

JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES

LUTHER COLLEGE

THE CAREER CENTER

INTRODUCTION

The two words “job search” generate a host of reactions from anyone who is starting the process to look for work. For many college students, this can be particularly discomfiting because it typically means they are ending their years as a college student and are nearing the time when they will join “the world of work.” Those week-long breaks in the spring, winter, and fall will soon be a thing of the past. On the flip side, joining the “world of work” can be very exciting. New friends, colleagues, and adventures await you. Even if you feel ill-prepared, you should find comfort in knowing that many alumni before you have left Luther to do a number of wonderful things.

REALITY CHECK

Finding A Job Takes Time

More than anything else, soon-to-be college graduates are surprised by the amount of time and energy one must exert to find a job. For most students, it will take anywhere from three to six months to find employment. If you know what you want to do, have an updated resume in hand, and have interviewed for a “high stakes” opportunity before, then you are ahead of the game. If you haven’t then you have your work cut out for you.

One aspect of going to college that is not built into your academic coursework, or your co-curricular activities for that matter, is the time one must dedicate to either finding a job or getting into graduate school. For many seniors, the job search process begins in the early fall semester and does not conclude until late spring or early summer. Also during this time you are likely taking a full load of courses, participating in either athletics or music (or both), saying goodbye to friends, planning your final spring break, and writing your senior paper.

Here’s the good news. You have a lot of support to help you along the way. The faculty and staff of Luther, and especially the folks in the Career Center, are here to help you. We can’t find a job for you, and we can’t get you into graduate school. However, we can equip you with the necessary tools and skills to ensure success.

FIRST THINGS FIRST Job Search Preliminaries

Before we get into “how to find a job”, you need to answer some preliminary questions so you can focus your job search and find meaningful and rewarding work.

What do you want to do?

While many college students find this to be a simple question, an equal number find this question terribly intimidating, restricting, or even irritating. Regardless of your stance, it’s a question that needs to be answered. By now you’ve had the opportunity to explore a number of courses and fields of study, and hopefully you opted to participate in an internship or two to help answer this question. If not, you should schedule an appointment with a career counselor in the Career Center. They can help you begin the process of answering this question. It is very difficult to begin seeking employment if you have no idea what type of work you wish to secure.

Do you have a resume?

Every college student should have a resume. Whether you are seeking a temporary summer gig, an internship, or full-time employment, a well-written resume will help showcase and market your background, experience, and qualifications. There are a number of books and resources in the Career Center’s Resource Library that can help you get started. Again, if you would like a career counselor to review your resume, stop by the Career Center or call to make an appointment. We’ll talk more about resumes a little later.

Have you interviewed for a position before?

When it comes to marketing yourself to prospective employers (or graduate school admission folks), you need to do more than just look good on paper. A well-written resume is essential, but if you can’t sell your skills and experiences in the context of an interview, then you are in trouble. In the Career Center, you can participate in a mock interview. A member of the Career Center staff will prepare interview questions that are relevant to the type of work you are seeking, and the two of you will

participate in a simulated interview. To enhance the take away value, we videotape them so that you can see yourself in an interview. Interviewing is a skill that can be learned and polished. Thus, if you haven't interviewed for a position before - or if you haven't interviewed when the stakes were high - then stop by the Career Center and schedule a mock interview.

CREATING A JOB SEARCH STRATEGY

How People Find Jobs

Networking

Have you ever heard the adage, "It's not what you know, but who you know"? While this is a bit of an overstatement, the point is that the people you know (parents, siblings, friends, previous internship supervisors, former employers, faculty members, etc.) can have a significant influence on your job search. Many college students retort, "But I don't know anyone." Wrong. Think harder. In fifth grade, did you ever make a list of everyone you knew? Whether you did or not, do it now. You will be surprised by the number of viable contacts you have. You need to make sure that each person within your network knows that you are graduating and what type of work you are seeking.

For college students, some networking opportunities are brought right here to campus. For example, the Career Center hosts several company presentations throughout the year along with six different career fairs. Whether you are seeking an internship, full-time employment, volunteer work, or even continuing your studies in graduate school, these presentations and career fairs bring human resources representatives, hiring managers, and graduate school admissions counselors to campus. Their primary objective for coming to campus is to see and speak with as many students as possible. This is a luxury you won't have access to once you graduate, so take advantage of this special opportunity now!

In addition to career fairs, many college students opt to further enhance their network by conducting informational interviews. In an informational interview, a student is seeking to gather information from individuals who hold positions or do the type of work they may seek as a career. Many first-year

and sophomore students do informational interviews to simply learn about different types of careers. As a junior or senior, informational interviews allow you to learn from experts in fields of interest to you, and also allow you to mention that you are seeking positions in their particular field (either an internship or a full-time job). It is important to note that informational interviews should be conducted professionally. Your goal as a student is to collect information and to make a favorable impression on the person you are interviewing. For more information, pick up a copy of the Career Center's *Informational Interviewing* career guide.

