

Tech skills important, but written and verbal key

By James Challenger

As the nation's roughly 2 million college freshmen take the first steps on their career paths, the employment experts at global outplacement consultancy Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc., offered some advice on which areas could offer the most fertile employment landscape over the next decade.

"It is a good idea to at least be armed with information about where job growth is expected to remain strong in order to make the best decisions about one's course selections," said John A. Challenger, chief executive officer of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

"Those who concentrate on courses related to math, science, engineering and technology, will probably have the widest array of options upon graduation. However, it is vital not to overlook

critical coursework in writing, public speaking and courses that sharpen your critical thinking skills. Employers across the country consistently lament the lack of writing and communication skills that are essential in any profession one might pursue," said Challenger.

Indeed, when human resources executives were asked by the Society of Human Resource Management to identify the skills that 2013 graduates were lacking the most, the largest percentage by far pointed to basic writing skills. Nearly half of the HR professionals said last spring's graduates lacked grammar, spelling and other writing skills. Math, which ranked second in the list of skill deficiencies, was selected by 18 percent of respondents.

"Even if you pursue a profession that is desperate for workers, a lack of fundamental written and verbal communica-

tion skills will significantly reduce the chances of being considered, let alone hired," said Challenger.

Challenger provided the following list of fields and professions that are expected to experience strong employment gains in the coming years, barring an unexpected shock to the economy.

Big Data – Health care, corporations, government agencies, etc., are all collecting massive information. The demand will be for people who can organize, manage and make sense of all this data.

R&D – Those schooled in biology, chemistry, math, engineering, computer technology, etc., will find opportunities in research and development.

Veterinarians – The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the need for vets to rise 36 percent by 2020.

Medical technicians – As medical

equipment becomes more sophisticated, it requires highly trained individuals to operate, troubleshoot and repair them.

Human Factors Engineers and Ergonomists – Where we work, how we work and when we work have all changed dramatically over the past decade. We will need people who specialize in maximizing efficiency, health, cost, quality, etc. We have companies now where more than half of the employees work from home. Yahoo couldn't do it, so the company ended its work-at-home option. Companies need strategies for managing such a workforce. These workers will have varied backgrounds, including psychology, engineering and technology, design, sociology, administration and management.

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