

THIS IS NOT YOUR FATHER TALKING!



ADVICE TO JMU JUNIORS AND SENIORS FROM THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2003



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INTRODUCTION

Time is running out! Sooner than you think you will embark on an exciting and challenging new phase in your life: the workforce or graduate school!

You have lots of questions about life after college and how you can make the most of your remaining time at JMU. You probably have been asking your friends and family about life after JMU. More than likely, your parents have provided lots of advice for you also!

We'd like to have the 2002-03 JMU graduating class provide you their advice! We recently asked these alumni to provide their responses to the following question:

“What actions do you wish you had taken during your junior and/or 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 these alumni and would like to share them with you. We could not share all of them, but have provided the best in this document.

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>

START SOONER

The process of finding a job and/or enrolling in graduate school took much longer for some of the alumni. They believe they would have been more successful if they had begun earlier.

- I wish that I had started making plans for a job after I graduated. I graduated over a year and a half ago and I am just now finding a real job--right here on the campus of JMU.
- I wish that I had put in more effort to find a job. I did find one upon graduating but it wasn't really utilizing my education. Although I just started a new job yesterday that will utilize my CIS education.
- I feel as though I could have taken more time to sift through graduate school programs better to have analyzed all of my options more carefully. Also, more networking in the area which I was to move to after JMU would have been helpful.
- I wish I started looking for jobs sooner. I didn't start looking until 2 weeks after graduation. I think I did everything right my J/S year. I was involved in campus life -- held a position in my sorority, started the Association for Women in Communication group, and worked part-time at UREC Marketing. I had a blast doing everything and it also looked good on my resume. Note to future students: DON'T JUST GET A DEGREE - GET ACTIVE ON CAMPUS! My extracurricular are what really sold me to my employers. Unless you have a 4.0 to brag about, you don't stand out from the crowd. But even 4.0's with no other activities on their resume, now I know, don't go to the top of the stack!
- I wish I had my resume fully completed and polished going into my senior year. I always thought my resume could use work. When I finally went to seek help on my resume close to the end of my senior year, the lady who reviewed it told me I could have had a job easily by now with my experience. If I had known this ahead of time I would have done Madison track interviews and worked harder to get a job while in school.
- I wish I had met with a career counselor more often to figure out where my major could lead professionally.
- I wish I had better maintained some of my contacts. I also should have begun my career search earlier. Beginning to look for a job second semester of senior year is far too late, especially with the job market today.
- Wow. I wish I had researched the job market and started making more connections those last few years. I was pretty unprepared leaving JMU because I didn't really look ahead to what I would be facing in terms of looking for real employment. It took me a while to realize that internships, networking, and applying for jobs isn't just for people trying to get ahead or be on top...it's almost necessary for anyone. There are a lot of jobs out there, but it really is about who you know and how to promote yourself so people know you.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SERVICES OFFERED BY JMU

JMU offers a variety of services through the academic departments and Academic Advising and Career Development. These alumni believe they would have been more successful in finding a job if they had taken advantage of these services.

