

student career services

A top-notch education is just the beginning of what Syracuse University offers its students

by denise owen harrigan

School of Management accounting major Karl Halteman '99 doesn't have a degree yet, but he boasts a 3.86 GPA and a resume packed with professional experience. From freshman year forward, he piled up internships: with Carrier Corporation in Syracuse, AT&T in Madrid, and Vanstar in Iselin, New Jersey. Last semester he coordinated all local business internships for the Syracuse University Internship Program—and lined up his own summer post with a Big Six accounting firm. "I'm getting a good idea of how what we learn in the classroom plays out in the real world," says Halteman, who suspects he's probably leading the pack of his fellow job candidates—"but not by much." When resume building in the nineties, you have to start early and progress steadily.

Zeroing in on a career used to be the last great challenge of senior year. Today it's a pressing issue even for first-year students, accelerated by job market pressures and the cost-consciousness of students and their parents. "With the high cost of higher education, students and parents ask tougher questions about the marketability of an SU degree," acknowledges Barry L. Wells, vice president for Student Affairs and dean of Student Relations. "We're giving this expectation of gainful employment the same serious attention as students' intellectual and personal growth. It's central to the University's vision of becoming the nation's leading student-centered research university."

In 1997, a task force took a hard look at SU's considerable network of career services. "There were more services than many of us were aware of—some central, and some located within the schools and colleges," explains Susan J. Crockett, dean of the College for Human Development and task force chair. "One of our challenges is not to duplicate services, and another is to help students understand where each service fits into different stages of career development."

The Center for Career Services (CCS), for instance, has a staff of 10 and serves the needs of the entire student body by bringing in recruiters, listing jobs, scheduling interviews, counseling students, and teaching the etiquette of the job hunt—such as providing pointers on resume writing, interviewing, and networking. CCS's corporate-like offices in the Schine Student Center are loaded with the latest technological tools, including software that speeds student resumes to employers via the Internet.

On the other hand, Career Exploration Services in The College of Arts and Sciences has a cozier feel and a different goal; it helps students address preliminary questions such as: "What would I love to

Students and professionals gather in Goldstein Auditorium for the 1998 Career Fair.

study?" and "How can I turn what I love to do into something the world needs?" "With many of our Arts and Sciences students, everything is still wide open," observes Deb Coquillon, the college's career services director. "That's the challenge here—and the opportunity."

While today's students display more career savvy than ever, there's still a disparity in the degree of focus. Some new students confidently declare a major and make a beeline toward their career goals. Others arrive less sure and, without gentle but persistent nudging, may have only a vague sense of professional direction by the time they reach graduation. Most students fall somewhere in between.

Typical of the early-to-focus graduate is Matt McFadden '98. Before he enrolled at SU, McFadden and his father discussed the future of the marketplace, forecast huge growth and opportunities in information systems, and selected a management information systems/information studies major in the School of Management and School of Information Studies. McFadden also set his sights on a career with Procter & Gamble Company in Cincinnati, his hometown. Getting an interview seemed assured, since his father had been with Procter & Gamble for 25 years. But McFadden quickly learned that nepotism is a no-no at Procter & Gamble. They recruit by the book.

Early in his sophomore year, McFadden approached Procter & Gamble about a summer job, using his 3.94 GPA as a calling card. "That got me in the door," he says, "but they still blew me off. They were looking for experience.

"I knew you acquired experience through internships, and you found internships by networking. Our professors really ingrain that in us," says McFadden, who scoured databases in the School of Management and the Center for Career Services looking for internship opportunities and alumni contacts. He soon landed a plum summer internship at GE Aircraft in Cincinnati, where he helped develop a multimillion-dollar program that organizes data from airplane computers. That fall, McFadden sent Procter & Gamble an updated—and upgraded—resume. Three interviews later, and barely halfway through his college career, McFadden accepted an offer for a lucrative summer position with the employer of his dreams.

