Advice to JMU Students from the Graduating Class of 2012

“This Is Not Your Father Talking”

“What actions do you wish you had taken during your junior/senior year to prepare you for your transition out of JMU?”

JMU PROGRAMS
Explore study abroad programs earlier!

GRADUATE SCHOOL
Apply the summer before your senior year!

LIFE SKILLS
Attend the various free financial workshops!

Academics
Advisor Assistance, Elective Courses, Test Preparation

Career Planning
Resume Workshops, Practice Interviews, Career Advising

Starting Sooner
Graduate Applications, Internships, Job Opportunities

Experiences
Languages, Study Abroad, Campus Organizations

“I wish I had taken advantage of...”
- LinkedIn
- GRE Prep Courses
- The Career & Internship Fair
This Is Not Your Father Talking
Advice to JMU Juniors & Seniors from the GRADUATING CLASS OF 2012

Photo by: Jason Lenhart
Graduate Words of Wisdom...

The Graduating Class of 2012 has provided insight on how to successfully transition into post-graduate life. This document offers advice on ways to better prepare for the future based on the experiences of some of these Dukes. Here is just a snippet of the themes discussed inside:

“I needed to be more proactive and talk to various people to decide what I wanted to do post-grad. I didn't know what I wanted to do (whether school or work), so I wish I utilized more resources at JMU to help me make a decision sooner.” (pg. 5)

“I wish I would have taken advantage of more of the opportunities available to me at JMU. Things like undergraduate research, internships, clubs, etc. There were so many opportunities available but I wasn't very active in the community, and I think it's hurting me now.” (pg. 6)

“I wish that I had more opportunities to take elective classes. I find myself in graduate school now and wishing I had taken extra classes...” (pg. 7)

“I wish I had more proactively sought out full time employment to better prepare myself for my next phase as I transitioned from college to work.” (pg. 8)

“I wish I had researched available funding opportunities for graduate school.” (pg. 9)

“Having a budget prepared for life after college before graduating.” (pg. 10)

“Learned about Recruit-a-Duke earlier to see what internship opportunities or career opportunities were available to me.” (pg. 11)

“Utilized more career services (resume workshops, simulated interviews, career advising). I knew they existed, but I didn't make as much time for them as I should have.” (pg. 12)

“I wish I had taken advantage of a study abroad program earlier than I did. I waited until the summer after I graduated to participate in a program in China.” (pg. 13)
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Introduction

Time is running out! Sooner than you think you will embark on a new and exciting journey in life: the workforce or graduate school!

You have probably received advice from family and friends about life after JMU. More than likely, your parents have provided their own insight from personal experience. To assist you in your transition, we’d like to have the May 2012 JMU graduating class provide you with their advice!

We recently asked these graduates to provide their response to the following question:

“What actions do you wish you had taken during your junior/senior year to prepare you for your transition out of JMU into the workforce or graduate/professional school?”

We received literally hundreds of comments from all of these graduates and would like to share them with you! Across all majors there were similar themes of preparation for the real-world. Some of these responses even provide specific advice to various majors from previous experiences. We could not include all of them, but have provided those that are indicative of trend comments.

Take a few minutes to read their advice. We’re sure you’ll find something useful.

Again, best wishes as you prepare for the workforce or graduate/professional school!

JMU Office of Institutional Research

http://www.jmu.edu/instresrch/
Starting Sooner

Get a head start. It’s never too soon to begin preparation for your future. The early bird gets the worm or in this case, the job.

• [I wish I had] Worked on my resume earlier.
• [I wish I had] Learned that I should have applied to grad school earlier.
• I would have searched for job opportunities much sooner and taken more advantage of the job fairs.
• [I wish I had] learned about Recruit-a-Duke earlier to see what internship opportunities or career opportunities were available to me.
• I needed to be more proactive and talk to various people to decide what I wanted to do post-grad. I didn't know what I wanted to do (whether school or work), so I wish I utilized more resources at JMU to help me make a decision sooner.
• [I wish I had] begun job search/spent more time on job search earlier in the year before graduation, used social media and built connections better to help me with finding a job.
• I wish I had taken advantage of a study abroad program earlier than I did. I waited until the summer after I graduated to participate in a program in China.
• I wish I had established a closer relationship with my pre-med advisor earlier on in my time at JMU, rather than talking with her for the first time (one-on-one) during my senior year.
Taking advantage of what JMU has to offer is one of the best things you can do to further your career. There are many resources on-campus just waiting to be utilized, and almost always free of charge.