- Also I wish I had really thought about what I wanted to do after graduation. When I graduated, I had a Finance and International Business degree, but realized that I had no clue what I was going to do with either one of those degrees. And after a year of work, I am still finding that I don't know what I want to do and most times the jobs that sound interesting have nothing to do with what my degrees qualified me for.
- More seminars/lectures about real world preparedness... how to network, how to do more non-traditional job searching (beyond Monster.com), how to find a place to live and basic financial management. Also, learning about what recent grads did upon graduation would have been a big motivator and offered more diverse ideas for career options.
- Had my resume looked over by the career center, gone on more mock interviews.
- I wish I would have done more research on different work opportunities in different areas.
- Gone to more career fairs - asked more questions from different industry professionals - used the resources at the AACD more
- I wish I had attended the career fair and had used the JMU Alumni network as a search tool for positions after graduation. I also wished that I posted my resume on Madison TRAK. However, the biggest regret I have was that I did not save my JMU emails or forward them to a new alumni account prior to graduation so I lost all my JMU contacts and references.
- I wish I had talked to teachers and students about their work experiences and made more connections. I really didn't start looking for a job until after I graduated and I was shocked at how hard it was to find one.
- I realized you can never get enough critique on your resume or interviewing skills, however each real life job interview is different from the next. Also it's important to understand no one's first job after graduation is his/her ideal career. Sometimes you have to settle for a while to gain the experience for your dream job.
- The transition went well for me because I think JMU did a great job preparing me for the workforce. I would stress the importance of taking all the classes you can and getting an internship.
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- I highly recommend juniors and senior to use the career center. Seek positions/internships in a related field. Use your last few semester to better prepare you for a job before or soon after graduation. I do plan to go onto graduate school. However, I wish I had looked into different grad school and programs prior to graduating.
- Taken more advantage of the career development center. Understood that if I had applied myself more- I could have done a lot better. Though I didn't do poorly, I could have had a much higher GPA. I would have taken an INTERNSHIP which I avoided b/c most wouldn't pay- instead I opted for the give it a try tactic and I am still currently seeking my proper fit in corporate America. If I had taken my time in college to figure out what I did in the last year or two after college, I would have saved myself a lot of heartache.
- I wish I had had a more definite plan for what I wanted to do.
- I would have taken more advantage of the excellent Career Services Center earlier than the beginning of my last semester at JMU. I would have taken advantage of Resume clinics and used the center to aid in my career search.
- I wish I'd done some more market research on what jobs are out there, began compiling a resume, gained an understanding of what employers are looking for, attended more job fairs and interviewing events, and had more opportunities to gain experience.
- I think I was ready with a job lined up by mid-senior year. If there is one thing I can impart on others graduating, it would be to pay particular attention to detail. It's not acceptable to produce an end product at 85% accuracy anymore. A B grade in the real world can hurt your reputation.

SEEK JOB-RELATED WORK EXPERIENCES

Many alumni believe that they should have gained real-world experiences through internships, volunteer work, and other actions. These experiences are definitely helpful in gaining the desired job.

- I never had an internship and at times, feel that this may have put me at a disadvantage for finding a job after graduation. People with internships seemed to have some connections with the workforce that aided them in finding jobs. However, by no means am I suggesting that everyone needs to go out and get an internship. I still believe that each student, if successful in their studies, should be able to find a creditable job. Also I wish I had really thought about what I wanted to do after graduation.
- More information on getting a job, the importance of internships/past experience, knowledge of the corporate world
- I felt that I was really prepared. I had several internships and started looking for a job the September of my senior year. However I had an extremely hard time finding one! I Guess I would have started looking earlier and harder.

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- I would have had more internships, made stronger networking connections in my field and started interviewing for jobs. The initial bumps I hit in the road all look back to not having enough real experience.
- Started looking in the winter for a summer internship to get better ideas, that was the best experience and I wish that I had been able to do more internships in order to build my resume, and have more 'real world' experiences
- I wish I would had done an internship. Moving into a large corporate atmosphere from college was very overwhelming and was something that took me a while to cope with. I should have sat down and wrote out on paper my likes and dislikes about the type of jobs I would be presented with when I began working. Doing this, I could have known whether I should move more toward engineering or computer science while in college. This would have given me a greater understanding on what I am more interested in and not just trying to achieve the greatest income potential.
- I graduated earlier than I had originally planned. Several weeks into my fall semester, I recognized that I might be able to graduate early if I took some extra classes that spring. If I had continued one more fall semester after that, I would have been able to do a summer internship and preparation for grad school and/ or the workplace during my final semester.
- The only thing I wish I had done was go out and get contacts of people. Networking is by far the best thing you can do to help yourself in the professional world.
- I would have liked to spend practical time in a diverse, urban environment. Though the experiences I had were helpful, Harrisonburg and its surrounding areas cannot fully prepare one for the inner city, or for working in any multi-racial society. I found this to be true in teaching, but I imagine it would be similarly true in other disciplines.
- I wish I would have gotten more experience in the career I thought I wanted to go into earlier in my undergraduate years. I realized later it was not what I expected.
- I should have been more willing to relocate for summer internships.
- Shadowing workers in my field to see if the end result is truly what I wanted to work towards. Wish I had a counselor-career mentor to clearly define the skills I needed for the exact position I wanted. I probably would've changed majors early on if I had taken that step.
- The one thing I'm glad I did that I don't think many people did was to have a job during my senior year. The reason I'm glad I did this was because it helped me start the transition into a working lifestyle. I worked 4 weekday afternoons every week, which forced me to really make priorities and stick to a schedule. Most other alumni had a hard time adjusting to the workforce, while I was ready for it. The one regret I have is more personal - I didn't participate in a study-abroad program. I felt at the time that it would hinder my ability to graduate in a 4-year period. Wouldn't have done much differently, I

ended up going onto a year long program of inner-city work so I didn't spend much time job searching/interviewing. I'd encourage more kids to consider exploring, taking advantage of service programs.

