

# From education to employment

BY IFAY CHANG  
FOR THE SOMERS RECORD

While people are sending greetings, enjoying holidays and thinking about the New Year, there is an opportunity for everyone to reflect on the past and to share some thoughts with others.

As many young folks are coming back to Somers from colleges to spend the holidays with parents, siblings and friends, I felt an urge to seize this chance to share with them a topic I thought was important to them.

Recently, McKinsey & Company published a 104-page report surveying 8,000 people, interviewing 70, analyzing 100 innovative and effective education programs and focused on the education systems in nine countries, including the United States. This study rightly focused on the twin crises: youth unemployment and unskilled and unemployable youth, which obviously begs the question — why are there so many obstacles between the road from enrolling in higher education to finding a job?

The survey highlighted some observations. For example, 700,000 Japanese youth have withdrawn from society, rarely leaving home, restless youth in a high-unemployment environment. Meanwhile, toppled governments in Egypt and Tunisia and a great number of U.S. Generation Y is forced into dead-end or unpaid jobs. Whose fault is it? What can we do about it?

This report by Mourshed, Farrell and Barton in McKinsey admitted that it did not present solutions, but provided some evidence on the seriousness of the problem, which may be helpful for identifying the mechanisms that better connect education and employment. In the beginning of this century, the creation of PISA (Program for International School Assessment) for the first time offered some data relevant to the efficacy issue of education. PISA tested the abilities of 300,000 15 year-olds across 42 countries (reading, math and science) and collected data on practices of education by country. This is the foundation for nations to assess which interventions are successful and which are dependent on the context of the specific system. However, there is no comprehensive data on 'skills required for employment' or on 'performance of schools in delivering those skills,' which would be very valuable to have. This McKinsey report, nevertheless, did find some useful facts and data which are worth sharing with young college

friends and people concerned with education and employment. Some of the findings can be summarized as follows:

- Only 50 percent of youth in nine nations surveyed believe that their post-secondary studies improved their employment opportunity. Only 44 percent in the U.S. believe so, a sad situation.

- Twelve to 56 percent of employers in nine nations claim skills shortage as the reason for entry-level job vacancies. In the U.S., 45 percent believe so, a serious skill matching problem.

- They live in a separate universe; averaged over 9 nations, 42 percent (U.S. 41 percent) of employers, 72 percent of education providers (U.S. 87 percent) and 45 percent of youth respectively believe the graduates are ready for employment. Meanwhile, 39 percent of education providers versus 9 percent of students believe 'student drop-out' is attributed to 'courses too difficult.'

- Less than half (38 percent) of caring students (caring students place education as important) believe they have a good understanding of what they choose to study leads to a job opportunity. In the U.S., this number is 41 percent.

- The problems in enrolling are cost (31 percent unable to go) and mismatch in study choice (only 46 percent believe they made right choice).

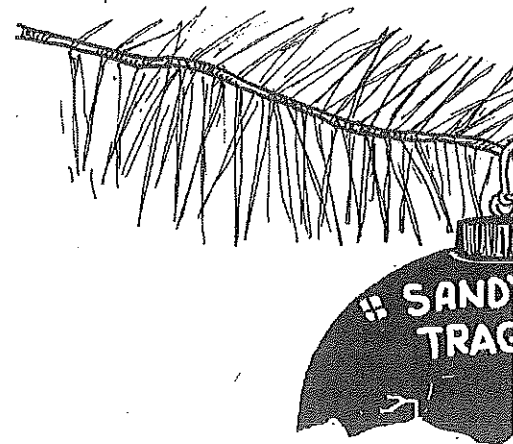
- The problem in skill building is lack of practical training and hands-on experience (68 percent of youth say job training and hands-on experience are most effective instructional techniques).

- The problem in finding a job is due to skill-job mismatch (25 percent of youth are not making a smooth transition).

- Among the effective programs analyzed, there are some common elements: education providers and employers step into each other's world, designing and influencing curricula, bringing workplace into classroom and classroom into workplace, and community-based and personalized student support.

- New incentives and structures are needed for building a more successful 'education to employment' system. Education providers need to collect data on graduates, the cost should be shared among education providers, employers and trainees/students in solving the skill gap, and high-level integrators and overseers are needed.

During the holidays when students are back from colleges sharing time with family, perhaps the following bullets can serve as a good topic for conversation:



NESEMAN @12



## LETTER

### Community unit

Dear Editor:

On Thursday, Dec. 20, I was among the countless viewers who lined Route 100 in Somers to pay respect to Anne Marie Murphy and her family as her funeral procession passed to her final resting place.

She came home again under unimaginable circumstances. The collective outpouring of love, respect and shared grief was palpable in the lines of local citizens; strangers standing shoulder to shoulder, in deafening silence, hands on hearts, tears on cheeks as the procession passed by.

