

On the Market:

Non-Academic Careers for Graduates

No matter what career path you choose after graduate school, says Scott Williams of the Career Center, it is important to find employment that will keep you motivated, excited and fulfilled. In a study of nearly 6,000 Ph.D.s ten years after earning their degrees, researchers from University of California-Berkeley found that those with careers in the government, non-profit or private sector expressed job satisfaction equal to those working in academia.

Pursuing a job outside academia does not mean that you will have to “sell out,” be underemployed or work in a field that doesn’t interest you, says Williams. Not only that, but private sector work places are becoming more and more flexible with options such as flex-time, telecommuting, job sharing or contract-based work. So, how do you become one of those highly satisfied Ph.D.s in the business, government or non-profit world?

What Do You Want to Do?

The toughest part will be choosing. First, think about where you would like to work, both geographically and for what type of employer. Among business, government and non-profit, is one more appealing than the others to you? What types of issues, services or products do you find interesting or valuable? Do you have specific skills you would enjoy using in a job? These are the questions to ask yourself as you choose a career path.

Don’t limit yourself to what seem like the obvious choices for your degree. Explore resources such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Occupational Outlook Handbook (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>) and O*Net occupational dictionary (<http://online.onetcenter.org>). The Chronicle of Higher Education (<http://chronicle.com>) has a regular feature called “Beyond the Ivory Tower” and non-academic job listings for people with graduate degrees. Learn more about the careers you might be interested in and, just as importantly, eliminate the ones that aren’t for you.

Internships are another avenue for exploring potential careers. In addition to helping you figure out what you want to do, an internship gives you valuable experience to put on a resume – employers say internships are the single most

important thing they look for in candidates for entry-level jobs – they usually contain a mentoring component, and they help you build a network of contacts to call upon when you’re ready to start the actual job hunt.

Acquiring Marketable Skills Now

You can view your graduate education as a specialization within a relatively narrow field, or you can look at it as a broad program of teaching, research and scholarship that might prepare you for any one of a number of careers. The key to convincing a potential employer of the latter is to complement your academic work with internships, volunteer experience and involvement in extracurricular activities. Use your summers to complete internships. Pursue other interests, as long as they don’t slow your progress toward graduating. Some students get so wrapped up in their studies that their other passions fall by the wayside. Take advantage of everything the University of Georgia has to offer: audit a course outside your field, sign up for a continuing education course or Graduate School seminar in computers or project management. Potential employers want to see not only the marketable skills that you gain from these wide-ranging experiences, but also that you are a well-rounded person.

Begin networking now. Approach networking as an information-gathering activity, as opposed to a way to “find a job now.” Make strategic choices about the faculty you work with in your department. If you’re interested in a non-academic career, you might not want to choose an advisor who has never worked outside the university setting. Use your faculty members, advisors, classmates and the people you meet at conferences to build your network. If you had a career before graduate school, keep or re-kindle those relationships. Send former co-workers and supervisors Christmas cards or an occasional note attached to an article you think they’d find interesting.

When It’s Time for the Job Search

The ideal time to start your job hunt is six to eight months prior to graduation. Many larger companies are able to predict their hiring needs that far in advance, and they recruit early because they want to find the best and

brightest students who are motivated enough to job hunt before graduation.

Use the resources of the Career Center to find non-academic jobs. The job search experience for graduate students closely mirrors that of undergraduates, says Williams, and the Career Center has a variety of databases and resources for gathering information about employers and job openings, as well as counselors who can help you with resumes, interview skills and the search in general. While the career fairs on campus are geared to undergraduates, the employer representatives at the fairs should be able to tell you whom to contact within their organizations to learn more about positions for people with graduate degrees. Also, join the University of Georgia Alumni Association as a student member to get access to its online community.Hall, open from 8 a.m.-midnight, with quiet study hours in the mornings and a television tuned to non-U.S. channels, plus magazines and newspapers from around the world.

Finding a job, in some ways, is like having a job. You should be constantly working at it: networking, developing leads, attending conferences and going to informational interviews. Set realistic goals for each day or week and then meet them. It's easy to procrastinate when it comes to job-hunting, because you're busy with school itself, and the task seems daunting. But you do not want to finish your degree with no leads in hand. How focused should your hunt be? Keep your options open, but don't spread yourself too thin to develop good leads and knowledge of an industry. Have a Plan B, but direct 80 to 90 percent of your energy at Plan A. ■

Based on the Graduate School seminars "Pursuing a Non-Academic Career After the Ph.D." and "Documenting Your Graduate Experience for the Job Search" by Scott Williams, executive director of the Career Center. To view these seminars in full, visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.

Forget the CV: You Need a Resume

While most employers in academic and research fields ask for curriculum vitae from job applicants, most in the government, non-profit and private sector want to see resumes. What's the difference? In a nutshell, the resume is much shorter. What you are allowed two to 10 pages to say about yourself in a CV, you generally have to fit on one page (unless you have 10 or more years of experience) in a resume.

It's also critical that a resume be aesthetically attractive. The average employer looks at each resume for about 20 seconds during an initial screening. That means that clear, readable type; succinct, active descriptions; and bold headers are critical. Remember, a resume is your tool for marketing yourself, and employers expect it to be an example of you putting your best foot forward. Choose your words carefully. Edit and proofread your resume several times and ask someone else to proofread it for you also. Most often, the reverse-chronological format (i.e., starting with your most recent experience and working backward) is the most effective. Typical

category heads include: Objective (optional, because you'll always be sending a cover letter, too), Education, Summary of Qualifications (highlight four to six of your strongest skill sets), Experience (or, break it down into "Related Experience," "Volunteer Experience" and/or "Other Experience"), Computer Skills, Honors and Awards, Community Service and Memberships. Use action words. Whenever possible, use numbers and descriptive phrases to communicate the results of things you have done, rather than just stating what you have done.

Even if you have never held a job outside of academia, you have skills that are transferable to jobs in other employment sectors (think: research, computer skills, critical thinking, problem solving, writing, verbal communication, presentation skills, leadership, project management, time management, multi-tasking, managing relationships with faculty members and undergraduates, etc.). It's your responsibility to communicate to employers the skills you have that will benefit them.