

Top 10 Career Strategies for Freshmen and Sophomores

by Bob Orndorff

You control your career destiny! Just going to class and picking up your diploma after four years doesn't cut it. You need to become active on and off campus. Becoming marketable to employers or graduate schools is a four-year job! Here are the top 10 things you can do during college to make yourself marketable at job-search time. In fact, if you do all 10, you'll be unstoppable!

1. **Keep your grades up.**
2. **Identify your interests, skills, values, and personal characteristics.**
3. **Actively explore career options.**
4. **Become active in extracurricular activities and clubs.**
5. **Get involved in community service.**
6. **Develop your computer skills.**
7. **Develop your writing skills.**
8. **Complete at least one internship in your chosen career field.**
9. **Gain an appreciation of diversity through study abroad, foreign languages, and courses.**
10. **Use your career center all four years.**

Your college career center can help you throughout your entire college career. Here is just a sampling of what your career center can help you do:

- * choose your major and career direction,
- * explore career options,
- * obtain an internship,
- * write a resume and cover letter,
- * develop your interviewing skills,
- * identify your skills, interests, and values,
- * develop a job search or graduate school plan,
- * connect you with prospective employers (career fairs, on-campus recruiting, etc.), and
- * connect you with alumni mentors.

Remember, you control your career destiny. Don't wait until your senior year to start realizing your goals. Your career train is on the move. Jump on board now so you can reach your destination!

JobWeb.com—Career development and job-search advice for new college graduates.

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4 Year Timeline – Career Development

First Year

- Meet with a career counselor to explore career options; take self-assessment tests to learn more about yourself. Identify the skills and strengths you enjoy using. Explore how your personality is important in choosing a career path.
- Develop an academic plan with guidance from a faculty advisor.
- Visit the Hart Career Center to discuss opportunities for practical experience on and off campus.
- Check out the Career Center website: www.iwu.edu/ccenter
- Register with the Career Center and complete your on-line profile through Titan CareerLink.
- Work through the Career Center's computerized career guidance program, FOCUS.
- Explore ways of enhancing academics with co-curricular activities by visiting the Office of Student Activities. Check out their website at www.iwu.edu/studact.
- Consider volunteer positions as a means of building professional experience and personal contacts.
- Study hard and keep your grades as high as possible.

Sophomore Year

- Review your academic plan with an advisor.
- If you didn't do so in your first year, declare a major(s). Consider the possibility of minor(s).
- Speak with family friends and professionals about their careers. Spend a day on the job with a professional. Take advantage of the Career Center's Alumni Mentoring Program.
- Explore leadership opportunities in campus organizations.
- Attend Career Center seminars and workshops on topics such as resume writing, interviewing strategies and Internships.
- Participate in the Mock Interview Program to develop essential interviewing skills.
- Meet with a Hart Career Center staff member to develop a resume. Update your on-line profile through Titan CareerLink.
- Seek an internship that affords you professional work experience, personal contacts, and potential for future employment. Attend the IWU Internship Fair.
- Continue to develop knowledge or skills that are in demand in your field of interest (e.g. computer, writing, foreign language).
- Explore study abroad opportunities; www.iwu.edu/studyabroad.

Junior Year

- Meet with your faculty advisor to confirm that academic requirements are being met.
- Focus on career objectives and update your resume. Be sure to have a Career Center staff member review this for you. Attend Career Center seminars and workshops.
- Pursue internship opportunities for the academic year, May term and/or summer months. Attend the Internship Fair, CareerFest job/internship fair and others to explore internship possibilities.
- Talk to professionals in your careers of interest (Informational Interviews) to learn more about career fields. The Hart Career Center can assist you in locating professionals working in a variety of fields.
- Update your on-line profile through Titan CareerLink.
- Consider the possibility of graduate and professional school. Review Hart Career Center resources related to graduate school.
- Consider taking the GRE, MCTA, LSAT, or any admission test required to continue coursework at a graduate level. (You may elect to take certain exams in the Fall of your senior year). Begin gathering information on graduate schools.
- Meet with a Career Center staff member to review your progress and plan for graduate school or the job search process.
- Begin to gather information on organizations in your field.
- Participate in the Mock Interview Program to develop essential interviewing skills.
- Continue to pursue leadership opportunities on campus.

