

Kentucky students speak about bleak job prospects

Our reporters
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On Tuesday, SEP campaigners continued to speak to students at Morehead State University (with some 8,700 undergraduates) in eastern Kentucky. MSU hosted a career fair that attracted a number of students eager to find employment. The region has suffered long-term economic distress. Many students expressed worry over their future prospects.

Among the companies represented were Kroger, Wal-Mart and temp agencies. Also participating, along with these low-wage employers, were local police departments, the Kentucky State Police and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, which operates numerous facilities in Kentucky and West Virginia. A few local manufacturing concerns had displays at the fair, and a large number of tables advertised graduate programs at area universities.

Few if any recruiters were distributing applications. Instead, many of the booths at the event merely stocked informational brochures. Several tables were entirely unstaffed, not even leaving students the possibility of speaking to a representative.

SEP supporters spoke to students as they exited the event.

Devin, a junior majoring in electronics, said of the career fair, "There are some good companies in there, I think. AK Steel pulled me aside. They were looking for interns.

"I'm from Flemingsburg, which is pretty much just a bump in the road between Morehead and Maysville [Kentucky]," Devin said. "The economic situation there is pretty bad. That's the reason why I'm in college. There are no real jobs or industry, just fast food and stuff like that.

"I feel confident in my job search because of my electronics major," he said, but added that in regard to changes he has noticed since coming to Morehead State around the time of the 2008 economic crash, "there's been a big difference, especially for people in other majors. Or things like job security, it doesn't seem like that's there for a lot of people."

SEP supporters elaborated on the party's call for a multi-trillion dollar public works program to provide jobs for the millions of unemployed workers in the US. Devin said, "I think that would be great, the jobs program you're talking about." He added, "I used to lean toward the Democrats. The way I see it now, you're not going to get what you want either way."

Of Barack Obama, he said, "He's doing the best he can. He inherited a big mess." SEP campaigners stressed the role that Obama played on behalf of Wall Street and the banks. Devin showed interest in the campaign and the meeting to explain the socialist program.

Mallory McDonald, a junior set to graduate in the next semester, said she was currently in the field of special education. After graduating, however, Mallory said she would likely pursue a job in real estate or selling insurance. "It's safe," Mallory explained, "and I'm a social person and feel like I would be good at it."

Mallory expressed concerns, however, about graduating with a degree in university studies. "People seem to look down on university studies degrees," she said, "because you don't have a certain field you're going into. In this economy, it's probably better to

know exactly where you're going."

Erting Pan, an accounting major from Guilin in southern China, told us, "I used to be a reporter and editor for a newspaper in China, but I came here to gain experience in accounting, and because my husband and child live here now. It seems like there's more opportunity here."

"I think the United States' economic situation is getting back on track, but in China they are experiencing really high inflation. The yen is increasing in price, and things are getting more difficult in general."

On the political situation in the US and internationally, Erting commented, "I don't pay much attention, but it seems like these things are more government to government and don't include the people too much."

"In China, we have a lot of heavy manufacturing, but I think they're using too many natural resources, and we're losing a lot of nature." She agreed with comments of SEP supporters that while there should be mass production and industrialization, it should be done rationally, and in concert with the well-being of those living around factories, and the workers themselves.

"In China, you never used to have strikes," Erting said. "Now, you see strikes all the time."

Many students showed a fierce determination to make their way in the harsh economy. Kara, a junior computer science major, said, "I thought the job fair was very helpful; it's a competitive job market, but I felt good talking to a lot of these companies." In response to questions about the economic difficulties facing most students, she explained, "In the US, it seems like you never know from year to year, but that's why I'm looking for internships, to try and get a head start."

"A lot of students are discouraged," she noted. "I told one of my friends that I was looking for an internship, and she was like 'good luck'—because, you know, they think it's incredibly difficult to catch on somewhere."

"I'm from Knott County [in eastern Kentucky]. The job situation is worse than it is here [Morehead]. There aren't many jobs, period, and it's just really hard to get your foot in the door." In fact, a third of the population of Knott County lives below the poverty line.

SEP supporters asked Kara what she thought about the 2012 election campaigns of Obama and the

Republicans. "I haven't been following it closely. I'm not looking to see a huge change one way or the other. The economic situation is key, but it just seems like we shouldn't expect a whole lot of change to take place." Campaigners responded by talking about the effort of both parties to use the huge number of unemployed to drive down wages, making the economic situation worse. Kara said she would read the election meeting material and thanked the SEP supporters for the discussion.

Karly, a senior majoring in public relations, expressed guarded optimism about her employment prospects after graduation. "I don't have a job lined up yet," she said, "but I hope to when I graduate." Her opinion about the overall economic situation was less optimistic. "It's just so scary. I suppose the best thing to do would be to go to graduate school," she said. "I have student loans and I hope they will be worth it in the end."

When asked about her job prospects, Leslie, a business major, replied, "I don't really know, I'm trying to get an internship. I'm scared but hopeful." She expressed her intentions to follow the job market after graduation. "I will probably leave when I graduate," she said. "Kentucky has no work."



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