

Are we adequately preparing students for ocean occupations?

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In his opening address to the 1998 National Ocean Conference held in Monterey, California, Vice President Al Gore stated that “twenty percent of our national economy is based on ocean-related activities” and that “one in six jobs is ocean-related.” The ocean attracts and inspires thousands of students every year to pursue degrees in science, engineering, and technology. Yet with all the attention paid to the oceans, students often lack the information needed to make wise decisions about choosing an ocean-related career. Specifically, they lack an understanding of the skills required to enter ocean occupations, as well as knowledge about where to receive additional education and training.

There are a variety of reasons for this problem: 1) Most education programs are not keeping up with changes in research & industry, 2) Student preparation in the use of advanced technology is especially lacking, 3) Most students don’t receive adequate career guidance, 4) Students and educators are unaware of many ocean occupations because they are not classified by the Department of Labor, and 5) Many students graduate from college with a strong academic background in ocean sciences but inadequate practical skills for today’s workplace.

The California Center for Ocean Science Education Excellence¹ (California COSEE) and the Marine

Advanced Technology Education (MATE) Center believe that one of the greatest services we can offer students, workers, educators, and employers is to provide access to accurate information about ocean careers and employment opportunities so they can make informed choices concerning their career, education, and future. Currently an interactive Ocean Career Website is in development where information can be linked in such a fashion that it will enable the user to answer such vital question as: What careers allow me to work in and around the ocean? What skills will I need to enter a career? Who may hire me if I have these skills? And, where can I go to get these skills? This website, **www.oceancareers.com**, is an extensive relational database composed of information on careers, educational institutions, employers, educational competencies, and professional societies. Every effort will be made to cross reference career information with current government labor statistics. We plan to launch this site in the spring of 2004. A companion course on ocean-related careers will be developed in 2005.

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