

The Job Search

For many college seniors and recent graduates, looking for employment means venturing into an arena where the rules are unfamiliar and stakes seem high. The possibilities—for rewarding work and an independently earned salary—are tantalizing, yet there may be a downside as well. What if you can't find a fulfilling job? Feeling both anxious and excited about your employment search is not unusual. The more you can learn about the process and methods of the job search game, the more successful you are likely to be.

Looking for a job takes time. It is estimated that most people spend between three and nine months on an employment search, the actual time depending on variables such as the type of work sought and geographic preferences and/or limitations. It also takes hard work. You will have to research employers, write letters, make follow-up phone calls, interview, and wrestle with tough decisions. Finally, there's a direct correlation between obtaining satisfying employment and having a good idea of what you are looking for in the first place. If you are facing the job search with only a vague goal of "wanting to help people" or "hoping to find something challenging," it is probably time to step back and direct your efforts toward self-assessment and career exploration.

Job vs. Career

Many college seniors feel that their first job will funnel them into an ever-narrowing career path. This belief can create unneeded pressure. "If my first position will determine what I do with my life, then I can not afford to make any mistakes!" is a common refrain. In

actuality, most people change career fields several times over the course of their working life. Rather than trying to plan your lifelong career at this point, you might ask yourself, "What do I want to gain from my first position after college?" Defining your priorities before you get to the job application stage can help you feel more directed.

When you've done your soul searching and are ready to begin the actual job hunt, it is important to understand how the game is played. Many methods exist for obtaining employment, and the more you are familiar with them, the greater your chances of finding what you seek. "Putting all your eggs in one basket" is generally not a wise job-search strategy. Your method should be based on occupational field, geographical preferences, and personal strengths and resources; but a combination of approaches is best.

Here are some of the strategies you may wish to use:

Alumnae/i Contacts

In surveys of recent classes, we find that approximately 10 percent of graduates obtained interviews that led to job offers through contacts with Vassar alumni. You can tap into this valuable network through our V-NET (Vassar Career Advisory Network) program. Talking to career advisors can give you valuable insights about hiring practices in specific industries and geographic regions; many alums can give you referrals or specific jobs leads as well. In order to access V-NET, you must first register online: Go to <http://www.aavc.vassar.edu/> and select the "Register" link in the upper right-hand corner of the page.



Office of Career Development

Vassar College

Follow the instructions to register, choosing a user name and password when prompted.

Networking

Networking is the art of developing and utilizing contacts. In addition to Vassar classmates and graduates, there are any number of people you already know who could provide useful career information or job leads. Faculty, parents of friends, friends of parents, neighbors, professionals in your community—the list goes on. And, anyone you are acquainted with now is a potential link to someone you'd like to know. Since a great many jobs are never directly advertised, you will increase your chances of landing the job you want by seeking out—and keeping in touch with—your contacts. Refer to the *Career Brief about Informational Interviewing*.

Internet

Not surprisingly, there is a vast array of career and job information on the Internet. The Career Development website, <http://careers.vassar.edu>, has dozens of links to useful sites.

eRecruiting

Most job announcements received by our office are posted to eRecruiting. All students have an account with eRecruiting. The username is your full Vassar email address and the password is: matthew. Additionally, eRecruiting is tied into campus and on-campus recruiting events as well as the CDO calendar of events.

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Career Brief: Job Search Resources

Vassar Recruiting Programs

Through consortia groups Vassar belongs to, we participate in off-campus recruiting days. The Selective Liberal Arts Consortium (SLAC) participates in recruiting days in New York City, Boston, Chicago, and Washington DC; the Fall Recruiting Consortium (FRC) sponsors a New York City recruiting day. Through these events, students can interview for a number of entry-level positions. We also offer an extensive resume referral service for organizations that are unable to visit campus. The Liberal Arts Career Network (LACN) has a very extensive database of internships and entry-level and experienced jobs across the country. The CDO sends out weekly email updates to all classes to update students on these and other events.

Print/online subscriptions

We also subscribe to various job-listing publications, including *ArtSearch*, *ArtJob*, *Environmental Careers*, and *The International Educator*, and many, many more. You can link to these and other job-listing resources at <http://careers.vassar.edu>, click on “resources” and then on the “jobs” tag.

Print Resources

Some individual job listings are filed in blue Post-graduate binders that are categorized by occupational area. The Post-graduate Internship binders include descriptions of several short-term positions that may be of interest to recent graduates. Some other colleges will allow you to use their career library and job-listing services as well. Check the reciprocity binder for details.

Professional Associations

In many fields, professional associations play a major role in job advertising, interviewing, and hiring. Regional and national conferences are excellent places to build a network, and many conferences offer a job placement service. Newsletters and electronic bulletin boards often list positions as well. To find professional organizations in your field, check the *Encyclopedia of Associations*,

Occupational Outlook Handbook (online and CDO library), and *Spotlight on Careers* (web-based—link through the CDO website).

Direct Solicitation

Many jobs are not advertised at all; they are filled by people who are already known to the employer, or by people who appear in the right place at the right time. To be considered for these “hidden” jobs, you need to begin with some detective work. Through your networking contacts, find out about key people in organizations that interest you.

Once you have identified the best contact person within an organization, send a resume and cover letter; follow up with a phone call (or calls on a periodic basis) to this person. Ask for an interview. If there aren't any current openings, ask how you can find out about upcoming ones. Also, ask for referrals to others who may be hiring.

Most organizations post job openings on their websites (typically through their Human Resources page).

Newspapers

If you are targeting a specific city or region, the help-wanted classifieds in the local paper are a potential source of job leads. Go to a website such as <http://www.newspapers.com> to view a list of the newspapers local to particular geographic regions. Be aware, however, that certain types of jobs are virtually never listed in the newspaper. And, because classifieds are such a highly visible means of advertising, those that are listed usually draw many applicants. By all means respond to ads that interest you, but make sure you supplement this job-search strategy with others that may prove more effective.

Employment Agencies

Employment agencies recruit, train and assign temporary workers. They can help you find a full-time job, gain experience, give you income while you are in transition, offer a more flexible work schedule and offer you positions

in nearly every field. See our *Temporary Agency* handouts for more information and location-specific agencies.

Alternative Means of Employment

Landing a permanent 9-to-5 job is not the only way to break into the work world. For someone who wants to explore multiple career options, a couple of part-time jobs may be more appropriate than one full-time position. Consulting or freelance work may be a possibility too, depending on your talents and interests. In industries where internships are highly regarded, you may want to consider a short-term internship after graduation. Some job seekers also find that volunteering is a good way to build up experience and make contacts that can lead to employment. Use your imagination to think up other creative strategies as well! See the Career Brief: Job Search Resources topic *Taking Time Off After College* for more information and possible opportunities.

Whichever methods you choose to conduct your job search, realize that the process takes time and lots of effort. If you need assistance, the Career Development Office is here to help. Good luck!