- I wish I had taken advantage of the resume review services.
- I wish I would have taken advantage of more of the opportunities available to me at JMU. Things like undergraduate research, internships, clubs, etc. There were so many opportunities available but I wasn't very active in the community, and I think it's hurting me now.
- I would have taken advantage of GRE opportunities. I also would have done more networking within my major.
- I wish I had taken advantage of the career fairs and on campus interview opportunities. Despite that, I think what prepared me most for the workforce was an internship between my junior and senior years.
- One thing I should have taken advantage of was [Career and Academic Planning] services. I did not ask for help with my resume until the very end of my graduate experiences at UMass. I did not realize how much help my resume needed!
**Academics**

If you want to be a competitive candidate for a position after graduation, get your GPA up. Take courses that will advance relevant skills that can be applied in the workplace setting and choose electives in your field of interest.

- [I wish I had] studied more, crammed less.
- [I wish I had] learned how to study and prepared better for tests.
- I wish I had picked up a minor in my field of interest (education and/or public policy).
- I wish that I had more opportunities to take elective classes. I find myself in graduate school now and wishing I had taken extra classes simply to learn about graphic design or sign language, for example.
- I wish I had taken more programming classes, as this would have helped immensely in my current role.
- Wish I had more time in my course schedule for basic programming classes and that those classes were available to the general student body.
- Taken a class on Special Education because whether you are a SPED major or not, you will have students with Autism/disabilities/etc. in your class.
- I wish I had taken a design course or a more useful minor that would've supplied me with technical/software skills.
- I wish I had minored in Medical Spanish and got better grades.
- I wish I had listened to my gut instincts and not have been afraid to pick up a concentration in Public Health. Over the past two years I've found that's what I would truly like to be doing but I would have been better prepared and probably have already found a career path that I would be heading down had I listened to myself.
Seeking Job Opportunities

Start seeking out job opportunities earlier in your college career. Attending the Career Fair is a great way to network with future employers and jumpstart your job search.

- I wish I had more proactively sought out full-time employment to better prepare myself for my next phase as I transitioned from college to work.
- I wish I had made more job contacts outside of the Harrisonburg area and varied my resume more.
- More interviews, more job fairs, more work experiences at a professional business.

- More trips to actual work sites and actually performing the work duties for a period of time.
- I would have liked to spend more time on different job options in my major so that I would know which classes to choose for my major electives.
- I wish I had attended more job fairs and talked to more professors to get connections with potential employing companies.
- To start looking and interviewing for jobs. I waited too long and paid for it once I graduated.
- I wish I had made more professional/academic contacts within JMU and the surrounding community. Had I kept in touch with more of my professors or some of the contacts from my volunteer associations, I may have had more luck finding a job within my field. I also wish that I had gone on mock interviews and attended more of the career fairs to be better prepared for job-seeking.
- I wish I knew more about what classes to take to prepare myself for the working world. I also wish I had started to apply to jobs sooner. Wish I looked up unpaid internships in my field instead of just taking pay jobs like nannying and lifeguarding.
Preparing for Graduate School

Consider the requirements of various universities and prepare yourself for the application process. Depending on the school you choose, stakes can be high regarding previous work experiences and GPA requirements.

- I wish I had researched available funding opportunities for graduate school.
- Make sure to apply early. Do it the summer before your senior year and that way you don't have to worry about it during the year when you're busy with classes.
- To seek out more information about graduate school and how realistic acceptance is for the program I was actively trying to pursue, possibly change my major.
- I wish I could have had more opportunities or taken advantage of information given about graduate school. I took a year off from school before I went back to grad school and wish I would have known some of the things I had to go through with the grad school process ahead of time.
- I wish I had reached out and talked to alumni who could give me insight on my preferred career track to get advice on job options and graduate studies.
- I wish I had enrolled in a GRE study course and attended more graduate school information sessions/workshops. However, I did work professionally for 2 years between undergrad and graduate school, which I think has been crucial to my development as a professional in my field.
- I wish I had applied to graduate school to attend right after senior year especially since I've realized my credentials here in MN aren't as good as they were in VA.
- I don't think I would have done anything differently but taking a Grad School 101 course in my undergraduate degree definitely prepared me for what I would have to do to apply/get into graduate school.
## Life Skills

Preparing for the real world is a crucial component toward personal development and future stability. Saving and career-building prior to graduation will start positive habits for financial security. In the “real world” nothing will be handed to you, you must seek out the knowledge for yourself. The job market is constantly evolving and bracing yourself for a full-throttle launch into adulthood after graduation will better prepare you for a soft and smooth landing in a solid career.

