



Higher Education Job Search: Creating Your Personal Plan

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This guide provides a snapshot of a typical job search in the field of student affairs. This is not an extensive guide – job seekers are urged to use all available resources: online, through faculty members, administrators, fellow students, and colleagues. Also, this document does not go into depth on a job search during a conference; if you'd like more information about this, please email odair@bc.edu.

Self Assessment (Fall of job search year)

- ☑ **Review your experience to date** and identify any areas where you can add to your experience (i.e. you would like to have more workshop presentation experience, or you would like to be involved with a search committee). Speak with your supervisor about giving you additional responsibilities that will enhance your experience.
- ☑ **Talk to your supervisor, other student affairs practitioners, and faculty mentors.** Discuss areas you might want to explore, ask for referrals for informational interviews, and research the field in areas you are considering for your job search.
- ☑ **Attend a local conference.** Regional conferences offer graduate students and new professionals an opportunity to network, attend sessions of interest, and get involved. If you have an opportunity to present or co-present, do it. Consider volunteering to establish connections in the association.

Research and Resume Preparation (January/February)

- ☑ **Research possible job opportunities.** Look for the types of jobs to which you will apply to see if your experience prepares you for what the employer is seeking. These jobs can be in Hawaii at this point – it does not matter the location, just the position and qualifications the employer seeks.

Consult online resources:

- **Chronicle:** www.chronicle.com
- **Higher Ed Jobs:** www.higheredjobs.com
- **Student Affairs:** www.studentaffairs.com
- **NASPA job link:** <http://jobslink.naspa.org/search.cfm>
- **ACPA:** http://www.myacpa.org/car/car_index.cfm
- **New England Higher Ed Consortium:** <http://newenglandherc.org/>
- **New England Student Affairs Placement Conference:**
<http://www.bacha.org/Site/conferences.cfm>
- **Mass Association of Women in Education:** <http://www.mawe.org/>
- **Academic 360:** academic360.com

Research types of institutions. It is helpful to start a list of the types of schools at which you would work and those at which you would NOT work. This might include private liberal arts schools, single-sex institutions, graduate and professional schools, public research universities, religious-based institutions, etc.

Prepare your resume: This is perhaps one of the most critical steps in your job search. There are steps to putting together a top-notch resume, and they include the following:

- Make a list of all positions held and the job responsibilities in each.
- Create action-oriented descriptors for each role you hold or have held. (see list below from BC Careers Office)
- Design a format and use a font that works for you.
- Work with a supervisor, faculty member, or classmate on formatting – look closely at other resumes you like and don't like!
- Review and update your resume weekly and ask others to review it.
- If you are listing undergraduate experience, make sure that you only include experience relevant to your job interests.
- Try to keep your resume at 2 pages. If you go beyond two pages, you must fill $\frac{3}{4}$ of the third page.

Action words for use on resumes:

Management skills	Communication skills	Clerical or detailed skills
administered analyzed assigned attained chaired contracted consolidated coordinated delegated developed directed evaluated executed improved increased organized oversaw planned prioritized produced recommended reviewed scheduled strengthened supervised	addressed arbitrated arranged authored corresponded developed directed drafted edited enlisted formulated influenced interpreted lectured mediated moderated motivated negotiated persuaded promoted publicized reconciled recruited spoke translated wrote	approved arranged catalogued classified collected compiled dispatched executed generated implemented inspected monitored operated organized prepared organized prepared processed purchased recorded retrieved screened specified systematized tabulated validated
Research skills	Technical skills	Teaching skills
clarified collected critiqued diagnosed evaluated examined extracted identified inspected interpreted interviewed investigated organized reviewed summarized surveyed systematized	assembled built calculated computed designed devised engineered fabricated maintained operated overhauled programmed remodeled repair solved trained upgraded	adapted advised clarified coached communicated coordinated developed enabled encouraged evaluated explained facilitated guided informed initiated instructed persuaded set goals stimulated