SEEK EXPERIENCES THAT BROADEN

Many students become involved in experiences that broaden them as individuals. These alumni believe strongly that involvement in on-campus experiences or studying abroad would have been very helpful.

- More volunteer work or involvement in a group that interested me. I think it would have been helpful to prove my commitment to areas of interest. This would have helped me stand out better during interviews.
- Note to future students: DON'T JUST GET A DEGREE - GET ACTIVE ON CAMPUS! My extracurricular activities are what really sold me to my employers. Unless you have a 4.0 to brag about, you don't stand out from the crowd. But even 4.0's with no other activities on their resume, now I know, don't go to the top of the stack!
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- I really wish I had done study abroad, that would have helped to understand how different cultures interact when you are the outsider.
- Study abroad. One of the most important things I have learned from my work experience is a huge portion of life is strong communications skills. I feel as if I had study abroad I would have a better understanding of other cultures and life which would help me in my relations with clients and coworkers.
- I wish I had had the funds to go on a semester abroad program to London for the theater.
- Done more volunteering to gain experience working with different populations of people.
- Joined a professional organization
- One regret I have is not traveling abroad (or studying abroad). I think the prime time would have been Junior Fall semester. I also wished I had an internship my sophomore year summer in addition to the internship I had my summer before senior year.

CONSIDER GRADUATE SCHOOL

Many alumni enroll in graduate school within a few years of graduation. These alumni believe that it is important to consider graduate school and begin preparations early.

- I wish that I had not eliminated the idea of graduate school so early. Although I am now in graduate school, I feel that I recognized the benefits of graduate school later than I should have. Also, I was unaware that I was able to pursue graduate studies in a variety of disciplines.

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- I wish I had taken the LSATs more than once.
- Make sure that I got more A's and B's. Most grad schools look at the last 60 credits of your undergrad career.
- I started planning for graduate school the summer before senior year...WOW should have begun serious resource before May '02. Seriously, get it all done early! I cannot reiterate this enough! Half of everyone figures it out around November senior year...so if you want to be a little ahead you MUST have figured out MAJOR prospects prior to Fall Semester!
- I wish as a junior that I would have realized that I would go to graduate school after I left JMU. I did not even think about graduate school until my senior year and then I felt rushed to pick a graduate major and school and get my applications with letters of recommendation in on time.
- I wish I had had a more information regarding the grad school application process. I'm sure resources were available of which I did not take full advantage. I felt and continue to feel very prepared with the grad school experience itself, however I would have been more driven to seek out other resources, done a better job overall with my applications (i.e., personal statements û I needed more time to have a faculty member check them over), started applications earlier(!), and talked with other grad students who have already been through the process. I wish I could have had a concrete timeline to have managed my time better with taking the GREs, writing a thesis, and taking a full course schedule.
- I finished many of my required courses early so I had a light senior year which was fun but it caught me off guard when I started graduate school.

BETTER STUDY HABITS

Some alumni wish they had been more serious about their studies earlier in their college years.

- Retaken my freshman calculus class to increase my GPA/allow for entrance into an internship program vs. direct hire.
- Spent more hours studying, yet not at the cost of my time with friends. More quality time and less time wasted on doing nothing.
- Understood that if I had applied myself more, I could have done a lot better. Though I didn't do poorly, I could have had a much higher GPA.
- I wish I had put in a bit more effort on the craftsmanship of my final art products in school. I also wish I had gone to more seminars and lectures outside of JMU, relating to my field of study.
- I wish I would have partied less often and concentrated on achieving a higher GPA. I believe I would have secured employment sooner if I had a more impressive academic record.
- I wish I had been careful with my major GPA. I also wish I had started my job search in my junior year itself.

IMPROVED NETWORKING AND PEOPLE SKILLS

People skills and networking are very important in the workforce. These alumni describe how improved people and networking skills could have helped them.