- Having more knowledge about finances and our current economy.
- Having a budget prepared for life after college before graduating.
- Real life skills training--how to apply for jobs, interview, negotiate salary etc.
- Learned more about balancing finances and taxes. I have [had] several jobs in the self-employment sector and knowing more about taxes and how benefits work would have been good. **I know a lot of liberal arts but not much about being an adult.**
- Gone to the various free financial workshops; they would have been very helpful in figuring out "real world" budgeting, different types of savings and investment accounts, credit ratings, etc.
- I think my involvement in programs that included "real life" situations (such as management consulting classes, involvement with organizations such as the Society of Entrepreneurs and work with the CFE and local economic development centers) really gave me the understanding of small businesses that I could bring to my current job (tech start up). The strengths that JMU equipped me with were problem solving skills and the ability to communicate with others effectively - not so much a deep understanding of the field.

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I wish I had practice with...

- Budgeting
- Financial Workshops
- Life Skills Training
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Internships

Internship opportunities come by often for JMU students; taking advantage of the opportunity to network with potential employers for summer internships is a great first step to a successful career.

- Internships should be mandatory.
- I wish I had done an internship/externship to get more experiences and make some connections/contacts so I could have had an easier time getting a job.
- [I wish I had] learned about Recruit-a-Duke earlier to see what internship opportunities or career opportunities were available to me.
- Wish I would've done more intensive internships and resume builders to be more focused on my career before I graduated.
- I wish I had done an internship. I think it would have been very helpful for networking and gaining work experiences.
- Made more effort to find internships -- taking an unpaid internship is hard when you are working through school, though.
- [I wish I had] been more active in networking, interviews and applied for enriching internships.
- I had 3 different internships at very different companies, so I was very prepared for going into the workforce.
- I interned as a software engineer for two summers before graduating -- if I hadn't, I certainly would have wished that I had.

I wish I had taken advantage of...

- Job Fairs
- Recruit-a-Duke
- Externships
Career Planning

If you have yet to discuss your future plans with your advisor, contact them today. As you get closer to graduation, the time is approaching when your adulthood begins. Take the steps to build your career now so you will be prepared for the workforce long before graduation.

- [I wish I had] used LinkedIn more.
- Utilized more career services (resume workshops, simulated interviews, career advising). I knew they existed, but I didn't make as much time for them as I should have.
- Junior and senior year are too late to take action.
  I genuinely believe that freshman need mandatory times where they meet with their advisor to talk about what they need to be doing and where they are headed.
- I knew how to write a resume because I volunteered in the Career and Academic Planning office, but lots of my friends did not have any knowledge of resumes. Not even the basics, like how many pages or what to write about.
- Practiced the routine of workplace hours. Pairing students with workplace professionals in the respective field could also help alleviate a lot of the concerns, anxiety through discussion and meetings. This would also give a head start to creating a professional network.
- I wish I had read more about career options and attended more workshops about putting together resumes /cover letters.
- I wish I had looked into what fields were poised to grow over the next decade.
- I wish I had been more proactive about meeting with professors and advisors so that I had a better idea of what I wanted to pursue and what career I could actually get a job with. I also wish that I had understood how important it was to develop my writing ability and medical experiences.
The JMU Experience

Part of being a JMU student is living the JMU experience. This includes a number of factors like joining organizations, volunteering, attending games and events, building lasting friendships, and exposure to different cultures.

- I think I did all the necessary steps especially involving myself in leadership roles in extracurricular. It's a little difficult to leave the JMU bubble so I guess my one suggestion is to immerse yourself in the school and friends before you leave.

- I wish I would have taken an introductory to career course, so I would have fully understood the career options available during undergrad better. I also wish I got more involved my first two years of college.

- [I wish I had done] more travel/internship experiences, independent research.

- I wish I had taken advantage of a study abroad program earlier than I did. I waited until the summer after I graduated to participate in a program in China.

- I planned as much as I could and had a backup plan if things didn't go according to plan after graduation, but I wish I would have expanded my horizons and branched out into new areas. There are so many opportunities that exist, and I feel that I limited myself when planning my post-grad plans.

- I held a part time internship, volunteered, and was active in an organization. I believe these experiences helped to prepare me for my transition out of JMU.

- I wish I would have joined more organizations to branch out. I would have also done an internship to help build my resume.