Naml Lewis '98 also entered SU with a clear sense of direction. Excellent in math and science, he majored in mechanical engineering at the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science because he knew he could quickly convert that degree into a job. "I'm from Newark, New Jersey, and from a low-income background," Lewis explains. "So a job was important."

To bolster his marketability, Lewis spent three semesters in the college's Cooperative Education Program, earning academic credit for placements with Dow Corning in Michigan and North Carolina. At the start of his senior year, he launched a serious hunt for a permanent job—in a totally different field. "I suddenly realized I have

an entrepreneurial spirit," explains Lewis. "After a lot of research, I decided to work in security sales for two years, then earn an M.B.A. and become an independent financial advisor. I'd specifically like to help small African American businesses find capital, and help people in low-income communities meet their financial goals, like sending their kids to college."

Lewis is now waiting to hear from several financial firms with whom he interviewed. "I'm nervous, because I don't have a job yet," he admits. "But I'm young, I have a dream, and I'm really trying to make it happen."

Both Lewis and McFadden have had career counseling from their academic departments, plus coaching from the Center for Career Services' interim director, Kelley Bishop. "At SU, most students tap into career services at a variety of venues. It's like shopping at the mall," Bishop explains. "You usually don't buy everything in one store."

Lewis turned to Bishop when it was time to line up interviews



CIGNA representatives Pam Joell, senior consultant for corporate relations (far left), and Anthony Percival '95, technical analyst (second from right), entertain questions from students.

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with investment firms and repackage his mechanical engineering degree for a financial market. "I was impressed with Naml's wish to leverage his education to help the African American community," says Bishop, "and I encouraged him to follow his dream. Going to college is about something much grander than getting a job. Our role is not just to construct resumes; it's to help students assess their values, their strengths, and themselves."

Lewis's engineering background was versatile. He'd completed a rigorous academic program; he had a lot of experience converting theory into practice; and he was familiar with scientific methodology, which is important in any financial field. Why shouldn't he dream big?

"I see my job as helping students navigate the transition between college and career," Bishop says. "It's a major transition, because getting a degree doesn't automatically earn you a great career. That's something you have to work at, and we're here to help. My role is to help students harness and leverage their SU education. These students are bright, ambitious, articulate, and worldly. But when it comes to dealing with employers, they don't know

what to emphasize. It's a matter of articulation. We have to show them how the game is played."

One of the game's best moves is networking—especially with SU alumni who have valuable professional perspectives. "It's understood that when you contact these alumni, you're asking for advice, not a job," stresses Michael Nahum '98, a School of Management marketing major looking for a job in the entertainment industry. "I've been contacting alumni on the Newhouse database. But first I had to attend seminars to learn to use Newhouse's resources. It's amazing that all this help is available to us."

En route to his summer job with Procter & Gamble, Matt McFadden quickly witnessed the power of alumni connections. In SU's School of Management Career Center he found the name of a management alumnus, Jay Dinwoodie '73, who worked at GE Aircraft. McFadden sent Dinwoodie a resume with a cover letter asking for advice, then followed up with a phone call. "He picked up the phone and said, 'Hey, what's up?'" McFadden remembers.

The School of Management Career Center also keeps an alumni database with 2,000 names, plus a corporate listing of more than 1,000 contacts. "This career center almost pleads with students to pursue the job openings in its newsletter and on its website," says Scotty Andrews, Career Center director. "We sometimes have trouble rounding up enough students for interviews. Our students have so many opportunities."

The College for Human Development aspires to a similar predicament of more jobs than students to fill them. To help generate placement and internship opportunities it has established national and regional advisory boards in restaurant management, retailing, and fashion. The college's director of career development spends a half-day each week in the Center for Career Services to encourage Human Development students to take advantage of the full range of career resources. "We've been concentrating on improving career services for the past three years," says Dean Susan J. Crockett. "In a professional school like ours, we have a special obligation to help our students segue into their careers."