The senseless tragedy of Dec. 14 in Newtown, Conn., is beyond our comprehension and impossible to wrap one's head around. The depth of our pain and sorrow is immeasurable. Both our precious innocents and our perceived innocence were ripped from our lives that day. Our hearts are forever broken by this cataclysmic event. There are no words that make any sense out of such a senseless act.

I was heartened by the obvious camaraderie

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"You need a base," he said.

Alden, a freelancer like me, had taken a job in the editorial department of a leading accounting firm, a position that gave him a salary — his base — and still allowed him time to keep up with his writing career.

Deeply involved in the arts field as writer/editor of a bi-monthly periodical, Arts Management, and as a magazine writer and lecturer, I never had the certainty of a pay check that a job offered. When I heard through the grapevine that Adelphi University in Long Island was exploring the possibility of launching a graduate arts management program, I thought that perhaps this could be my base. I called the director of Adelphi's business school, Robert Carlson, and without suggesting myself as

Lunch ensued and after that, several more meetings. I suggested a new concept, a program specifically oriented to those already working professionally in the arts, offering the option of a one-year certificate or, for candidates wishing to continue an additional year, the opportunity to earn an MBA in arts management. I had found my base. I was hired as program director and, at my option, I served as an adjunct professor, working two to three days a week, but earning close to a regular salary, my first in many years.

When I was drafted and beginning my Army orientation at Camp Kilmer, an opportunity presented itself. Wandering into the day room, I chatted with an inductee seated at a table, typing a list. He told me it was his job

ALVIN H.  
"SKIP" REISS



before he was shipped out to basic training to type three or four duty rosters a day, listing draftees for such "pleasurable" jobs as KP or latrine clean-up. Although I had never learned to type and, in college, only dated girls who were great typists, I volunteered to take over his duties when he left for basic training in several days. He recommended me and through hunt and peck I was able to type the required lists, becoming a hero in my barracks for leaving my new bunkmates off every duty roster.

Another opportunistic moment came years later when my travel agent wife phoned to say that

I was to moderate a panel at the annual American Society of Journalists and Authors conference. I found a substitute moderator and called the executive director of the organization asking her, "If you were offered a free luxury cruise around Italy or instead the opportunity to moderate an ASJA panel, which would you choose?" After she agreed with my choice, I told her that I had found a new moderator.

Another opportunistic moment came just a few weeks ago. After leaving a theater in Greenwich Village, my wife and I just missed an uptown bus. To make matters worse, a giant delivery truck started to unload right in the bus stop, making it difficult to signal any approaching bus. We went into the street and waved to an oncom-

World Center in Brooklyn. The van was on its way to park near Madison Square Garden, where it would hand out educational and outreach materials and candy and goodies in celebration of Hanukkah. Needing a ride uptown, we knocked on the door and they let us in.

We enjoyed our unusual voyage uptown, both the conversation — the driver lived in the Brooklyn neighborhood where I grew up — and the oozy jelly donuts they gave us. As our ride showed, when opportunity knocks, it doesn't hurt to knock back.

*Alvin H. "Skip" Reiss is a resident of Heritage Hills in Somers. This is an excerpt from a new book Mr. Reiss is writing, "In My Anecdotalogue." His email is skipreiss@aol.com.*

## CHANG FROM PAGE 9

First, since skill matching to a desired job is a critical issue for graduates, perhaps a college kid should reflect each year on whether his or her studies matches a desired job or not. Shouldn't college kids ask the professors and the teachers to explain the perception gap in job readiness and how to correct it? Shouldn't the school counselors collect the employers/recruiters' job requirements annually for the sake of students?

Second, since most students claim hands-on as more effective instructional techniques, then a discussion on hands-on curriculum in college is warranted. High

school seniors should ask that question while selecting colleges and current college kids can provide an honest assessment.

The third is a suggestion for education providers. Since cost is a major obstacle for qualified caring students to enroll in a good college, perhaps the education providers should restructure their scholarship and tuition formulas to give domestic students a better deal. Scholarship should not be offered to foreign students except when they are needy with extraordinary academic qualification. Tuitions should be higher for foreign students if the education provider receives any tax dollars from the federal and state governments.

Fourth, the government should allow tax payers to assign a few percent or a fixed amount of their tax dollars to any effective education provider or job-training institute they select to encourage and recognize the education provider's contribution to 'Education to Employment.'

Finally, high school seniors who are applying for colleges should ask the following questions when you apply: Which employers come to recruit your college graduates each year? Does any employer collaborate with the college, offering job training, an internship and/or scholarship? Does the college collect its graduates' employment data? Is the data showing a high rate of employment for students immediately following their

graduation? How many years have they been tracking their graduates' careers? Are they tracked by disciplines?

To improve 'Education To Employment' is not a simple task. However, with educators, employers and students/parents all paying attention to the issue, improve-

ments are inevitable.

*Dr. Ifay Chang is a retired professor (POLY/NYU) and a trustee on the Somers Board of Education.*

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