Financial skills	Creative skills	Helping skills
administered	acted	assessed
allocated	conceptualized	assisted
analyzed	created	clarified
appraised	designed	coached
audited	developed	counseled
balanced	directed	demonstrated
budgeted	established	diagnosed
calculated	fashioned	educated
computed	founded	expedited
developed	illustrated	facilitated
forecasted	instituted	familiarized
managed	integrated	guided
marketed	introduced	referred
planned	invented	rehabilitated
projected	originated	represented
researched	performed	
	planned	
	revitalized	
	shaped	

This table taken from the BC Career Center site: <http://www.bc.edu/offices/careers/skills/resumes/verbs/>

- Make a first draft of a cover letter.** Use a job that piques your interest, but that you will not necessarily apply to right now. Your cover letter should have 3, or up to 4, paragraphs:

1st: Who you are, what job you are applying for at what university, how you heard about the posting, and that your experience matches well with what they are seeking.

2nd: How your experience directly connects to what they are looking for, giving specific examples, and referencing your resume for more info.

3rd: The intangibles – you are open, flexible, critical thinker, a good match for X university.

4th: How they can contact you, you look forward to hearing from them.

- Have people read and edit your cover letter.** Show it to several people and ask them to pretend they are the hiring manager. One mistake is too many.

Self-awareness and competency work (February)

- Begin to look at your own strengths and competencies.** Competencies are areas of skill and ability that are not necessarily visible on your resume. Some competencies include, but are not limited to:
 - *Bias for action:* to what extent do you see a need and act upon it?

- *Teamwork*: To what extent do you work to facilitate (in whatever role you are in) the operation of a team you are a part of?
- *Interpersonal understanding*: To what extent are you aware of what others are thinking and feeling but not necessarily saying?
- *Collaboration*: To what extent do you work with others to achieve results?
- *Information seeking*: To what extent do you look beyond the obvious or what is presented and seek out other, clarifying information?
- *Commitment to service*: To what extent do you demonstrate a willingness to serve your constituents and the institution where you want to work?
- *Organizational Awareness*: To what extent do you understand decision making channels and use them to achieve results?
- Other qualities or competencies include:
 - *how you resolve conflict – both between others and when you are involved*
 - *your organizational style*
 - *your communication style*
 - *how you handle anger and frustration (we all have it!)*
 - *how you balance your work and personal life*
 - *what makes you unique*

(Competency definitions adapted from the MIT Human Resource Competency Model)

- Make a list of examples**, using some of the competencies and qualities above, from your own experience that would enable a potential employer to understand you better.
- Make a separate list of things that did not go well** – a program, a miscommunication or misunderstanding with a supervisor, a difficult interaction with a student, etc. Write down how you handled a particular situation and what you learned about yourself. Most employers do not expect you to be perfect, in fact most expect that you are imperfect and have learned from your experiences.
- It's never too late to change paths**. Sometimes, once you have done the self reflection and competency work, you may realize that you want to pursue a different path than you originally thought. Guess what? It is early enough to do that!

Building Your Momentum (March)

- ☑ **Narrow your search** to the institutions, positions, and regions to which you would apply.
- ☑ If the ACPA/NASPA conference career booklet is out or online, **identify positions and apply**.
- ☑ **Finalize your cover letter and resume**. Show it to people again. And again.
- ☑ **Use your connections**. The field of student affairs is small – ask your colleagues, friends, fellow students, and mentors to help connect you to people.
- ☑ **Participate in multiple mock interviews** using the jobs you have applied for or are planning to apply to.
- ☑ Using index cards, **come up with answers to both simple and complex questions**, using scenarios, experiences, and your competencies as a guide. Use the following questions as a start:

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

What interests you most about this position?

Why do you want to work at (institution)?

What were your major responsibilities at your previous/current positions? Tell me more about what you are currently doing.

This position requires someone who can juggle multiple tasks. How do you go about deciding what needs to be done first?

How much independence have you had in your current and previous positions?

Tell me about a time when you were in a conflict with someone. What was the issue, and how did you resolve it?

How do you handle a task that you are not interested in doing?

In what type of environment do you work most creatively and efficiently?

Describe a situation where you were unable to meet a deadline and how you dealt with it.

Sooner or later we all have to deal with demanding or arrogant people. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. What did you do to make the interaction successful and pleasant? What would you do differently?

Give me an example of a time you had to say "no" to a very persistent person and how that situation played out.

Can you tell me a little bit about your experiences working with people from other countries or with diverse ethnic groups?