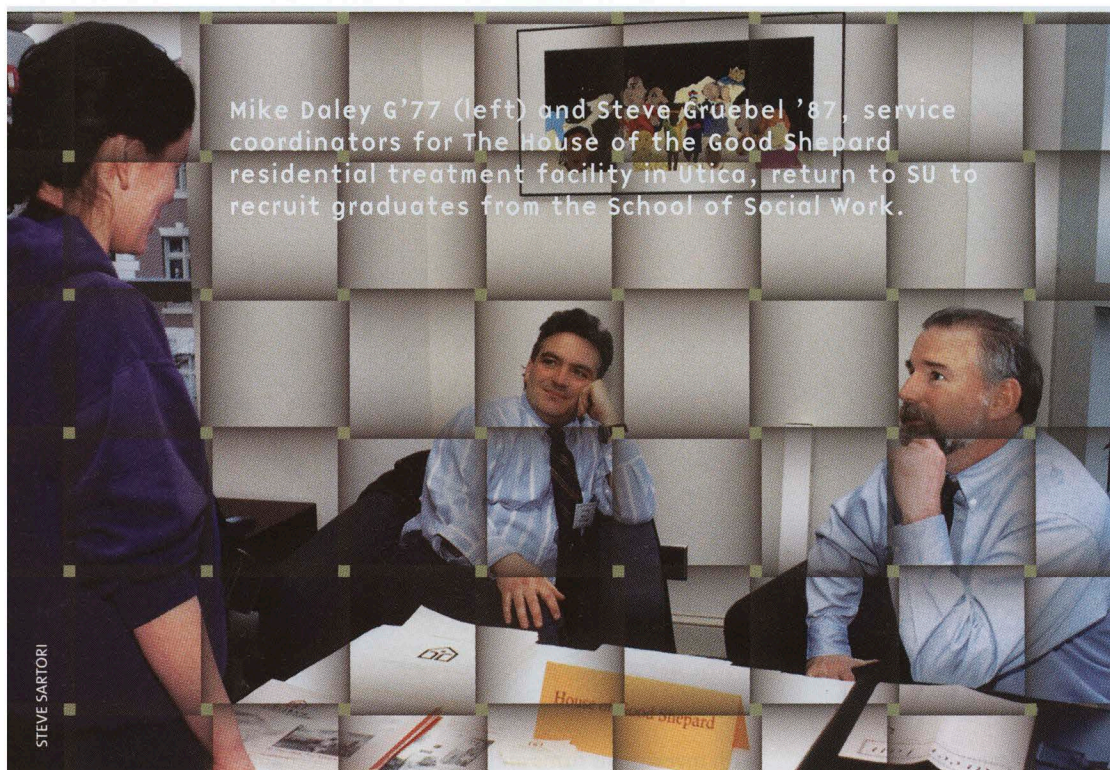
Almost all Human Development majors take a one-credit career course that helps them anticipate—and navigate—the professional development path that lies ahead. "Hopefully it opens their eyes and motivates them to set higher goals," Crockett says. "Of course, you can't make them do it. Ultimately, the responsibility for career development lies with the student."

The one career development tool that's almost universally used at SU is experiential learning. With academic credit as the carrot, students flock to these temporary job placements at some of the region's and nation's most high profile organizations. Placements that are integrally linked to the academic curriculum and completed during the academic

year are generally termed co-ops. Internships are more apt to be electives, taken in the summer, with or without pay. Internships are available through the various career centers and the Syracuse University Internship Program (SUIP), which coordinates about 700 placements a year.

"Internships have become an essential component of a college degree," notes Carmel Piccoli, SUIP coordinator. "Students use them to explore career options, gain practical experience, and make very valuable connections."

Bioengineering major Cathryn Ungermann '98 completed two summer internships at the SUNY Health Science Center at Syracuse. One focused on osteoporosis, the other on muscle loss due to aging. Neither turned out to be of major interest to Ungermann, but she says the experience did a lot to help her focus on the future. "As a senior you are overwhelmed by the number of directions you can take," she says. "So far I've applied for positions with the Peak Performance software company and the Olympic Training Center



Mike Daley G'77 (left) and Steve Gruebel '87, service coordinators for The House of the Good Shepard residential treatment facility in Utica, return to SU to recruit graduates from the School of Social Work.

