



By Karen Good, *The Hilltop*, Howard U.

A Freeman buzzes about his Howard U. office ruminating on some student's records, trying to figure out if he will allow the student into the College of Fine Arts. He's just finished filming his role as Elijah Muhammad in Spike Lee's latest flick, *Malcolm X*, and is relaxing now, riding off the tremendous media hype that's followed. And then it happens — like it always happens. Someone interrupts his solitude. It seems she is trying to get her musician boyfriend to meet Freeman.

"She knows I'm in theater and really not in music."

It doesn't really matter, though. Freeman has connections — and that makes him a connection.

He tells the story of a woman who approached him one day with a brief outline of a screenplay she'd written. "The woman left," he says, "and then came right back and asked, 'Oh, by the way, if you don't find it interesting could you pass it along to Spike for me?'"

You know the lingo. Contacts. Hook-ups. Connections. The whole it's-not-what-you-know-but-who-you-know thing. It's a game college students play once they find out that a few well-chosen contacts can make all the difference in getting a foot in the door.

Amy Giberson, a junior at San Diego State U., knows how to play it.

Giberson, who studies elementary education, volunteers in a local grade school, trying to make contacts to increase her shot at a job.

"I've learned through my family you have to not only develop connections but to keep them," she says. "I don't think anyone's going to hire me because my mom's in the school district, but they're going to take a second look at me."

And that's the key.

"I think it's way too idealistic for a person to think they can make it on their own," says Mikel Husband, a senior at Howard U. "I mean... there are people out there with Ph.D.'s and master's degrees who do not have jobs that reflect these honors and it doesn't make any sense. They're just sitting around thinking, 'Damn, I've got a Ph.D., and I'm working at McDonald's.'"

Husband says that's not going to happen to him. He joined Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., to make the kind of connections that will keep him from the McDonald's rut.

"I go to conferences and meet older frat brothers," he says. "A year ago I went to this conference and met two graduate chapter frat brothers who were teachers in Florida. They gave me their cards and told me to call them so they could keep me abreast on how the job market for teachers was down there and possibly hook me up. That's what

it's all about."

Valerie Wilson Wesley, senior editor of *Essence* magazine, says students have to be careful with connections.

"I think that it is important to do some networking and have contacts, but the bottom line is that you really have to have your skills together," she says. "It's kind of like the old expression that if you have a contact, it may get you in the door, but your skills and talent are what's gonna keep you in the room."

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— Mikel Husband, a senior

Wesley says she's interviewed students who think their connections are going to keep them in the room. It always backfires on them, she says. "During an interview, I had a young writer who just made it a point of telling me everyone she knew and that her parents were very prominent people," she says. "And it kinda turned me off. The first thing out of her mouth was like, 'I'm so-and-so and I know so-and-so.' It was really kind of obnoxious."

In a tight job market, though, when thousands of college graduates with the right qualifications are competing for the same positions, it's hard to convince students that a connection can't do anything but help them.

"The job market right now is so tough," says Joe Pietrzyk, a junior at the U. of Arizona. "You need every edge you can get."

Steffanie Carr, a senior at Howard, says students have little choice — they either play the game or stand on the sidelines — unemployed. "You could look in the want ads for a job and nine times out of 10, those jobs are already gone... given to somebody's friend or fraternity brother who received a hook-up," she says.

"We live in a political world and that's what makes the world go 'round. It doesn't have to be a fair world or a fair system, but that's the reality of it."

Average starting salaries by major

\$40,173 to \$32,574	Chemical Engineering \$40,173	Mechanical Engineering \$35,619	Electrical Engineering \$35,141	Industrial Engineering \$32,574
\$31,572 to \$27,750	Computer Science \$31,572	Civil Engineering \$29,592	Nursing \$29,452	Physics \$29,367
\$27,566 to \$24,144	Accounting \$27,566	Marketing/Sales \$26,165	Financial Admin. \$24,607	Geology \$24,144
\$23,643 to \$22,601	Mathematics \$23,643	Agriculture \$23,319	Hotel/Restaurant Management \$23,103	Natural Resources \$22,779
\$22,554 to \$20,833	Education \$22,554	Telecommunications \$22,060	Retailing \$21,390	Liberal Arts \$21,011
\$20,687 to \$19,114	Home Economics \$20,687	Communications \$20,619	Social Sciences \$20,348	Advertising \$19,776
				Journalism \$19,114

Source: Collegiate Employment Research Institute, Michigan State U.