Tell me about a successful project you worked on that involved multiple tasks. How did you begin to approach the project, organize it, and follow through? What made it successful?

Tell me about an accomplishment, either at work or in your private life, that you are most proud of.

Tell me about the experience you've had organizing large meetings, preparing agendas, and taking meeting minute notes.

What concerns do you have about this position and its responsibilities?

Why are you interested in this job?

Tell me about a time that you showed initiative.

What are some of the biggest challenges you have faced in your current position?

Why are you leaving your present position?

What are your longer-term career goals?

What are your strengths/weaknesses? What have you done to improve upon your weaknesses?

What is important to you in your work environment?

What are your salary expectations? What is your current compensation?

When can you start?

The Interview Process (ongoing)

Many graduate students attend national conferences such as NASPA, ACPA, ASJA, or NACA to search for jobs. Conferences provide an excellent opportunity to explore different jobs, institutions, and locations. It is highly recommended that any student job searching attend a conference if he/she can.

Interview Attire

The most important advice on dress is that you should always look professional and presentable during all phases of your interview.

- For interviews, wear a suit.
- For day-long or multiple day interviews with “casual” time, dress business casual or business.
- No jeans, shorts, or very casual clothing.
- Comfortable shoes. Now is not the time to try out those new pumps as you will be on your feet all day!

Interviewing

There are many types of interviews, whether they are on campus, at a conference, or elsewhere. These include phone interviews, one-on-one interviews, group interviews, and lunch meetings. It is important for you to find out with whom you will be speaking so that you can prepare accordingly.

- Ask for a detailed itinerary for your day or interview, including the names of the individuals with whom you will meet. Then, do your research.

- ☑ Think very carefully about the question “why do you want to do (insert position here) and why do you want to work at (insert institution here)”?
- ☑ Know the basics about the position and the institution before you start the interview.
- ☑ Prepare questions for each position for which you are interviewing, and make sure some are specific to the position and institution.
- ☑ When you are in an interview, make eye contact with everyone in the room, not just the person who asks the question or the person who is running the interview. The quiet person may be the one with the most influence.
- ☑ Only interview for positions that you are truly interested in. This does not mean that you can’t “practice” interview at an institution whose location is not ideal, just be interested in the job. Employers can tell.
- ☑ Don’t fall into traps. Traps include “*I love this particular job, I love this school, and it is the only place I will accept a job*” or “*I would never move away from X*”. Think about all of your options, and then make the right choice for you based on as much information as you can get. Talk about your options with those closest to you, not the interviewer.

Follow-up

- ☑ **Send thank you notes** to all of the people you interviewed with. A handwritten note is still preferable, though email is acceptable as well.
- ☑ **Go on interviews**, usually second round interviews if you had your first round at the conference. It is important for you to know if the employer will pay for you or expects you to pay your own way, so ask.
- ☑ **Keep up your job search**. There will be a second wave of openings about two to three weeks after the initial conference bump, where people who got jobs will leave their current position. Check the online job sites every day and apply immediately when you see something that fits.
- ☑ **Attend NESAPC**, the New England Student Affairs Placement Conference, usually held in late May or Early June. This conference is for

those candidates who are focusing their search to the New England region.

When you get an offer

- ☑ **Jump for joy!** 😊 Then take a deep breath.
- ☑ **Look at the total package.** Salary is one aspect of a job offer, but not the only one. Benefits, housing, tuition, professional development funds, and vacation are also part of an offer package.
- ☑ **Do not accept immediately.** Ask to have the weekend (if it comes on a Friday) or until the end of the week to think about it. Talk about the offer with a friend, your supervisor, or a colleague. Do a pro and con list for the position, the institution, the salary, and the details of the job.
- ☑ **Negotiate start date and try to negotiate salary.** Sometimes this is easier said than done. Start date should be easier to negotiate, unless you are months apart in your thinking. The salary is often banded and there is little wiggle room. However, try to negotiate more, because once you get in, you are locked into a salary band with that particular job.
- ☑ **Communicate the good news to faculty, supervisors, and friends.** Let them know what you will be doing, when you start, and how they can reach you in the interim. And, most importantly, let them congratulate you!