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"We chatted for a while, then he offered to forward my resume to GE's recruiting people."

After GE Aircraft made him a job offer, McFadden learned that his SU contact was the company's chief information officer. "It was complete luck," he marvels. "I sent my resume to someone two steps from the top. He must have been really busy, but he took the time to shoot the breeze with a 19-year-old."

Alumni networking is especially essential for S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications students, whose nationally acclaimed Career Development Center keeps a database of 2,400 well-positioned graduates. "We post job listings, but we don't encourage students to wait for them; in this field, that's the lazy way of looking for a job," explains Karen McGee, director of the center. "What's unique about communications is that it's so unpredictable; there are always new projects starting up with just a few weeks' lead time. So you have to get out there and network. In communications, it's important who you know."

because my goal is to one day work with Olympic athletes. However, I may need a master's degree for that. In the meantime, I'm also looking into selling MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) equipment and orthopedic implants."

Refining goals and articulating what they've learned are key skills for job-seeking students. College of Arts and Sciences psychology major Michael Glennan '98, who recently accepted a consulting position with Deloitte & Touche in New York City, considers the time spent on self-evaluation well invested. Price Waterhouse, which also offered him a position, asked Glennan probing questions about his experience with SU's Soling Program, in which small teams of SU students tackle real challenges of organizations.

Acting on a suggestion from the Center for Career Services, he registered twice for the Soling Program. "It parallels what you'd do if you were working as a consultant," explains Glennan, whose Soling assignments included helping a motivational speaking firm set goals for expansion and creating a promotional CD-ROM. "The Soling Program is structured to include weekly evaluations and comprehensive final presentations," Glennan says. "The project's completely in your hands, so it's a very intense experience. You learn a lot about teamwork, technology, and creative problem solving, which are big buzzwords in today's job market."

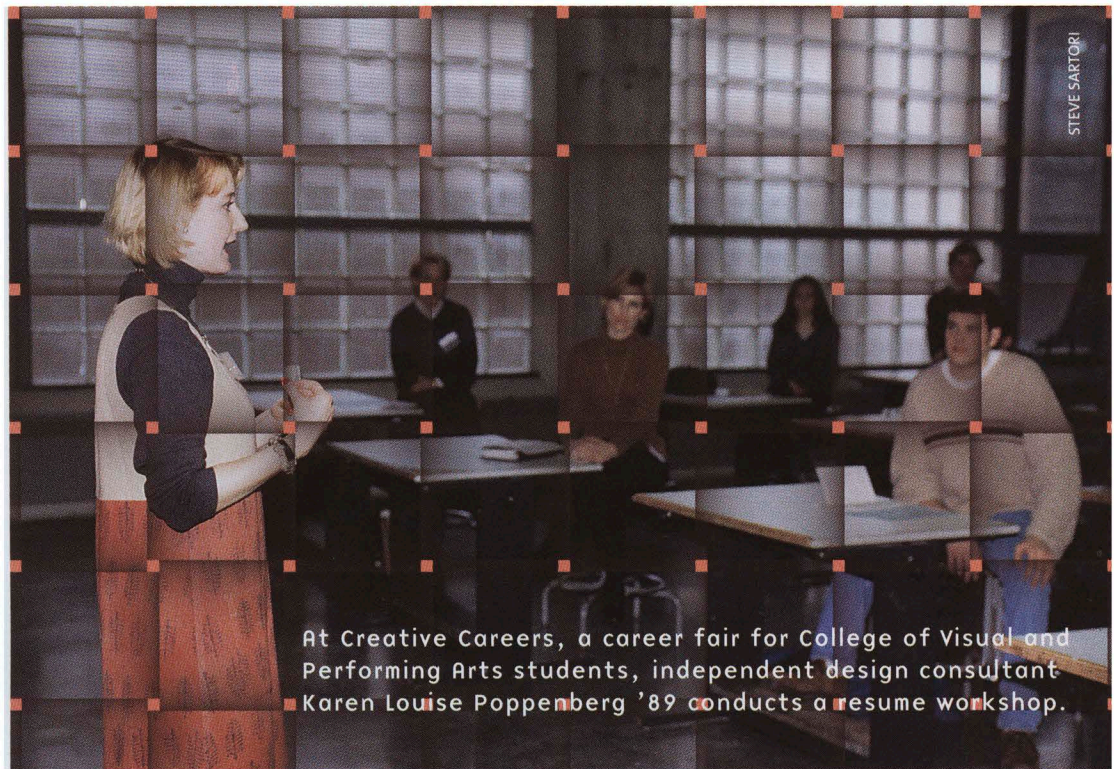
A significant finding by SU's Career Services Task Force was that faculty advisors play a pivotal role in career development. Professor William Coplin, chair of the Public Affairs Program and a proponent of the policy studies major, illustrates the profound impact faculty can have on students' careers. "While public service lies at the heart of the policy studies major, I am also very career-oriented," acknowledges Coplin, who publishes a career guide titled *Policy Studies for Your Heart, Mind & Wallet*.

