

Search Strategies

Considering your options for after graduation can be both exciting and nerve-wracking. Hopefully, you see this time as an opportunity to indulge in your curiosity, ask questions, and make new discoveries about yourself and your career options. We are committed to supporting you throughout your search process – from your initial brainstorming to your internship experiences and finally your post-graduation plans.

GETTING STARTED

Your major may or may not relate to your career interests. Maybe you're unsure what's out there. Or, you have a clear goal and don't know how to reach it. You might be considering graduate or professional school. Perhaps you are struggling to identify your own goals, separate from the advice of others. No matter your situation, we are here to help. Your advisor can't make decisions for you or place you in a job, but we can coach you along each step of your search, application and interview process.

Regular advising appointments are a great way to keep in touch about your progress. To schedule an appointment, call our front desk at (314) 935-5930 or stop by DUC 110. You are welcome to use our services after you graduate, but it will be more effective for you to come in while you're on campus.

FIGURING OUT WHAT YOU WANT TO DO

How can you "follow your passion" if you don't know what your passion is? You don't need to know what you want before you meet with an advisor. That's why we're here!

We can help you identify the factors that make your life most satisfying and rewarding. Which of your current activities do you most enjoy? What motivates you? How do you picture your ideal workday or lifestyle? Spending time to identify your critical values, interests and skills will impact the careers you decide to research and the positions you decide to target.

In addition to advising, we offer several assessment tools:

- Strong Interest Inventory
- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
- StrengthsQuest

To take any of these assessments or to learn about their value, call us at (314) 935-5930 or stop by DUC 110. You are also welcome to take advantage of our library of job search and industry related books available in our front office.

SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

Make it your goal this year to determine a good next step – not to map out your career path for the rest of your life. It's smart to think long-term, but try not to let the pressure of needing to know what you'll be doing in 5 years paralyze your progress. Instead, focus on learning about opportunities that seem like a good fit for your current goals.

Your internships and first post-college job experiences are going to help you learn more about yourself, your skills, your lifestyle values and what you truly enjoy. So, start early and spend time researching opportunities, but also know that you'll probably make better decisions about your second and third jobs once you have some full-time work experience under your belt.

Managing your search while balancing academics

An early start and small steps will make this process feel much more manageable. A job search takes time; the average search takes at least six months. Unfortunately, it's not something you can pull off with an all-nighter at the end of the semester. Finding a balance between planning for the future and seizing the day will relieve a ton of stress.

- Meet with your career advisor regularly and set realistic weekly or monthly goals.
- Designate a standing time each week to work on your search and treat it like a class.
- Set up a follow-up appointment before you leave from each advising appointment.
- Check Handshake periodically and RSVP for events, workshops, and information sessions.
- Join a Career Interest Group to get a heads up on industry-specific resources tips.

GETTING OUT THERE TO LEARN

Informational interviewing and networking

Talking to people is the most effective way to learn about career options and find out about internships and jobs. Networking is nothing more than connecting and engaging with others to gather information and ideas. Conversations with professionals can help you more fully understand the industry, job or company culture you are considering. Networking might also provide the insight that helps to set you apart in the application or interview process. Research indicates that approximately 80% of jobs are found via networking. This means that you should plan to spend a significant portion of your job search reaching out to people, rather than applying for online positions. You will be more likely to learn about the "hidden job market" of un-posted positions if you take the time to build connections with people in your target field. Informational interviewing is an intentional form of networking where you request to speak with a person by phone or face-to-face. It is an excellent chance for you to ask questions and get a better sense of whether a career is a good fit for you.

Focusing your interests and becoming a good candidate

It's best to narrow your focus to a few industries and geographical areas. Remaining completely open-minded can be extremely overwhelming and counter-productive. You need to identify characteristics of a workplace that are a good fit for your talents and needs. Targeting your search also makes it easier for others to help you. Don't worry about going too far down the wrong path; you can always shift your focus.

Career Interest Groups: We offer several groups to help you learn about potential careers, make industry and alumni connections, and get the inside scoop on breaking in. Some groups meet regularly, others provide weekly emails with tips and opportunities, and all offer programming and industry-specific chances to visit employers. Sign up for one or more at careercenter.wustl.edu.

Road Shows: Join us for a trip to another city to visit a handful of organizations and hear from alumni working in the field. Road Shows are an excellent way to refine your interests, expand your network, and make you a more informed candidate.

Here are some tips for becoming more comfortable with networking:

- See our handout about Networking & Informational Interviews. You'll find ideas about how to expand your network, tips for requesting an informational interview, and advice for preparing and following up.
- Start by talking to people in your comfort zone, like family, friends, faculty and staff.
- Utilize alumni connections through LinkedIn, our Success Stories database, and by attending Road Shows.
- Talk with your career advisor about how to make networking less intimidating.

Gaining experience through internships or research

Earning Credit: WashU offers academic credit for some internships. Check our website to learn the steps for receiving credit in your school or department.

Career Center Stipends: We offer a limited number of stipends to help finance unpaid internships. See our website for more information.

Research Opportunities: The WU Office of Undergraduate Research is an excellent resource (undergradresearch.wustl.edu). We also suggest you talk to instructors in your department to learn about opportunities at WashU and other schools.

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES

Building a target list

Once you have a good sense of what kinds of organizations appeal to you, you'll want to make a list of similar places to target in your city of interest. This valuable tactic can help focus your search. Don't limit your list to organizations with posted openings. You can always request an informational interview to get the scoop on working in that city and ask for advice about conducting your search. You may even get hints about unposted positions.