Senior Year

- Review and participate in recruitment opportunities available through the Hart Career Center. Begin a targeted job search campaign.
- Update your online profile and resume through Titan CareerLink. Draft necessary cover letters and have Career Center staff review these for you.
- Explore internship opportunities for your senior year.
- Attend Career Center workshops on applying to graduate school, job searching, preparing for job fairs, and other topics.
- Meet with a Career Center staff member to develop a job search strategy and review your resume.
- Participate in job fairs throughout the year to explore job opportunities.
- Take any necessary graduate school admission tests not taken your junior year (FRE, LSAT, GMAT). Apply to graduate programs. Have an advisor or Hart Career Center staff member review your essay.

A Career Planning Course for Parents

By Sally Kearsley

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Your son or daughter just left for (or returned to) college but doesn't seem to have a clue as to what he or she wants to major in, let alone choose as a career. Don't worry! This is not unusual, although you might wish your student had a little more sense of direction!

Choosing a career is a process students (and adults!) need to go through—and students go through the stages of this process at different rates of speed. The steps include:

- assessing skills, interests, and abilities (this is an important first step to choosing an appropriate career);
- exploring majors and career options;
- experimenting with possible career options; and
- organizing and conducting a job or graduate school search.

You can assist and support your students in each of these stages. But what can—or should—you do?

Here's your own career planning timetable!

Careers 101 - For Parents of First-Year College Students

During their first year or so of college, students will be involved (formally or informally) in assessing their skills, interests, and abilities. They will do this through finding success (or failure) in courses they take, involvement in campus activities, discussions with their friends and faculty, and generally being exposed to and trying out different ideas and experiences.

Most students enter college with a very limited knowledge of the vast array of courses and majors available to them. When they begin to delve into studies that are new to them, even those who entered with a plan may be drawn to different options. This is an exciting time for students!

Here's what you can do to help:

- Support your child's exploration of new areas of study and interests. This, after all, is what education is all about!

- Affirm what you know to be areas of skill and ability he or she has consistently demonstrated. Sometimes students overlook these and need to be reminded.
- Talk with your son or daughter about the courses and activities he or she is enjoying and how well your student is doing. Students discover new things about themselves throughout the college experience. Your willingness to listen and be a sounding board will keep you in the loop.
- Don't panic if your student is excited about majoring in something like English, history, or art. These can be excellent choices, particularly if they are a good match for a student's interests and skills.
- Support your son or daughter's responsible involvement in campus activities but urge this to be balanced with maintaining achievement in the classroom.
- Urge your child to seek assistance in the career center at his/her college or university. Most institutions have assessment instruments and counselors to help students to define their skills, interests, and abilities.

Careers 201 - For Parents Of Second-Year Students

Generally, during the second year of college, a student begins to explore majors and career options more seriously. Many colleges and universities require that new students take a broad range of subjects to promote this exploration.

What's your role in this step of development?

- Don't insist upon a decision about a major or possible career choice immediately. If you sense that your student's indecision is a barrier to positive progress, urge that he or she look for assistance in the career center. Students often have difficulty making a "final" choice because

they fear they may close off options and make a wrong choice.

- Suggest that your son or daughter talk with faculty and career advisers about potential choices.
- Don't assume that if your child chooses to major in English, history, philosophy, or some other "impractical" major that he or she will never get a job. Liberal arts studies sharpen skills which are critical to the "package" employers are seeking: strong written and oral communication skills; problem-solving skills; the ability to synthesize information; and excellent research skills.
- Suggest learning a foreign language and developing computer skills. Both of these skills can be helpful in today's market, no matter what career field he or she chooses!
- Direct your child to family, friends, or colleagues who are in fields in which your student has an interest. "Informational interviewing" with people can be extremely helpful at this stage!
- Steer your child toward a source of information. Many campuses have a career consultant or mentoring network of alumni in various career fields who are willing to share information with students about their careers. These resources are invaluable both in this exploratory stage and later as students are seeking internships and jobs!

Careers 301 - For Parents Of the "Mid-Career" Student

During the sophomore year and throughout the junior year, it is important for students to experiment with possible career options. They can do this in a variety of ways: internships, cooperative education programs, summer jobs, campus jobs, and responsible volunteer experiences both on campus and in the local community. This is a critical time for your support and understanding.

