

"Equal Employment Opportunity for ~~All~~ Some"

by Shanxi Upsdell, Spring 2004

Note: Shanxi Upsdell served as assignment editor for Johnson County Community College's student newspaper, *The Campus Ledger*, in the spring 2004 semester. The college had previously denied her work because she had not yet graduated from homeschool high school.

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I have successfully overcome college policy.

As one of The Campus Ledger staff, I write stories, edit articles and make assignments to reporters ... although technically, I am forbidden to work in the newsroom.

Last year, the college refused to pay me because I did not yet possess a "requirement": my high school diploma, even though faculty had recommended me for the position.

"Shanxi is 16 years old, will not graduate from high school until June 2004, and does not meet the minimum requirements of the job," stated an e-mail from Human Resources March 3, 2003.

As more high school students attend the college, some experience the same discrimination - hiring practices based not on ability, but on circumstances we cannot control.

An obsolete requirement

The college has the legal right to set minimum requirements for its employment positions, and I respect that.

Furthermore, this policy might make sense if high school diplomas successfully qualified candidates for positions.

However, [a study by the American Diploma Project](#) proved high school diplomas have little relevance, if any, to qualify one for employment.

"Earning [a high school diploma] no longer guarantees that a graduate is ready to compete after high school, either in the college classroom or the modern workplace," the Feb. 9 report read.

"While students ... may still believe that the diploma reflects adequate preparation for the intellectual demands of college or work, employers and postsecondary institutions know that it often serves as little more than a certificate of attendance."

The chain effect

By having this requirement, high school students perfectly qualified for these positions are denied work.

Allison Covault, alumna, 2003, applied for the college's math tutor position in 2002 without a high school diploma.

She had successfully completed or exceeded other requirements, including Calculus II, yet the college denied her the position.

In the 2002 exam by the American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges (AMATYC), Covault earned one of the top five scores of all contestants at the college.

"If I'm taking classes at (the college), I don't think having a high school diploma should matter," she said.

By shutting out such qualified candidates, the college has hurt itself and the student body.

The Campus Ledger suffered from severe understaffing this semester, having at least four full-time reporter positions available since January.

Although several high school students have expressed interest in these positions, the college forbids them from working here.

A hypocritical stance

This policy might have made sense 25 years ago, before high school students attended the college.

However, times have changed.

The Quick Step and College Now Programs designed for high school students enrolled over 2,900 students last fall: approximately 16 percent of the credit student body.

The numbers have increased every year, according to the college's Institutional Research department.

Furthermore, [the college has welcomed us](#), claiming on its website that "[College Now and Quick Step students] have all the rights, privileges and obligations of any other JCCC student."

Despite this boast, we cannot work at some student positions, yet we pay full tuition fees like any other student.

Trumping the system

To the college's credit, some positions do not require a high school diploma.

Student ambassadors need only a recommendation letter from staff or faculty, completion of 12 hours with a 2.5 GPA and a minimum 12 hours enrollment.

However, too many positions - math and writing tutors, *Campus Ledger* positions, office assistants, etc. - demand high school diplomas, even though these cannot fully qualify candidates.

This policy might make sense if others had not already overcome it, even before I did.

Chris Badell, alumnus, 2002, worked at the Writing Center as an English tutor in the 2002 fall and spring semesters.

He had no high school diploma then, although he had completed the minimum Composition I requirement and had an emphatic recommendation from his English professor.

"They didn't worry too much about my age when they saw the experience I had, and my ability," he said.

Jeffrey Amos, alumnus, 2003, also worked at the college last year - as a tutor in the Math Resource Center.

Although he was taking Calculus III, Amos had not yet earned a high school diploma, one of the "minimum requirements" for a math tutor.

Finally, I also trumped the system.

After a lengthy battle that ultimately reached the college president, I received my paycheck this year.

My argument is not with the college per se, nor with the people who saw fit to pay me for my work.

I have enjoyed two years of excellent teaching and interaction with outstanding faculty, advisers and students.

However, I cannot agree with an administrative policy denying some students the opportunity to work, based not on ability, but on criteria they cannot control.