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member of Interact Club, Beta Club, Spanish Club, Science Club, Book Club and Drama Club, Westview marching band and concert band. Tennessee Governor's School for the scientific exploration of Tennessee Heritage at ETSU, swing dance group with Mrs. DeMartinez, and makeup artist and understudy for Westview plays. Martin First United Methodist Youth group and Hands for Him sign language group. She plans to attend University of Ten-

nessee at Chattanooga.

Kaleigh Cross-Brown, daughter of Ricky and Melaine Brown, ranks ninth in the Class of 2017. She is a member of Book Club, Drama Club, Key Club, Science Club, French Club and the Colorguard. She plans to attend Trevecca University.

Chelsi Spencer, daughter of David and Staci Spencer, ranks 10th in the Class of 2017. She is a member of Beta Club, Interact Club and HOSA. She plans to attend Union University.



Employment: The next step after graduation

Graduation is an exciting time in the lives of students. After years in the classroom preparing for life after school, graduation marks a time when students are finally ready to enter the "real world" and land their first professional job.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics advises that earning a college degree can greatly improve a person's chance of landing a job. The more education a person receives, the lower his or her prospects of being unemployed become. The BLS said that, as of 2014, individuals with a bachelor's degree could earn on average \$1,101 per week, compared to \$668 for persons with high school diplomas. Those with bachelor's degrees had a 3.5 percent unemployment rate compared to 6 percent for those with only high school diplomas.

The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that roughly two million students earn bachelor's degrees each year. Many others will go on to earn master's or doctorates

before entering the workforce.

As the economy continues to improve, job prospects follow suit. According to a job outlook from the National Association of Colleges and Employers, employers had plans to hire 8.3 percent more new college graduates in 2015 than in 2014. The growth of businesses and the rising rate of retiring Baby Boomers has spurred employment prospects.

Landing a job post-graduation requires diligence on the part of new grads, and the following are a handful of ways to make those pursuits more successful.

- Hit the ground running. It's tempting for recent grads to take the summer off and have a lax approach to job hunting after all of the hard work they put into their education. But recent grads can get a head start on their competition by beginning their searches immediately after earning their degrees. Create a list of a few target companies you have your eye on, and then tap into your network to find a contact at

each company and reach out to that contact directly.

- Focus on a career path. Prospective employers prefer that applicants have some certainty regarding the types of jobs they are looking for. Take a career assessment test or work with a career counselor to narrow down the fields and positions that speak to you. Avoid the "I'm willing to do or learn anything" approach to job applications. Employers may see that as desperation.

- Don't rely entirely on the Internet. Oftentimes, landing a good job requires reaching out to people in person. In a MonsterCollege survey, 78 percent of job-seekers said networking was a factor in their job searches. Standing out from the crowd may involve physically standing out. Attend conferences or speeches from people who work at the companies you're investigating. Don't be afraid to shake some hands and introduce yourself to others.

- Think about what you can offer to prospective employers. Narrow

down your specific skills and customize your résumés or cover letters to the specific talents you can offer each potential employer. Use examples that illustrate these skills from past school courses, volunteerism or part-time jobs. Your "quirks," like being the most punctual person in your group of friends, may turn out to be the skill an employer admires the most. Consider developing a career portfolio that highlights your past achievements.

- Do your homework before an interview or networking opportunity. Always be prepared before an interview or when meeting with someone you are soliciting for job help. Research the company and know its background so you have an idea of how the company runs. Keep a list of questions at the ready. A knowledge of the company can help you stand out from other applicants.

The next step for many after graduation is to find a job that fits with graduates' career goals.

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