

DECAF Career Fair Generates Buzz on Campus



Google, Cisco, Yahoo!, Facebook: the roster of companies featured at this year's Disciplines of Engineering Career Fair, also known as DECaF, reads like a Who's Who of the hottest tech companies. The event also featured many local powerhouses, including ViaSat and Solar Turbines. In all, more than 80 companies and 1,600 students turned out for the event, packing the Price Center Ballroom. Lines of students decked out in their best business attire and waiting to enter the career fair snaked out onto the Price Center food court.

Recruiters say it's the quality of the students and the support that companies receive that makes DECaF a destination for them. Students say it's a good opportunity to learn what the job market is like in the real world and connect with companies, especially smaller businesses they didn't know about.

“UCSD is an important school for our recruiting efforts,” said Jessica Lulovics, who is on the university program team for Google and also a 2005 alumna of the University of California, San Diego.

The university has one of the top-ranked engineering schools and one of the top computer science programs in the country, she pointed out. Google recruiters have been coming to DECaF for the past three years. The company also is a member of UC San Diego’s Center for Networked Systems and provides research awards. From an academic standpoint, the university’s curriculum is top notch, Lulovics said. Students are well versed in algorithms, data structure and coding. They have the opportunity to take classes that allow them to work in groups, such as CS 125, Software System Design and Implementation, also known as the video games class. The tutoring program in the computer science department also consistently turns out students who have a better understanding of the concepts, because they’ve taught their peers. Lulovics also praised the Corporate Affiliates Program at the Jacobs School of Engineering, which provides great support to companies on campus. “More companies should join,” she said.



Cisco is a member of the CAP program as well. The company’s university manager for UC San Diego, Tina Randhawa, also said DECaF is an important event.

"The caliber of the talent is what keeps us coming back," she said.

UC San Diego students do well at Cisco, Randhawa said. They are outgoing and work well in teams. The Jacobs School of Engineering does a great job of preparing students to interview and format their resumes. The school’s Corporate Affiliates Program also helps Cisco find students that fit its job openings, she said.

Some of the recruiters were Jacobs School alumni themselves. Stephan Kemper graduated in 2010 and now works at ViaSat, which also is a member of CAP. He had originally interned with the company twice through the Jacobs School’s Team Internship Program (TIP). The first time, he was just a sophomore and was terrified to apply for a job, he said. TIP helped him overcome his fears. He had a great experience and decided to sign up for a second stint. When he graduated, it wasn’t hard to go back to a job at ViaSat, he said. He now works in large-scale applications distributed computing. Essentially, ViaSat runs a network of residential satellites, for which it needs to analyze data as close to real time as possible. “That’s my job,” Kemper said.



Among the hundreds of students vying for the attention of Kemper and fellow recruiters were Hien Nguyen and Alexander Chen. DECaF gives students a good idea of what employers are looking for from job candidates, said Nguyen, a fifth-year mechanical engineering student. “Experience in having a good conversation and interview with recruiters is the most valuable thing I’m taking away from it,” he said.

The event was helpful for learning about lesser known companies, said Chen, a fourth-year mechanical engineering major. “I had a great time talking to the smaller companies and learning about awesome opportunities in areas I wouldn’t have known about before,” he said.

Year after year, recruiters tell organizers that DECaF is their favorite event, said Pooja Makhijani, a sophomore and bioengineering major who was this year’s business lead for DECaF on the Triton Engineering Student Council. Volunteers are key to the event’s success, she said. They connect with recruiters and provide them with all the help they need, from special lunch orders to shipping and dropping off materials.

More than 120 volunteers helped out this year.

“We are not a cookie-cutter career fair and we pride ourselves on this,” Makhijani said. “It really pays off in the end to have recruiters who are extremely happy with the event.”

This year, TESC is trying to gauge how many students wound up landing jobs as a result of DECaF. Stay tuned.



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