Direct Contact

For students who are seeking to relocate to a specific area of the country or who are perhaps seeking to enter a particular industry, contacting prospective employers directly can be an effective job search strategy. However, this does not mean mailing off 100 to 300 resumes with a general cover letter that begins with "To whom it may concern." This is not only ineffective, but it can be very expensive and frustrating.

Your initial goal is to identify organizations that most closely align with your career goals. You should choose a manageable number of organizations (no more than 50 or 60) to guide your research. There are several resources in the Career Center's Resource Library to help you with your research. Some of the more popular resources include the *JobBank* geographic directories, the *Business Journals Book of Lists* for several major metropolitan areas, and the Internet-based database, *CareerSearch*. Make an appointment with a career counselor to discuss your job search objectives, and he/she will direct you to the best resources to get you started.

Once you've identified the organizations, your next goal is to identify key individuals who work within each company. Many organization's web sites seek to disguise individual's contact information, so you have to be creative in identifying people. For example, many sites have keyword search engines. Enter a person's title like "human resources manager" to see if any names become associated with that

particular title. Also, read through the organization's press releases if they have a section dedicated to media relations. You not only find out the latest news concerning this company, but you can also glean some important contact information. And lastly, if you've exhausted the company's web site, pick up the telephone and give them a call to inquire about the most appropriate contact person within the organization.

Once you've developed your list of organizations and key contacts, it's time to write a targeted cover letter to each company. In your cover letter you want to convey your sincere interest in the company and highlight how your skills and experiences can be an asset to their organization. If you have never written a cover letter before, stop by the Career Center to review the numerous resources in the library, and to pick up a *Cover Letters and Other Job Search Correspondence* career guide.

Responding to Advertisements

Many employers use newspapers and other print publications to advertise their job openings. It would be a mistake to overlook this traditional job search strategy. However, again, relying on this method alone would also be a mistake. In addition to using the newspaper, which often lists immediate openings, the Career Center subscribes to numerous job vacancy bulletins that advertise current job openings in a number of different fields. These include jobs in the arts, humanities, media and communications, business, and the sciences.

When responding to advertisements, you should react in the same way as listed in the previous section. However, now that you have a position advertisement in front of you, you can do a better job of focusing your cover letter and resume on the needs of the organization. Remember, the purpose of your cover letter is to convey your interest in the company as well as to demonstrate how your skills and experiences can be an asset to the company. Stop by the Career Center to inquire about these vacancy listings.

Professional & Trade Associations

Many college students are unfamiliar with professional and trade associations. These associations are comprised of individuals who engage in similar kinds of work or who work within industries that have shared interests. For example,

the Luther College Career Center staff are members of the National Association of Colleges and Employers. This professional association's membership includes college and university career center personnel as well as corporate representatives who hire college students.

Now you may be thinking, "That's great. But how will this help me find a job?" Well, the response to your question is twofold. First, many professional and trade associations have student memberships. Thus, you don't have to wait to join the profession to join the association. These associations frequently hold national and regional meetings: a great place to network and build contacts. Second, many professional associations work to recruit individuals into their respective fields. If your association is one of them, then they may offer some kind of job listing or candidate referral service. Therefore, professional associations not only offer networking opportunities, but they may be the source of current job openings.

ARE YOU ABOUT TO APPLY FOR A POSITION THROUGH THE MAIL?

If so, consider the following...

- **Use Nice Paper:** Your cover letter, resume, and references (if included) should all be printed on the same resume or parchment paper. The Luther Print Shop has a nice selection from which to choose.
- **Flat vs. Tri-Fold:** You can either tri-fold your cover letter and resume or send it flat in a business envelope.
- **Paperclips vs. Staples:** Paperclips make the employer's job easier if she/he decides to copy your application and route it throughout the office. Staples can be a hassle to mess with... Therefore, use a paperclip or nothing at all.
- **Address Labels:** Unless your handwriting has been described as "perfect", take the time to type the address label. Don't ruin a professional application with a sloppy envelope. Also, don't forget to include a return address (you'll want to know if your application doesn't get there).
- **Don't forget your "John Hancock":** In a rush to get your application in the mail, don't forget to SIGN your letter. It happens.

On-campus Interviewing

Each year the Career Center invites several organizations to campus to conduct screening interviews. These interviews take place in the Career Center, and they are an excellent source of initial contact for many students and employers alike. Most of the employers who conduct on-campus interviews come from industries that are reliant on college grads as a source for future employees. They are typically large accounting, consulting, technology, and similar firms who hire several hundred to several thousand college graduates from several colleges and universities across the country.

Employment Agencies

Private employment agencies are in the business of filling job openings for their clients. While some agencies charge their client for filling a position, other fees are charged to the job-seeking candidates. If you decide to contact an employment agency, make sure you fully understand the parameters of the agreement before you sign anything. It is good practice to check an agency's creditability by contacting a local Better Business Bureau office to see if any complaints have been filed against the organization. If so, keep shopping around. You'll likely save yourself time and money in the end.

