

## A Parent's Guide to Career Planning

The job market for college graduates is very different than the market most parents faced when they graduated. Not only is the current job market highly competitive, the long range projection for college graduate jobs is bleak: demand today is one-third that reported in the 1980s. Technology, off shoring, and a glut of experienced workers have contributed to this trend.

Internships during college are now routine: most juniors complete an internship and many are doing an internship sophomore year as well.

Jobs that didn't exist 5 or 10 years ago are now commonplace. Do you know anyone who grew up aspiring to work in social media, forensic accounting, or smart phone technology? It is virtually impossible to predict what jobs will be available in 4 or 5 years' time.

College graduates are no longer hired for their "potential"; employers now require a proven track record of marketable skills. They want to know that the job candidate can contribute to the organization on day one. Marketable skills are simply skills you can use on the job. Students who can demonstrate these skills throughout their college experience will have a competitive advantage when entering the job market.

The most common **marketable skills** employers are looking for include: (in no particular order)

- Communications skills (written and verbal)
- Analytical skills
- Strong work ethic, motivation, initiative, flexibility
- Team work
- Interpersonal: ability to network and build relationships
- Leadership
- Persuasion, selling
- Self management

There are many ways in which to develop those skills, including work experience and participating in extracurricular activities. The specific activities that employers value include (in order of employer preference):

- Summer work that is career-related
- Internship or co-op programs
- Leadership in a student organization
- Participation in a student organization
- Volunteer work
- Study abroad programs

Each year, as they progress through college, students should apply a particular focus toward their coursework and outside activities, building both their skills and a track record of achievement.

**First Year Students:** The goal for college freshman should be to acclimate to college and develop strong study habits.

*Recommendations for freshman:*

- Meet with Academic Advisor and key faculty members: understand the requirements for core courses, major, minor, graduation.
- Take a foreign language.
- Join at least one extracurricular activity or academic club.
- Take a part time summer job.
- Identify courses liked and disliked.
- List memorable projects and activities.

*Recommendations for Parents:*

- Encourage your son/daughter to explore new areas of study. Most college freshman are not aware of the vast array of courses and majors available to them. This is an exciting time, an opportunity to sample new topics and learn more about themselves.
- Affirm what you know to be areas of strength for them. Starting college is a time of uncertainty and some reinforcement can work wonders.

- Try to be open and supportive about their choice of major. College students change majors frequently. And, when a college student majors in their area of interest, they tend to have a higher GPA.
- Discuss their favorite (and least favorite) courses with them. As they progress through college, this information helps them choose careers that fit their interests.

**Second Year Students:** Sophomore year is when the “resume building” should begin.

*Recommendations for sophomores*

- Take a self-assessment to identify skills, interests and work values.
- Identify at least two marketable skills to develop this year and create a plan to pursue them.
- Identify electives and other courses to begin to close in on a choice of major.
- Spend some time on the winter break researching 2 or 3 career choices. This can be done by asking friends and family for suggestions, or through externships. (An externship is an opportunity to shadow someone while they are on the job.)
- Students may want to apply for a summer job or internship in the spring.
- Attending a job fair will give a student an idea of what to expect: which employers present, how candidates dress, etc.

*Recommendation for parents:*

- Review the results of your child’s assessments. Validate their results and keep an open mind.
- Ask your child if they have started thinking about career choices. If the answer is “no” or if they don’t want to discuss it, that may be a sign of anxiety. College students are painfully aware of the job outlook and some times don’t know how to start. You can ask them if they have any curiosity about other people’s careers.
- Encourage them to obtain a part time job and/or internship.

## **Third Year Students: Begin Career Planning**

### *Student Recommendations*

- Finalize major and graduation requirements.
- Register for: LSAT (December); MCAT (April); GRE (June)
- Identify 2 more marketable skills to develop this year and create a plan to achieve.
- Participate in a leadership role in one extra curricular activity.
- Create a list of contacts (in the fall, and ongoing).
- Create a self-employed part time job.
- Conduct 3-5 informational interviews.
- Career research: identify and research 3-5 job functions and 3-5 industries.
- Apply for internships (November-March.).

### *Recommendations for Parents*

- Internships in the junior year are a critical component for the resume. Many internships, however, are unpaid or may be in a different location. Discuss the various options with your son/daughter as well as your financial expectations. If finances are a concern, perhaps they can do a part time internship and work a part time job.
- Do not find the internship or job for your son/daughter. Provide suggestions or ideas, and of course, offer to introduce them to some of your contacts. But your student should take responsibility to reach out to your contacts and secure a job. Looking for a job is a life skill, best learned at the onset of a career.
- Be sure to provide positive reinforcement for any career-related activity they perform. This is new and it can be scary.

**Fourth Year Students:** Begin Active Career Search

*Student Recommendations*

- Complete all requirements for graduation.
- Create a plan to further develop 2 marketable skills previously identified.
- Finalize career goals.
- Create job search plan.
- Draft and finalize resume.
- Prepare for interviews by participating in mock interviews.
- Identify 8-10 target employers. Search alumni database for contacts.
- Create and continue to build a Linked in profile. [www.Linkedin.com](http://www.Linkedin.com)
- Make two contacts per week. Track job search results.

*Parent Recommendations*

- The anxiety level rises during senior year. Students are scared, unsure of what to do, and as a result may do nothing. Remember: they are not disinterested or unaware. Try to be patient and understand that making the transition from school to work is probably the biggest change they have ever had to make.
- Don't nag your child about not having a job or plan yet. Positive reinforcement on any steps they take to move forward is more effective.
- Be prepared to support your child through the ups and downs of the job search. Encourage them to keep moving forward, even if they think they have a job.
- Do not contact a prospective employer on your child's behalf. This is his/her responsibility. It will also leave a negative impression of your child in the eyes of the employer.
- If your child expresses interest in graduate school, be sure it is the right choice. If graduate school is a requirement for their career goals, then it is



the right choice. If graduate school is being used as a mean of postponing the job search, then it can be an expensive and ineffective tactic.