

Getting Started

Four important tasks that graduate and professional students should address before looking for positions in corporations, non-profit organizations, and government agencies are described below.

GET SUPPORT

- Looking for work is hard work itself so you should elicit support from others.
- Talk to individuals in your field – advisor, classmates, colleagues at other institutions, etc.
- Connect with UW grad students in other disciplines through the Graduate and Professional Student Senate and other graduate student groups.
- Seek support from individuals outside the academic world – friends, family members, teammates, neighbors, etc.
- Consider visiting with a counselor at the UW Career Center or the UW Counseling Center.

BELIEVE

- Many graduate level students who decide to pursue positions outside academia view themselves in a negative light. Such students often...
 - Doubt that employers will consider them serious job candidates
 - Feel they do not have valuable skills
 - Think that nobody will hire them without years of work experience
 - Feel like failures for choosing to leave academia.
- If you want to be a successful job seeker, you must avoid these cognitive pitfalls. Realize that...
 - As an individual in an advanced degree program, you are developing many, many concrete skills that will be valuable to a wide variety of appealing employers.
 - Your completion of a graduate degree indicates to employers that you are ambitious, you like to learn, you can persevere, etc.
 - Success is not necessarily landing the most prestigious job you can find, but landing a job that allows you to utilize your favorite skills (and perhaps even have a life)!

KNOW YOUR SKILLS

- Skills are the backbone of the job search process. Successful job seekers:
 - Realize that finding a job congruent with their skills is critical for job and life satisfaction
 - Have a clear understanding of what skills they have to offer
 - Can clearly and convincingly communicate the value of their skills to employers

- Knowing your skills will help you:
 - Feel more confident in your employability
 - Fight stereotypes
 - Find interesting jobs
 - Construct your application materials
- As the result of your graduate study and other experiences, you have developed many skills that will be valuable to a variety of employers. You likely possess several concrete skills within each of the following categories. Check out the grad student resume handout for more skill words.
 - Research / analysis
 - Problem-solving
 - Written communication
 - Oral communication
 - Teaching
 - Administration / business
 - Management / leadership
 - Teamwork
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Arts / creativity
 - Technical / science
 - Perseverance
- Consider making a list of the specific skills you possess.
 - Use the list above and the lists available at the websites provided at the end of this handout as springboards.
 - List every skill that comes to mind, despite your perception of their importance, uniqueness, or relevance to potential employers.
 - Think of skills you demonstrated in all the different professional roles you have played – student, teacher, researcher, etc.
- If you have a difficult time identifying your strengths, consider attending a Dependable Strengths® seminar. Participants in this seminar explore “good experiences” for patterns of strengths, consider what strengths they want to use in a career, create a report that reflects strengths, and use the report to make connections and improve interviews.
 - The Graduate Student Dependable Strengths® seminar is 2 days long and takes place at the end of each quarter. For more information, visit:
<http://careers.washington.edu/Forms/DependableStrengthsforGradStudents>
- An additional resource that can help you identify your skills is a document called *Skills Identification for Ph.D. Students and Postdocs*. This 6-page handout takes you through a number of short activities to help you extract skills from the roles you hold inside and outside academia. It is available at: https://caps.uchicago.edu/resourcecenter/handouts/skills_id.pdf
- Learn more about other ways to identify skills by downloading a handout called *Personal Development: Assessments & Books* at -
<http://careers.washington.edu/gradstudents/selfandcareerexploration>

CONSIDER THE STEREOTYPES

One of the reasons that graduate and professional level students often feel pessimistic about their chances of getting a job outside academia is perceived stereotypes. To be an effective job seeker, you need to anticipate possible stereotypes associated with graduate students and academics, internally recognize their inaccuracy, and prove their inaccuracy to potential employers through your resume, cover letter, and interviews. Below is a list of common stereotypes of PhDs and strategies for combating them, adapted from: <http://career.ucsd.edu/sa/GPrepareforNonAcademicJobMarket.shtml>

“Academics Don’t Work Very Hard”

- Gained expertise in broad field and particular specialty
- Passed difficult, lengthy, intense qualifying exams
- Initiated, developed, executed, and finished massive project over months or years
- Worked long hours to complete projects by deadlines

“High Performers Don’t Come from the Academy”

- Was admitted to competitive graduate program
- Earned high grades, academic distinctions, honors
- Performed for experts in the field (professors and other professionals)
- Solved multiple problems throughout academic career

“Graduate Students Who Leave Academia are Failures”

- Want to utilize broad range of strengths and skills
- Want to use energy and talents to effect change
- Desire a position congruent with my personality and interests

“You’re Just Marking Your Time until an Academic Job Comes Along”

- Carefully researched this position and organization
- Confident about the match between my skills and the job description
- Excited about how the position corresponds to my career goals
- Glad the job is similar to previous positions I’ve held
- Willing to start as an intern or volunteer to demonstrate my commitment

“People with Graduate Degrees are Elitist”

- Volunteered for various service activities
- Can use humor, empathy, active listening
- Can converse without using academic jargon
- Want to work as part of a team in order to have a greater impact

“People with Graduate Degrees Lack Management Skills”

- Collaborated with other students and professionals on various projects
- Effectively managed diverse group of professionals (dissertation committee)
- Successfully taught students of varying abilities
- Mentored and trained undergraduate research assistants
- Served as departmental representative on committees
- Organized professional and social events

“Academics are Disorganized and Flaky”

- Organized complicated application materials to get in to graduate school
- Finished dissertation
- Managed the roles of student, teacher, and researcher simultaneously

RESOURCES

University of California, San Diego

- <http://career.ucsd.edu/sa/gradpage.shtml>
 - Non Academic Career Survival Handbook

University of California – Berkeley, Career Center

- <http://career.berkeley.edu/PhDs/PhDskills.stm>

Stanford University, Career Development Center

- <http://cardinalcareers.stanford.edu/communities/graduate/guides.html>
 - PhD Pathways handout

University of Pennsylvania, Career Services

- <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/gradstud/humalt.html>

Book

- Basalla, S., & Debelius, M. (2007). So what are you going to do with that?: Finding careers outside academia. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.