- More seminars/lectures about real world preparedness... how to network, how to do more non-traditional job searching (beyond Monster.com), how to find a place to live and basic financial management. Also, learning about what recent grads did upon graduation would have been a big motivator and offered more diverse ideas for career options.
- Gotten to know more professors better so I could get references years later.
- I wish I had attended the career fair and had used the JMU Alumni network as a search tool for positions after graduation. I also wished that I posted my resume on Madison TRAK. However, the biggest regret I have was that I did not save my JMU emails or forward them to a new alumni account prior to graduation so I lost all my JMU contacts and references.
- Taken advantage of the resources offered by the career center more extensively. Networked with professors, had a more reputable internship with a company I planned to work with after graduation.
- I wish I had talked to teachers and students about their work experiences and made more connections. I really didn't start looking for a job until after I graduated and I was shocked at how hard it was to find one.
- Joined a professional fraternity or honor society.
- Worked harder to develop public speaking and interpersonal skills.
- I wish I had started networking way more in advance, I wish I had known how important keeping in touch with previous employers was... honestly nothing can prepare you for the workforce as much as you'd like to be prepared. I went to school for 18 years of my life, it's all I knew aside from summer jobs, and you're thrown into a totally different situation when you enter the workforce.
- I wish I had taken more diverse internships to further my experiences and connections rather than coming home to the same steady summer/winter intern job.
- I wish I was exposed to more alumni, both successful in their intended and field and those who had deviated. I still wonder how many of my peers continued on in our major field and how many are simply bank tellers and office analysts. Looking back I would have learned a lot from the why's the how's of their stories.
- I wish I would have joined more clubs outside of my major. The interactions with people of different backgrounds/studies would have prepared me more for the 'real world.'

LEARNED LIFE SKILLS

Life skills are very important to all alumni. These alumni describe what life skills they found necessary after graduation.

- The only thing that really took me back was the number of hours you actually put in. I thought school was rough and you were constantly working during school hours and at home. I thought work would end at 5, 6, or 7 - when you left the office - but it never does! I don't know how to prepare people for that - but if you could??
- I wish I had taken a personal finance course.
- I wish I had relaxed more, next to impossible to come out of college with a job, take time to celebrate graduating, then get a job
- Tried to save more money.
- Work on something in my field outside of my class work. I've found in my technology field that there is so much out there that cannot be taught in a textbook. Practical knowledge, albeit as a job or just personal time, makes all the difference in the world.
- I wish I'd gone to more events focusing on finding your first apartment, budgeting and finding your place in a world of grown-ups.
- Listened to my parents.
- I wish that I hadn't gotten a credit card in college -- now I'm struggling to pay off the debt, buy a car, AND pay for very expensive northern VA housing.
- Saved more money
- I would like to have had some more education on how to evaluate compensation packages that are offered by employers. I found that I was very surprised at how much difference other considerations, besides monetary compensation, can make.
- Taken a finance or some type of business class to prepare me for budgeting, filling out tax forms, investing, etc.
- Saved money
- Got up regularly early to adjust to the 9-5 business world schedule.
- I wish I had been involved in something that communicated the expectations and priorities of companies... to get a better idea of the business world although I wasn't a business major.

LEARNED MORE

Education does not end when you receive your diploma. In fact, it probably begins there. Below are comments from the alumni about what they wish they had done to acquire more information or skills.

- I wish I had done a second major in Art History rather than just minored in it. That would have helped me to have a better position from which to approach graduate programs, and museum fellowship positions in the subject.
- Work on something in my field outside of my class work. I've found in my technology field that there is so much out there that cannot be taught in a textbook. Practical knowledge, albeit as a job or just personal time, makes all the difference in the world.
- I wish I had been able to get more information about other majors/programs other than my own. I ended up taking many classes outside my major to be eligible for graduate school, but could not easily access information.
- I wish I would have taken more accounting classes, as I ended up needing two more for a job later on, and had to take them at a community college.
- I wish I had taken more independent studies and hands on programs that gave me experience with my field of study
- I wish that I had taken more writing classes. My work is judged on how well I document it. Therefore I feel if I were better at expressing myself with the written work, my work would appear to be of a higher quality.
- I wish I had chosen two majors and stayed in school an extra year. It's so hard to decide what you want to do in college, picking two majors allows you to have choices.
- I would have tried to finish my double major instead of settling for a major and minor
- I wish I would have paid more attention to my interests rather than my requirements. I loved my classes, however, once out of school, I found myself stuck with what I was already familiar with, and I felt required to continue with the work I had begun as an intern.