



THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
mentor memo
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This Mentor Memo, part of a series, responds to graduate students' requests for advice about navigating graduate studies successfully.

The series also addresses topics in career preparation and professional development. For more information and to suggest topics, contact Graduate School Dean Jerry Baldasty at baldasty@u.washington.edu.

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No matter what career you plan to pursue after earning your graduate degree, being proactive in the career development process and using your time strategically while enrolled in graduate school will enhance your career success. Getting an early start with the steps outlined below can prove instrumental to success, and can make the difference between falling into a job because it's available—and finding an intentional match that meets your professional desires.

Orientation (beginning of program)

Orient yourself to the career and professional development resources offered by:

- Your department
- Career Center
- Alumni Association
- Many other centers, offices, and programs
- Graduate School
- Counseling Center
- Library system

Self assessment (beginning of program and beyond)

Learn more about who you are and what you want out of life. It's important to know your:

- Strengths
- Work & life values
- Decision-making style
- Interests
- Sources of motivation
- Geographic preferences

Career exploration (beginning and middle of your program)

Learn more about the career paths you are considering. Be sure to explore:

- Different employment sectors that offer careers that interest you (academia, corporate, non-profit, government, self-employment, etc.)
- A variety of job titles and responsibilities
- Salary and job outlook information

Try exploring careers using three methods:

- Reading about careers
- Talking to people in careers that interest you (informational interviews)
- Experiencing careers (volunteering, internships, etc.)

there's more... ➤

Focus on the essentials

(middle of your program)

Get serious about making yourself marketable for career paths of interest. Secure the necessary:

- Coursework
- Experiences
- Skills
- Contacts

Job market preparation

(middle and end of your program)

Start preparing yourself for the job market. Do what it takes to feel confident about your:

- Job search plan
- Résumé or curriculum vitae (CV)
- Cover letter
- Portfolio
- Interviewing skills
- Negotiating skills

Job search preliminaries

(9–12 months prior to degree completion)

Look for employment using a variety of strategies such as:

- Asking professors, classmates, alumni, colleagues, and contacts for referrals
- Connecting with and joining professional organizations
- Applying to campus, general, and niche job boards
- Attending career fairs and similar events

Transition to a job/Start a career

(end of your program)

Prepare to exit the university and start another adventure.

- Thank those who helped you in your academic success and your job search
- Read books, attend workshops, and participate in groups related to the transition process
- Start your new job
- Reflect on your job responsibilities, work environment, standard of living, relationships, mental and physical health, and leisure activities

References

- <http://web.mit.edu/career/www/graduate/timelines.html>
- <http://cardinalcareers.stanford.edu/communities/graduate/guides.html>
- http://www.career.uci.edu/Graduate/graduate_GetStartedEarly.aspx

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