

"A business will schedule a time and tell us who they are looking for, and then suspend their visit," he says. "Ten days later, they're back."

The good news, according to the MSU survey, is that starting salaries for 1990 graduates with bachelor's degrees are expected to average \$25,256, up 3.1% from last year. The outlook is most promising for chemical engineers, whose starting salaries will be among the highest.

Janet Sansone, manager of recruiting and university development for General Electric Co. in Bridgeport, Conn., notes that her recruiters face stiff

competition for the nearly 2,000 graduates they seek this season, most of them engineers. She says the company will have a major recruiting presence on 60 campuses and will be visiting or seeing candidates from more than 100 other schools.

"As the number of engineering graduates decreases and our standards increase, the competition for students will be even keener," she says.

The Northwestern report also paints a bright picture for students majoring in accounting, chemistry and computer science. More job opportunities will be available for these graduates at both the bachelor's and master's degree levels, the report notes.

College placement directors at large and small colleges say that major public accounting firms remain a strong presence. The difference from last year is that, instead of the Big Eight, it's the Big Six. Ernst & Whinney and Arthur Young are now Ernst & Young, and Deloitte, Haskins & Sells and Touche Ross have formed Deloitte & Touche.

John Barbieri, manager of recruiting and college relations for Deloitte & Touche, says his firm hopes to hire 2,200 accounting, finance and liberal arts graduates, about the same number as both of the merged firms hired last year. He said more students are expected to register for interviews because, although the number of jobs remains stable, the field has narrowed.

"There are fewer choices for students," says Mr. Barbieri. "Now that we are the third or fourth largest firm, not the seventh or

eighth, we are seeing students who wouldn't have signed up with us before."

Although students at big schools may not notice a marked difference, the cautious

economy appears to be weakening recruiting efforts at small liberal arts campuses.

Placement directors at these schools say they are gratified that the Big Six are returning because regional retailers and banks, usually a major source of jobs, are cutting back.

Marilyn Hill, associate director of the career center at Carleton College in Northfield, Minn., says she expects 52 companies to recruit on campus, about the same as 1989, but most firms appear to be "pretty wary."

"We used to rely heavily on banking, but they are really suffering from their losses from foreign loans and agriculture," says Ms. Hill.

"Our old banking friends haven't been here in a long time."

At Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Pa., all six major public accounting firms

will be competing for the school's 13 graduating accountants, but some retailers, such as Philadelphia-based Strawbridge & Clothier, will not be returning, says Dick Hess, career services director.

However, some retailers will intensify recruiting efforts to meet

expanded business demands. For example, Bentonville, Ark.-based Wal-Mart Stores Inc. plans to open more than 150 new stores this year and plans to hire 600 graduates, 32% more than in 1989, for its management training program, according to Von Johnson, personnel director. The company will visit more than 100 campuses seeking graduates in all majors.

"Whereas the other retailers will hire three or four students, we'll hire 10," Mr. Johnson says. Bankruptcy proceedings at a handful of other major retailers dampen hiring prospects in the industry overall, however.

Given the uncertain market, recruiters and placement directors advise students to visit their placement offices immediately to refine their search and interviewing skills and to begin interviewing early. Some students, who have sensed a possible downturn in the market, have accepted jobs early instead of waiting for something better, Mr. Lindquist says.

"The greatest impact on the class of '90 will be on those in the lower quartile who haven't done well academically or done anything in the summers to build up their resumes," he says. "Those students are going to have a tough time."

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