

Does the cause of unemployment lie with the unemployed?

Disagreement as to the causes of unemployment is a major obstacle to solving the problem, according to a survey taken in the Monterey Bay area during the past year.

The survey was conducted by Project Employ, a regional consortium of seven educational institutions in the Monterey Bay area. These were Cabrillo, Gavilan, Hartnell and Monterey Peninsula community colleges, Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies and the UCSC Extension. Among their findings:

—Employers tended to believe that the unemployment problem was caused mainly by the unemployed, and that the real reason for unemployment was that the unemployed had worked and behaved poorly when they had jobs.

—Unemployed persons favored better education and vocational training, but

felt the primary need was for better job placement and pre-employment counseling.

—Officials at employment agencies called transportation, personal problems, child care and lack of adequate job skills the major problems in finding and holding jobs.

Questionnaires were sent to 850 employers in Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito and south Santa Clara counties. Of these, 250 returned the forms.

Employers said the main problem with employees was that they simply didn't produce a sufficient quantity or quality of work to satisfy their bosses. Other problems included poor attendance, work behavior, motivation and attitudes.

"We are finding that the age groups from 18 to 25 are finding it hard to take on job responsibility, and feel that the

company they are working for owes them something for coming to work," said an employer of a medium-size Santa Cruz County firm.

Another employer was quite blunt about his feelings: "Too easy to collect benefits in Santa Cruz County — why work?"

One Monterey County employer said schools are putting too much emphasis on "non-productive activities," such as drama, arts and crafts. Another Monterey County employer said:

"It should be impressed upon the youth, unemployed or other persons who have resolved they will have to be a part of the nation's work force, that having a job is a great privilege and should be regarded as such."

Employers were also asked to provide statistical employment information so

that Project Employ could produce a five-year projection of employment and training opportunities.

"The findings suggest that there are a sufficient number of job openings in the region to accommodate the schools' graduates, which was something we didn't expect to find," said Richard Stafford, chairman of the project's steering committee.

In contrast to employers, the unemployed (200 people were interviewed at unemployment offices throughout the area) never mentioned attitude or work behavior as reasons for their unemployment. Better job placement services were the most frequently mentioned need, resoundingly.

According to project coordinator

Jennifer Franz, "Those who are seeking employment clearly view education as an undertaking to contemplate after the primary concern of unemployment has been eliminated, rather than as a means by which to eliminate it. This contention was further substantiated by the fact that no course, service or any type of instruction was accorded high importance with anywhere near the frequency of placement."

An interesting discrepancy turned up in the reactions to a course on techniques for job applications and interviews. Employers and employment agency staffers viewed such courses favorably. The unemployed and underemployed, however, ranked such courses dead last in a list of what was needed.

A questionnaire was also sent to 477 governmental and private employment

offices and agencies; nearly 300 returned the forms. The agencies described their typical clients as not having completed high school, young, non-white, poor and disadvantaged.

In addition to points made earlier, the agency officials said their clients needed additional courses in language arts and mathematics.

Overall, the project report notes, "Perhaps the most striking conclusion to be drawn on the basis of this survey, is that virtually all of the target populations, courses and services frequently deemed of high importance by respondents tend to be outside the traditional purview of colleges and universities," and that institutions of higher learning should "seriously re-examine" their roles if they want to meet the needs of the unemployed.