Here's what you need to do:

- Encourage your child to use the resources available at the campus career center. Experts there will assist your student in preparing a good resume and finding opportunities to test their career choices, including internships, cooperative education programs, and summer job listings. Most career centers are in direct contact with employers.

Top 15 ways employers look for new hires

Organization's internship program
Organization's co-op program
On-campus recruiting
Career/job fairs
Faculty contacts
Employee referrals
Student organizations/clubs
Internet job postings (campus web site)
Internet job postings (company web site)
Job postings to career offices (printed)
Resumes from career offices
Recruitment advertising (print)
Internet job postings (commercial web site)
Internet resume data bases
Career/job fairs (online)

- Tell your student that you understand the importance of their gaining exposure to and experience in his or her field of career interest. Broadening experience through involvement outside the classroom is a valuable use of time.
- Internships or summer experiences in some very competitive fields may be non-paying. Also, a good opportunity may be in a distant location. Discuss your financial expectations with your student before a commitment is made.
- Don't conduct the internship or summer job search for your child. It's a great help to provide networking contacts or names of people who may be helpful, however, making the contact and speaking for your child deprives him or her of an important learning experience—and may make a poor impression on the future employer.

Careers 401 - For Parents Of Graduating Seniors

The senior year is when organizing and conducting a job search or graduate school search begins in earnest.

It is also a time when students are heavily involved in more advanced courses in their majors and often have more responsible roles in campus and/or volunteer activities. Balancing these important pursuits and setting priorities is a constant challenge for seniors!

You are probably anxious for this young adult to make a decision—and yet, he or she may be moving toward closure more slowly than you would wish.

There are a number of ways you can lend support during this challenging time.

- Suggest that he or she use the campus career center throughout the senior year. These offices provide assistance in preparation for the job search offering.
- Workshops and individual help with resume and cover letter writing, interviewing, and other job-search skills.
- Individual and group career advising.
- A library of books and bookmarks to web sites with links to job resources.
- In many cases, on-campus interviewing opportunities.
- Alumni career consultant or mentor programs may also be a part of their services.
- Don't nag your child about not having a job yet! This will often have the reverse effect. Use positive reinforcement.
- Offer to assist by sending information you may have found about the career field of your student's choice and/or job listings that may be of interest. Listen for indications from the student that you are getting carried away—and back off!
- Don't call potential employers to intervene for your child. Contact with potential employers is the candidate's responsibility!
- Be prepared to support your child through the ups and downs of the job and graduate school search. It can be a bumpy road! Not every desired job or graduate school acceptance will come through. Your student will need reassurance that for every door that closes, another opens.

A Few Final Thoughts

The college years are a time of exploration, experimentation, and learning on many levels for students

Qualities/skills employers look for in new hires

Communication skills (verbal & written)
Honesty/integrity
Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)
Motivation/initiative
Strong work ethic
Teamwork skills (works well with others)
Analytical skills
Flexibility/adaptability
Computer skills
Detail-oriented
Leadership skills
Organizational skills
Self-confidence
Friendly/outgoing personality
Tactfulness
Well mannered/polite
Creativity
GPA (3.0 or better)
Entrepreneurial skills/risk-taker
Sense of humor

and their parents! Some student challenges may seem more positive than others, but all contribute to the educational outcomes of the college or university experience.

Throughout these years, students are developing a "record of achievement" which will be evaluated by employers and graduate schools as they move beyond college. There are several pieces of this record:

- **Academic Achievement.** Although it is not (and should not be) the primary factor in determining a candidate's success, the grade point average (GPA) is one factor considered by competitive employers and graduate schools. It is one of the few tangible indications of a student's ability to learn and perform effectively, at least in the academic environment. Therefore, students need to do as well as possible in the classroom,

especially in courses in their majors.

- **Responsible Work Experience.** In today's competitive employment market, many employers seek students who have related internship, summer, cooperative education, or part-time job or volunteer experiences. In fact, employers often look to their own such programs as primary sources for their new hires. These experiences are particularly critical for liberal arts students whose majors may not appear to be directly related to their areas of career interest.

- **Responsible Involvement Outside the Classroom.** Extracurricular activities provide the opportunity for students to gain many valuable and career-related skills such as the ability to work effectively with others in a team environment; leadership; planning and organizational skills; and priority-setting and time management. These are part of the package of skills employers seek in their new hires.

Best of luck to you in navigating the challenging waters of parenting a college or university student!