

Starting Your Job Search

Starting your job search can be an exciting but often overwhelming and frustrating experience. We have provided some guidelines to help make the process less stressful for you.

Know Yourself through Self-Assessment

To begin your job search, you need a job target. You can narrow down possible career options by determining your interests, skills, and work values. Here are some questions you should address:

- What do you enjoy doing?
- What are your talents and abilities?
- In which tasks do you excel?
- What are the most important factors to you in a work environment—
 - Salary?
 - Job security?
 - Autonomy?
 - The ability to express your creativity?
 - The opportunity to help people?
 - Other _____?

We offer several programs that can help you complete your self-assessment including:

- MCDP: Major and Career Decisions Program
- Individual appointments with career advisors
- FOCUS: an online career guidance program

Explore Different Careers

Once you have determined your interests, skills, and work values, make a list of potential careers that are compatible with your findings. Gather occupation information for those careers, including career fields and possible job titles. Reading job descriptions will help you get an idea of the basic requirements and responsibilities of a particular career. The following resources can help you explore your career options:

- Books in the Career and Academic Planning Resource Center (Wilson 303)
- FOCUS: an online career guidance program
- The *Career Guide to JMU Majors* available online at http://www.jmu.edu/cap/career_guide/index.htm
- Job search websites available online

Conduct Informational Interviews

A great way to find out about potential careers is by interviewing professionals in your fields of interest. Interviews will help you understand the industry from the viewpoint of a seasoned professional and can also lead to networking opportunities.

The JMU Alumni Online Community

The JMU Alumni Online Community is an excellent resource that allows students to contact and network with JMU graduates working in different industries. You can access the website by visiting <http://www.alumniconnections.com/olc/pub/JMD>. Also speak with your academic advisor, professors, and professionals through friends and family members. Here are some appropriate questions you can ask during an informational interview:

- In general, what is your work like as a [name of occupation]?
- How did you get into this field?
- What preparation and educational background do you recommend for this type of position?
- What skills and abilities have you found to be most important in your work?
- What do you like most about this position?
- What do you like least about this position?
- Could you describe a typical day on the job?
- What advice would you give to someone still in college, aspiring to enter this profession?
- Could you refer me to colleagues in your organization or field who could tell me more about job or internship opportunities?

Gain Practical Experience

Another good way to learn about the career you are interested in is to participate in an internship. An internship may help you decide whether a particular industry or career is right for you. Internships can also lead to jobs within companies. Other possible ways to gain experience include volunteer work, part-time work, temporary work, and job shadowing.

When you search for an internship, consider the following questions:

- What do you hope to accomplish?
 - Do you want to confirm your choice of major?
 - Do you want to acquire new skills?
 - Do you want to try out a career field?
 - Do you want to make networking contacts?
- Would you consider an unpaid internship in order to gain hands-on experience?
- Can your internship count toward academic credit?
 - Have you met with your department to ensure the internship satisfies all requirements for academic credit?
- Does location affect your preference?
 - Do you want to intern in a city or town?
 - Would you be willing to commute a long distance?
 - Would you need to find housing?
 - Will training be offered at the same location as the internship?

As you find internships, be prepared by having your resume ready to send to employers. Make sure to pay attention to application requirements. Some internships require a minimum GPA, an application, references, and samples of your work. Some employers may also request a copy of your transcript. Once you apply, contact the employer to check the status of your application. Persistence can show you are interested.

Job Search Methods

Some people think that the only way to find a job is through advertisements in a newspaper. Reviewing a newspaper's classified section is a common job search strategy, but not always the most effective. Developing a good job search strategy is the most important step in the job search process. An effective job hunter should use a variety of methods, including:

- networking
- job search websites and databases
- newspaper advertisements (printed or electronic)
- trade or professional association bulletins
- career fairs
- university on-campus interviewing programs

Networking

The Internet can make your job search process easier, but it is not necessarily your most effective tool. Take advantage of networking opportunities at career fairs or through on-campus interviewing programs. Realize that many positions are in the "hidden job market" and can be found through conversations with networking contacts. Job hunters often search for jobs in obvious places, but fail to use networking, an effective strategy in locating job opportunities. Networking involves building relationships with people to create a web of contacts in your career field or industry. Tips for effective networking are provided later in this guide.

Attending Career Fairs

Career fairs are the perfect opportunity for you to network with company representatives in your career field. JMU hosts several career fairs each year. For times and locations, visit our website at <http://www.jmu.edu/cap/careerfair>.

Research Jobs Online

Visit our website at http://www.jmu.edu/cap/job_intern_search/websites.htm for a listing of general job search websites, such as Recruit-A-Duke.

Long-Distance Job Search Methods

It can be especially daunting to search for a job in an unfamiliar location. Visit the Online Chambers of Commerce at <http://www.online-chamber.org> to find the chamber of commerce for your area. The Chamber of Commerce will help you identify local employers and industries. Once you have identified local employers, you can search their websites for contact information and job opportunities. Several websites, such as <http://www.hoovers.com> or Business Source Complete (accessible through the Carrier Library website: <http://www.lib.jmu.edu/resources/>) allow you to research company profiles and backgrounds.

In addition to finding jobs, you may need help relocating and factoring the local cost of living. Visit our website at http://www.jmu.edu/cap/resource_center/jobsearch_websites.htm to find relocation guides and online salary calculators.