

career planning

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Finding a job: One step at a time

The who, what, when, where, why and how of job-searching

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You may or may not have much luck with this step-by-step approach to finding a job — then again you may or may not have much luck without it. What follows is a semi-comprehensive guide to finding a job.

The steps set forth here have been gleaned from conversations with University officials, students, employers and most specifically from Larry Smith, Director of Career Planning and Placement. They are all employed, so one might surmise they knew what they were doing when they were hired.

The first step in finding a job is to decide what you want to do. A seemingly easy task until you have to determine whether the \$40,000 you plunked down on an education was spent in a field you're still interested in.

Smith suggests a number of possibilities to ferret out the type of job or career area you're most in tune with. The University's testing center and career information system can pinpoint your interests and abilities and direct you to a suitable occupation. Smith says the testing provides "entree to a shopping list of careers."

The best time to start exploring your options is during your sophomore year, after you've made the adjustment to University life and can focus your interests.

When you find out just what it is you want to do, the next step is to do it. In class, out of class, for free, for money, for any reason — do something that will help you once you're out of school.

"Gather eyeball to eyeball experience," Smith says. "Identify your primary career interests. You need to know who your audience is — get an idea of the world in which they operate."

Students usually gain experience in their chosen fields through volunteer channels, although there are some chances at finding work that actually pays. This career-related experience is not only to boost the number

of entries on your resume, but to provide insight into how well you'll adjust to and enjoy a chosen career.

During your junior year, Smith suggests some serious thought about where you want to start working and who you want to work for. A resume and contacting people in your career area could, with some perseverance, land you a summer job or an internship.

About the time a student thinks he or she might be interested in getting into a certain field is about the time the student should be thinking of how to "sell" themselves, Smith says. A good sales pitch includes a well structured resume, a letter of introduction and some hard work.

All of those items are essential in a final job search during your senior year, but a little practice can be obtained in a work search during your junior year, maybe for a summer job in a related field.

Your resume should highlight your job objective, your education, personal tidbits and a list of any experience that could be applicable — the more the better.

But to get a prospective employer to take a closer look at the resume, Smith suggests an "appetizer" — a letter of introduction that gives the employer a sample of you, but leaves the company wanting to know more. The letter can include some major accomplishments and interesting facts that tell the employer "Hey! you'll want to hire me."

There are a couple of ways to go about the job search. Smith suggests a letter campaign, either a mass mailing of about 200 letters or a targeted approach to 20 or 30 carefully selected companies. With the mass approach, Smith says you can expect a lot of replies — mostly "no." With the targeted approach, more research and selection is involved but fewer rejection slips end up in your mail box.

The final step in a job search begins as early as the first step, although all the steps culminate at the same time. Letters, re-

sumes and interviews are the means to an end — being hired. The more of those you have, the better your chances become.

Taking that last step of preparing for interviews requires additional research into the company and its background, Smith says. A few calls to an employee you know or someone who is familiar with the company will suffice.

Smith stresses the need to know about interviews themselves — how they're conducted, how they're organized, what questions a prospective employer might ask. To that end, Smith has a handy item in the placement office: a list of 50 of the most commonly asked interview questions. He also suggests a little practice with a roommate or friend.

But the most important interviewing skill Smith talks about is the ability to talk about yourself.

"You have to feel comfortable talking, so you don't feel like you're bragging," Smith says. It's a kind of "just the facts, ma'am," attitude.

You must note, however, that all of this hard work won't get you anywhere if there are no jobs to be had.

So how do you know where the jobs are? About 80 percent of all job openings are never even advertised, Smith says. That makes your contacts an important — probably the most important — job search tool.

Smith says potential contacts are everywhere. Your friends and relatives, your parents' friends, your friends' friends, professors, former employers and office personnel have all been known to provide job leads.

"Make friends with the secretaries," Smith says, they usually know about the openings first.

Well, there it is, as much job finding help as space allows, but there is one final suggestion, if all of the preparation and work doesn't pan out — there's always the Army.