"Arts and Sciences programs traditionally pay more attention to the students' intellects than to their careers," Coplin says. "While I believe my students should be able to hold their own against philosophers, they should also be able to do a bar graph. My students are generalists, but they have skills. It's not antithetical. In the course Methods of Public Policy Analysis and Presentation, my students perform an extensive statistical analysis for real clients. It's a nightmare for them, but it's a substantial piece of work, often involving 200 respondents. It's totally theirs, and it gets them their first job interviews. At least 10 percent of my students go into consulting, where they do exactly the kind of work they've done in my classes."

To generate support—and alumni mentors—for policy studies, Coplin personally publishes a newsletter. "I also have a mentoring file," reports Coplin, a Laura J. and L. Douglas Meredith Professor of Teaching Excellence. "When students start looking for jobs, I ask where they want to settle and put them in touch with my graduates. Once they're established, I start sending students to them."

Andrew Finger '00, who's been weighing potential majors with the help of Career Exploration Services in The College of Arts and Sciences, took Coplin's class during the spring semester—and found what he's been seeking. "I liked the subject matter, and I liked Professor Coplin; he's funny, and he's always thinking about what we're going to do in the real world," says Finger. "I'm getting ready to go over and have lunch with him to talk about my decision. He always encourages us to join him for lunch before class."

Thanks to professors like Coplin, carefully tended alumni databases, cutting-edge technology, and committed career counselors, SU students have more career focus—and more career potential—than ever. Maryam Robati '94 noticed a big difference when she was on campus recently, recruiting for the mega-advertising agency Young & Rubicam New York. "On a lot of campuses I've visited, we've had to advertise to get students to our presentations," Robati says. "At SU, the Center for Career Services handled the promotion and we had a great turnout. Many schools pour their ener-



At Creative Careers, a career fair for College of Visual and Performing Arts students, independent design consultant Karen Louise Poppenberg '89 conducts a resume workshop.

gy into marketing graduate students, but SU makes a huge effort to market its undergraduates as well.

"When I was a student, I didn't really take advantage of career services, and neither did a lot of my friends," Robati says. "I found my first job—with J. Crew, in human resources—by chance, through a sorority sister. The SU students I met this year were very focused. I was proud to take their resumes back with me."

"We had 65 students attend, one of the largest turnouts we've seen," she continues. "These students were very professional. They asked good questions and knew a lot about advertising. And they had to brave 20 inches of snow to get to our presentation!"

Career Services interim director Kelley Bishop takes almost paternal pride in the impression these students make on recruiters like Robati. "The driving force on this campus is that we really love these students and want to do all we can to help them succeed," Bishop says. "We know they're going to be great. They cannot always see that, but we can."