An alternative to using an employment agency is taking advantage of a temporary employment agency. For students who lack work experience and have yet to determine what type of work they would like to pursue full-time, temporary employment agencies can be a great option. Also, many companies like to offer full-time positions to their "temps." Consider this from the employer's perspective. They can hire you "temporarily" to see how you work out, and if you are reliable, professional, and productive, why wouldn't they hire you full-time? This is the proverbial "getting your foot in the door" method to job searching...

Internet "Big Boards"

With the advent of the Internet, many job seekers have propped themselves up in front of their computers (pajamas and all) and submitted 100 resumes to 20 different job boards in about an hour. "Well, I've done my job searching for the day." Wrong. By using only a single job search method, including the Internet, as your approach to job-

hunting, you drastically increase the likelihood that you will be looking longer.

In her book *WORK IT!*, Allison Hemming gives some excellent strategies for using the "Big Boards" as a part of your job search.

INTERNET "BIG BOARDS"

www.monster.com

www.hotjobs.com

www.careerbuilder.com

In the Career Center's Resource Library, you can find a job board Internet directory entitled *CAREERXROADS*. The indices organize the sites by geographic location, industry/field, as well as those sites best for college students.

Set up a personal account. All of the Big Boards allow you to create your own account (i.e., MyHotJobs or My Monster). Once you set up a personal account, the board enables you to save a version of your resume that's quite easy to email. This feature allows you to apply to jobs easily by sending a pre-formatted resume that will look good to a hiring manager.

Handle with care. When you set up your personal job board account, you'll often get a special email address specific to that board. It's essential to choose an email address that identifies you in a professional manner and won't confuse the hiring manager. The safest bet is to use a version of your name such as JamesSmith@monter.com.

Location, location, location. If you're looking for work near a particular city, your first inclination might be simply to type the city name into the search. But wait: if you only search this way you might not find out about suitable jobs in the surrounding region. If you're interested in relocating to an unfamiliar city, it's worth it to invest in a map to figure out what nearby city in which you would be willing to work. Most of the Big Boards are incorporating "search metro area" capabilities into their sites, but since searching is never an exact science, it's still a good idea to try the tips above.

Timing is everything. Sort search results by the most recent date of posting and concentrate on those posted within the last week or two. This is particularly true as you get closer to graduation. Postings older than that are quite likely either to be filled or no longer needed; unfortunately, pulling obsolete postings off the boards does not seem to be a top priority for busy recruiters.

Keep track of hiring and personnel managers. The real key to a successful job search is building a contact database of real-live human beings who can help you in your quest for a new job. Job boards are one place to find such contacts. After you respond to a job posting in which you're truly interested, keep track of all the contact information for the human resources representative listed.

Job Search Follow-up

Whether you are directly contacting an organization or responding to an advertisement, it is critical that you follow-up with professionalism and tact.

First, it should be stated in your correspondence when and how you will follow-up. If you are going to call within seven business days to verify the arrival of your application, then make sure you do. Also, when it is time to make that phone call, make sure you are in a private area (absent of loud roommates, stereos, televisions, etc.). Second, your goal is to speak with the individual who is making the decision on who to interview. This takes some finesse, but be polite, persistent, and professional. If the person you need to speak with is busy (often a diversion tactic), you might say that due to "your hectic schedule" you would like to know when might be an appropriate time to call back. Keep the ball in your court. Phone messages and emails are easy to ignore. A human voice on the other end of the phone gets more attention.

Last, keep good notes. A comprehensive job search can get messy. With resumes and cover letters being sent to several different organizations, it is easy to get things mixed together. It is good practice to document and keep track of the dates, times, and types of correspondence you have with the different companies with which you've made contact. This includes phone calls, emails, and letters sent to you.

JOB SEARCH CHECK LIST

*Now that you have an idea of how to begin your job search, use the following list as a guide to help you get started and stay on track. If you have any questions, schedule an appointment with a career counselor.
Best of luck to you!*

- ✓ Determine your purpose and goals (meet with a career counselor if you struggling with this).
- ✓ Polish your resume.
- ✓ Begin researching organizations that offer the type of work that interests you.
- ✓ Attend career fairs and networking events to develop contacts.
- ✓ Participate in a mock interview to brush up your skills.
- ✓ Conduct a couple informational interviews to gain an "insider's" perspective on the type of work you are seeking. End each interview with "Do you know someone else who would be a good person to speak to about this field?"
- ✓ Research (and maybe join) professional associations to learn more about your particular field of interest.
- ✓ Make a point to talk with family, relatives, and friends about your plans after graduation. If they know what you are looking for, they may be able to give you a lead!
- ✓ If you have a few friends who are also looking for full-time, internship, or volunteer work, make an agreement to forward any opportunities you come across that you think may interest them. By helping each other, you can cover a lot more ground!
- ✓ Celebrate the small successes - finding the "ideal" job opening, a phone call, an interview. Job searching takes time.