional, Mr. Taylor said, he has found that a young applicant's G.P.A. is the best single predictor of job performance in the first few years of employment.

Mr. Taylor is not alone in that opinion — much to the dismay of some students and career counselors. For better or worse, grade-point average has become increasingly important to employers in a wide range of industries.

“Companies want the smartest people, and the best indicator for new employees competing in a knowledge-based economy are grades,” said Mr. Taylor, whose company has 33,000 employees worldwide and owns 60 businesses including Ticketmaster, Match.com and the Home Shopping Network. “G.P.A. is the best indicator an individual is likely to succeed,” Mr. Taylor said. “It demonstrates a strong work ethic and smarts.”

When hiring executive assistants, for example, the company closely scrutinizes G.P.A. to ensure that they have “problem-solving skills” rather than just the ability to answer a telephone, Mr. Taylor said.

Not every company puts as much emphasis on college grades as IAC, but many use it as an important factor in weeding out lower-achieving students from the interview process. Often companies will advise college admissions officers and recruiters that they will not see anyone with less than a B (3.0) average. In some ultracompetitive industries or companies the cutoff point is even higher.

In its Job Outlook 2007 survey, the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that 66 percent of employers screen candidates by G.P.A., and 58 percent of those surveyed said they would be much less likely to hire graduates with grades averaging less than a 3.0. This cutoff makes it even more critical for average or below average students to take advantage of college internships and leadership positions in extracurricular activities, job experts say.

Every year Trudy Steinfeld, executive director of the Wasserman Center for Career Development at [New York University](#), spends a significant amount of time imploring companies to broaden their criteria by considering students with lower grades who have a strong record elsewhere.

Ms. Steinfeld and her colleagues try to assist students who show social, leadership and communications skills — intangibles that cannot always be quantified on a résumé. She said she was seeing a growing fixation on numbers to predict job performance. In some cases, companies are also asking for college graduates' SAT scores.

“Employers are trying to predict who’s going to be better able to hit the ground running,” she said. “G.P.A.’s can tell you who’s a better student, that’s true. They assume a high G.P.A. will make someone successful. But being a successful employee requires social and communication skills. Nobody even cares about G.P.A. after a few years.”

Ms. Steinfeld said that in the past it was generally the financial and accounting companies demanding high grades as an important hiring criteria. But in the last few years she has seen that trend expand to include consulting, retail training programs, science and technology and consumer products. She recommends that students learn which industries and which companies have G.P.A. requirements.

The reasons employers cite for increased interest in grade-point averages include heightened competition for jobs, abundant college graduates and the cost of training new employees.

But by placing too much emphasis on G.P.A., employers are missing out on “a lot of diamonds in the rough,” said Terese Corey Blanck, founder of College to Career Inc., a company in Minneapolis that offers

seminars, publications and consulting to college students and their parents.

“Hiring managers who use G.P.A.’s as a major success predictor do not understand the full capacity of human potential,” Ms. Corey Blanck said. “You can have all these wonderful skills, but your G.P.A. isn’t high enough so the door might not be open for you.”

That wasn’t the case for Justin Kirk, a New York University senior whose 3.3 G.P.A. as an economics major was considered below the standards of the most competitive investment banking companies.

Mr. Kirk, who was hired in September by Houlihan Lokey in Houston as an investment analyst, credited his extensive summer job experience and leadership role in the school’s economics honor society for quelling any doubts about his grades.

“The cutoff in investment banking is somewhere around a 3.5,” he said. “Someone like me might have a lower G.P.A. because they were always working and always busy with extracurricular activities. I wanted to stand out, and I knew I had to be more than just my grades.”

Ms. Corey Blanck advises many students with lower grade-point averages to aim for smaller or lesser-known companies. After establishing a reputation there, consider the option of reapplying to the company of your choice at a later date, she said.

Tory Johnson, the chief executive of Women for Hire in New York, which coordinates job fairs and seminars around the country, understands why employers would be attracted to students with high G.P.A.’s. But she also says that students with lower grades do not have to

give up on their dream jobs, as long as they are willing to work harder at networking and meeting potential employers face to face.

She tells recent graduates never to put a grade-point average that is below 3.0 on a résumé. “That is like saying ‘Hi, I’m mediocre,’ ” she says.

Instead of being screened out immediately, the candidate who omits that statistic has a better chance to have an interview and an opportunity to explain lower grades or to use it to possible advantage.

Jeff Man, 25, a 2004 graduate from the [University of Delaware](#), was embarrassed about having a G.P.A. below 3.0 but was able to finesse the issue by doing what many experts suggest: playing up his G.P.A. in his major, which was 3.1. He is working as a production assistant for a new cable network, Retirement Living Television, in Columbia, Md.

Another suggestion from Ms. Johnson and others is to play up the grade-point average from junior and senior years, if it is a significant improvement over earlier years.

Experts say that working one’s way through school, supporting a family, or dealing with family illness, can be acceptable and even admirable reasons for a low G.P.A.

“That’s why God made entry-level positions,” said Steven Jungman, division director for ChaseCom, a recruiting company in Houston with clients like AT & T and Waste Management.

“If you were busing tables for four years and getting home at midnight,” he said, “those books can seem mighty heavy.”