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## ASU business grad lands dream job

**Chad Graham**

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Nyssa Packard is proof that hard work pays off.

At the tender age of 21, she is set to graduate this week from Arizona State University with honors and degrees in marketing and French with a psychology minor and an International Business Certificate.

She will join a global market-research firm and spend a month at its offices in Chicago, Minneapolis, Stamford, Conn., and Phoenix.

During that time, Research International will pay for her housing, provide her with a company car and a food stipend and fly her home to see family.

"They made me such a good salary offer that I didn't feel I needed to negotiate for any more," said Packard, a Boulder, Colo., native who wants to work in the company's Paris office.

Packard's enviable opportunity is not unusual among those in the Class of 2006.

This year's 1.4 million college graduates are entering the best job market since 2001 as employers are ready to hire 14.5 percent more graduates than in 2005, according to Challenger, Gray and Christmas, an outplacement firm based in Chicago.

With much of the United States, including Arizona, hovering at full employment, newly minted grads can basically pick their employer and bargain for higher salaries as well as signing bonuses, especially if they have business, science or computer-related degrees.

"Companies have spent the last several years being very cautious about their hiring, but now with the baby boomers retiring, they realize they have to fill their pipeline," said John Challenger, chief executive of the firm. "They just can't afford to wait any longer."

The need even includes slots for liberal-arts majors "who've done well in school, especially for sales and marketing and relationship-oriented jobs and various other

functions in companies where they need entry-level people," Challenger said.

Accounting graduates will see average starting salary offers increase 5.4 percent to \$46,188, according to a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

Average starting salary offers for business-management majors are up 3.9 percent to \$40,976 and 5.3 percent for economics/finance graduates to \$45,058.

Nearly 38 percent of the association's survey respondents said they expected to hire more new college graduates for full-time, entry-level positions this fall compared with last fall.

Ron Butler, a partner in the Phoenix office of Ernst and Young in charge of recruiting, said the accounting giant has increased hiring 100 percent during the past three years.

Much of that is due to the need for more accountants following passage of the 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act. Among other things, Sarbanes-Oxley mandated tighter internal accounting controls and more extensive reporting of financial information for businesses after accounting scandals at Enron Corp., WorldCom Inc. and other companies.

Additionally, Arizona's certified public accountants are required to have 150 credit hours, which means students are in school for up to five years.

"Our depth and breadth of students now are master's degree students," Butler said. "These students' skill set and quality has absolutely improved, and employers are taking notice."

According to a hiring survey conducted by Experience Inc., a career-services Internet site based in Boston, 60 percent of college graduates are expected to earn between \$26,000 and \$45,000 per year in their first job.

Having found the right position, 44 percent said they expected to stay with their first employer for one to two years, and 46 percent planned to stay for three years or more.

Fifty-two percent of students received two or more job offers, and nearly 10 percent received four or more job offers.

Samir Al-Awar, a 26-year-old master's of business administration student at ASU, had two offers and accepted a job with Raytheon in Massachusetts.

"I think companies expected a little bit more negotiation this year (from students), so I'm assuming the offers were comparable to last year's," he said. "Except companies were more prepared to be flexible and move upward with those offers once negotiations were begun."

Al-Awar will receive a signing bonus and use part of his paycheck to start saving money.

"Once I've been working for a little bit and feel that I'm afloat, then I'll probably start

splurging on a few things," he said. "Actually, a computer desk might be the first thing I splurge on."

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