



THE GRADUATE SCHOOL **mentor memo** AUTUMN QUARTER 2009

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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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Planning for the right type of job

Start early. Finding time to devote to your career planning is not easy. But early exploration and preparation are crucial for later success.

Think broadly. Explore different ways to use your graduate degree. In addition to teaching and research inside and outside of the academy, consider jobs in government, the non-profit sector, and industry. Informational interviews with people in different jobs and working in different kinds of institutions can help you make the career decisions that are best for you. Following the business press (e.g., *The Wall Street Journal*) or trade publications specific to your discipline can help you learn about many issues relevant to your chosen field and what trends are shaping that field.

Understand what you want. The best job is one that is right for you. Know what you want out of your career—in academia or elsewhere. Have a career vision and link your goals to the preparation that you will need for being a standout candidate. Having a career plan will help you think about which publications, presentations, and activities you can do to show that you are right for the type of job that you want.

Position yourself for the market. Focus on cultivating professional relationships with your committee members, demonstrating professionalism to them, and doing quality work—regardless of the type of job you want to secure. After all, your committee members and references are asked to comment on multiple facets of you as an applicant, not just your writing, research, teaching, or organizational skills.

Planning for an academic job

The above principles apply especially to academic jobs, the preparation for which involves very long cycles. Decisions about research presentations and publications need to be made years before you go on the market. For example, in order to give a presentation on your dissertation research before you go on the market, you will need to have a paper ready for submission often a full year before job application deadlines. To have an article listed on your vita for the academic job market as “in press,” it

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should be under review by the January before you go on the market at the very latest. Cultivating a professional reputation in the field, in advance, will help you significantly when you go on the market.

Successful academic searches

Match skills and interests to the position. Early planning will help you get your ideal job. Interested in research-oriented positions? Having a publication record of your own and collaborating with faculty will help you here. Demonstrate distinction in teaching as well as research on your vita. Want to stay open to industry? Working on consulting projects during graduate school will help you build a portfolio of projects and skills that translate easily outside of the academy.

Communicate clearly and effectively. Each advertised academic job can yield more than 100 applications. Help the search committee understand what you might bring to the department, what makes your work interesting, and how you fit the advertised position—don't make busy people hunt for buried information. Compelling cover letters are crucial! Work with your advisers on the best way to communicate your skills, achievements, and interests in your application materials. Pay particular attention to grammar, style, and formatting in all materials as your attention to details reflects upon your ability to be a professional scholar.

Help your letter writers help you. By communicating your interests clearly, providing copies of materials, and allowing ample time, you can help your letter writers write better, more detailed recommendations for you. Remember, we're all busy—make sure you help your letter writers understand your deadlines and give them ample time to do a good job. Be sure to ask your chair for personal introductions to people at the schools where you are applying.

Remember: It's about the fit

Hopefully your job search will be successful the first time out. If it isn't—don't despair! Use the time to push yourself back into your work and into the preparation for the next cycle of applications. Remember, this is a process that matches your skills and interests with the needs of an organization or department—it might take a while to find the perfect job match for you.

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