Searching for postings online

It can be tempting to spend time searching for tangible positions posted on well-known job search web sites. Using major job search sites is not a bad idea; just don't make it your only approach. While it may feel like the most direct way to find openings, this tactic takes a lot of time and yields few results. Those positions can be seen by anyone with access to the internet, so you'll have a lot of competition. Also, don't count on posting your resume somewhere and waiting for companies to come to you. Proactive searches yield the best results. Generally, the best places to look for postings online are websites for specific organizations and professional association websites.

Using Handshake

Handshake is the Career Center's online database of jobs and internships. Unlike public job search databases, many positions in Handshake are posted as the result of relationships we've cultivated with employers from a variety of industries – from finance to arts – who are interested in WashU students. While we can't guarantee you'll find a position through us, you will want to consider jobs we are working hard to bring to you.

Here are some tips for maximizing the potential of Handshake:

- First, make sure you are comfortable with the site. Set up your account at wustl.joinhandshake.com.
- Search the site often to learn about new postings. Make sure you update your profile so that Handshake can share opportunities with you. We recommend that you check the site often during senior year, as new positions are added daily.

- Read position descriptions carefully to develop an understanding of the kinds of opportunities that will truly be a good fit for you.
- Check the Events tab to learn about upcoming career fairs, employer information sessions, panels and speakers. Learn about your options and get in front of important decision makers in various organizations. For sessions hosted by employers, you'll often meet the recruiters who also conduct interviews. So dress nicely, and prepare to introduce yourself and ask informed questions.

UNDERSTANDING ON-CAMPUS RECRUITING

We will help you find opportunities in any industry that interests you. Our advisors have experience helping students land jobs in organizations ranging from social justice groups to entertainment companies to major corporations.

Some industries and companies have a tradition of coming to campus to recruit students. For example, business and engineering companies often have the resources to come to career fairs, host information sessions, and do on-campus interviews. They post their positions on Handshake and may even hire students to be company ambassadors. These on-campus recruiting activities are the most visible to students.

On the other hand, many industries (most of them!) are unable to predict their hiring needs several months in advance. Or, they do not have the human or financial resources to send recruiters to campus. We still reach out to them and ask them to post positions on Handshake, invite them to speak on campus, and present with us at events like Career Camp. However, you will benefit most from working with an advisor to learn how to network, seek opportunities and pursue leads.

When to conduct your search

When you conduct your research, begin doing informational interviews, and actually apply for positions will depend on the hiring timeline for organizations in your industry. Be careful to use this list as a GENERAL guide. There are plenty of exceptions and many organizations hire throughout the year.

Fall Recruiting:

If industries in this list interest you it is critical to make a career advising appointment as soon as you return to campus for senior year. Begin searching Handshake for postings and events by late August. If you have not already started researching industries or networking, begin now! Take advantage of Quick Questions walk-in hours and advising appointments to hone your cover letter writing and interviewing skills. It is possible to land a position several months before graduation, but it will require you to act early and stay proactive.

These industries tend to recruit in the fall:

- Finance & Investment
- Banking
- Pricing/Economic Analysts; Actuary
- Management Consulting
- Computer Science/IT
- Engineering: Defense, Manufacturing, Transportation, Research, Biomedical
- Pharmaceutical
- Retail Merchandising
- Consumer Products
- Federal Government

Spring Recruiting:

Most organizations hire real-time, meaning they look for candidates who can fill open positions right away. You can begin searching for these postings in late winter or early spring. Use your energy and time in fall semester to take the critical first steps of self-assessment, research and informational interviewing. Your career advisor can help you set goals, refine your resume and plan your strategy for spring. Beginning early will help you approach the application process with confidence.

These industries tend to recruit in the spring:

- Marketing, Advertising & Public Relations
- Legal Assistants
- Computer Science/IT
- Engineering: Consulting, Manufacturing, Biomedical
- Nonprofit & Advocacy
- Capitol Hill
- Elementary & Secondary Schools
- Museums & Cultural Institutions
- Architecture Firms

TAILORING YOUR APPLICATION MATERIALS

Hiring managers read hundreds of applications each year, so yours must be tailored and well-written to garner serious consideration. Read the position description carefully and note the key skills or characteristics the employer is seeking. Then think about examples of times you've demonstrated those skills and how your experience relates to the job you're applying for. You'll also want to articulate why you are a good fit for the culture of the organization.

This means that you will need to do a lot of research and brainstorming to prepare each resume and cover letter. Use your cover letter to

convey how you can fill the employer's needs, rather than talking about how the position will benefit you. Resist the urge to write a general cover letter and update a few lines here and there for various positions. This tactic is always obvious to employers and will keep you from getting an interview slot.

For help getting started or for feedback on your materials, stop by Quick Questions walk-in hours or schedule an advising appointment by calling (314) 935-5930. See our Resume & Cover Letter Writing handout for more detailed advice and examples.

INTERACTING WITH EMPLOYERS

Most of the hiring decision is based on the impression you make interacting with employers. Your professionalism in emails, casual conversations, interviews, thank you letters and follow-up correspondence makes an impact and can be the factor that sets you apart from other candidates.

Take advantage of opportunities to interact with employers at events, career fairs and information sessions. Research the company and position ahead of time and come prepared with informed questions. Practice how you will introduce yourself and think about how you would like to be perceived. Make an appointment with your career advisor to practice using good eye contact, a firm handshake and a confident conversational style. To an extent, you will be designing your professional identity or "brand."

No matter how much research you do, interviewing skills take practice. Mock interviews at the Career Center are highly recommended and many students find it helpful to do several. See our Interviewing Skills handout for practice questions and advice.