

Does where you went to college matter in the working world?

(Depends on who's doing the hiring)

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Dr. Donna Parker, who graduated from the University of Maryland School of Medicine, runs her own pediatric practice in Annapolis.

Matt Bowry received his master's of business administration from Virginia's College of William & Mary, a degree that helped land him an investment banking job at Legg Mason in Baltimore.

Mike Ladas went to University of Pennsylvania's prestigious Wharton School and rose to become a managing director for investment banking firm Bear Stearns by age 30.

The universities they attended helped determine their economic standing in today's fast-paced globalized work world.

While impressive resumes and marquee universities helped get their foot in the door, many are still split on how far a school name can take you.

According to a recent survey developed by staffing firm Accountemps that polled more than 1,400 chief financial officials, 51 percent of respondents said university prestige was "very important" or "somewhat important" in hiring.

The remaining 49 percent thought it was "not important at all."

Tom Darrow, principal of Talent Connections, an Atlanta-based recruiting firm, said college prestige is important for certain industries, such as consulting and accounting. Some firms

exclusively hire from major schools with histories of producing top quality employee, he said.

"It really is a Darwinian thing, it's survival of the fittest," he said.

With little work experience under their belts, college graduates often must rely on the name of their alma mater during job searches. The prestige of well-known schools such as Harvard and Stanford carries the weight they need.

"The well-known schools typically draw the best talent from high school," Mr. Darrow said. "From an employer standpoint and a recruiter's standpoint, you've just got to go where the volume is."

Reputation and image often are the reasons behind why major companies recruit from big-name schools, Mr. Darrow said. Clients paying big bucks want to know they are working with the "cream of the crop," he said.

But Marcia Hall, a Severna Park author of "Navigating Newbie-ism: 12 Simple Ways to Thrive in Your First Job and Career, The College Student's Guide," (Parker Stanton, \$12.95) said some employers prefer to recruit from their own state schools. Still, some companies requiring more technical skills "don't really care" about college background, she said.

For those who can't afford a more than \$120,000 education at an Ivy League school, take notice.

Ms. Hall said work experience quickly takes over where the degree leaves off.

"The employer cares about how you do things on a day-to-day basis more than your degree; they forget about that very quickly," said Ms. Hall. "One employer said her biggest moron has a master's degree."

Mr. Ladas said the Wharton name got him onto the investment banking "playing field." But it's how he played on that field that pushed him up the corporate ladder.

Before being accepted to Wharton, Mr. Ladas worked for two years as an investment banking analyst for Legg Mason.

"They work you, no joke, 16 hours a day, seven days a week," he said.

That work experience helped him get into Wharton and Mr. Ladas later worked for several major firms including Deutsche Bank and Lehman Brothers. After working as a managing director at Bear Stearns, he traded corporate America for a better work-life balance.

Last year, he formed a private equity firm that invests in several companies including a multi-million yacht brokerage in the old Leon's Barbershop in Eastport.

While investment banking recruiters often gravitate toward certain big-name business schools, there is general prestige among medical schools for simply being accepted.

Dr. Parker majored in natural sciences at Spelman College in Atlanta. Growing up in a family that placed a strong emphasis on education, Dr. Parker said going to the University of Maryland's medical school meant embracing priorities far from the girl who had "every hair in place."

"You would live and sleep and eat medicine and do laundry when you had time," Dr. Parker said.

After joining Johns Hopkins Community Physicians, which provides health care throughout the state, Dr. Parker set up her own practice on Forest Drive. She still draws on her contacts from the University of Maryland and has attending privileges to admit patients to Johns

Hopkins Hospital.

As with Mr. Ladas, Mr. Bowry said the quality of his education was important, but not the only factor in his success.

A 1992 James Madison University graduate, who traded 100-hour workweeks at Legg Mason to run a private equity group in Eastport, he said his recruiters evaluate candidates on a variety of criteria including personality, interview, work experience, essay and grades.

Mr. Bowry, who now runs MacKenzie Equity Partners and the portable storage franchise SmartBox for Maryland, said he believes his William & Mary degree helped him stand out from the piles of resumes piled on recruiters' desks.

"They would rather have someone from a different school than an eleventh Wharton guy," he said.