# How to Conduct a Strategic Job Search

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Understand Employer Expectations and Job Search Processes

Where are you going? How will you get there?
Conducting a search for your first professional position requires a thorough and proactive approach. The results of your efforts will determine your future. You want to receive job offers for positions that permit you to utilize your education and find the best fit possible for your interests and strengths. Look for entry-level opportunities in companies or organizations that will allow you to gain skills and knowledge to progress in the direction you want to go. With a plan and carefully identified job targets, your search will be focused and you will not be in a “reactive” mode, simply applying to the limited number of positions that are advertised. Your main goal in an effective job search is to tap into the “hidden” job market and to get as many job interviews related to your career objective(s) as possible.

It is your job search yet you must maintain an “employer focus” at all times. The classroom and college campus are relatively “warm” environments but employers have different expectations. Familiarize yourself with those expectations. When searching for a job, your focus must shift from yourself to the employer. It’s the intersection between the strengths and qualifications you can contribute and the employer’s needs. If you understand that, the action steps you take will be more effective. Communicating this in resumes, cover letters, approach letters, and in person at job fairs, info sessions, and in interviews, will help you stand out from the crowd.

Throughout your job search, present yourself professionally with strong verbal and written communication that conveys your strengths and your eagerness to contribute. If you are still looking after you graduate, take a survival job while you keep looking for a professional position, but don’t for one second stop your search for a position that requires a college education.

Job Search Planning & Preparation
Create a plan. Take time to assess what you want and explore your options so you can decide on alternative career plans.

Ask yourself:
- What jobs do I want?
- What jobs am I qualified for?
- How do I get the job I want? (research career paths in specific occupations)
- Do I have the skills?
- What skills did I enjoy using in my past jobs or extracurricular activities?
- What abilities helped me to do a good job with community service projects?
- What am I passionate about? Where are people with similar passions working?
- How can I gain experience and position myself? When an accounting major obtains a part-time job in an accounting firm and takes a slight pay cut rather than continue as an assistant manager in a fast food restaurant, they are “positioning” him or herself for an entry-level position after graduation.
Understand Employer Expectations and Job Search Processes continued

Research potential employers
Research to gather and compare information to help you find a meaningful professional position with an employer that is a good match for your career goals.

What to look for:
- Culture and philosophy of the employer
- Location of employer and the service area
- Size and growth trends
- Age of company and condition of facilities and equipment
- Cost of living
- Benefits including health insurance, sick leave, etc.
- Salary schedule

Sources to find information:
- Internet
- Internships
- Employees or former employees (networking)
- Informational Interviews
- Local newspapers
- Business journals and periodicals

Post a resume online
Posting a resume online makes you searchable and immediately accessible to potential employers. Increase your visibility for hiring managers who look for talent. Create an online profile on professional sites (LinkedIn, Portfolium) although social media sites are also increasingly used (Facebook, Twitter).

Privacy
Check out each site to understand how they use your information. Familiarize yourself with privacy policies. Be cautious of sites that prey on desperate job seekers. Don’t share your birthdate or social security number until the employer hires you.

Location, location, location!
Decide where you want to live after graduation to narrow your list of targeted employers based on geography. Utilize the industry and company search tools on Career Info Net to research employers by location. Learn as much as possible about the industry that interests you. Create a list of companies where you want to work. Then, create a path to get to the professionals who work in those companies.

Human Resource departments – Their role is to assist with the selection process by initially reviewing resumes and screen out unqualified candidates. Only the resumes of those who are best qualified make their way to the desk of the Hiring Manager.
Networking

Networking is making connections and maintaining relationships with people who support you throughout each phase of your academic and professional career. Your network of contacts may help you choose the right career, find opportunities, develop your skills, and achieve your goals.

Networking and pursuing strategic volunteer, internship or work experience are ways to become the known quantity rather than one of hundreds of unknown applicants. **It’s not who you know it’s who knows you!** Use a combination of face-to-face and online networking, as well as personal and professional contacts (faculty, classmates, present and former colleagues and bosses, etc.). Contacts can give you information, leads, referrals, and recommendations. Cultivate a network so it will be there when you need it.

While social networking can assist you in your job search, you want to ensure you remain professional and protect your online persona at all costs. Employers will check you out. Get a custom URL to publicize your profile. Use a professionally appropriate profile image. Much like your resume, keep everything professional and positive. Highlight your best accomplishments instead of summarizing your entire work history.

**Portfolio**
Create an electronic portfolio on Stan State’s Portfolium network. Showcase the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA’s) that you have developed through coursework and extracurricular activities. Documenting projects and academic accomplishments helps you communicate the value of your education and experiences to help you stand out to employers. Connect with other students, faculty, and alumni. Follow employers and have them follow you.

**LinkedIn**
Create and maintain a profile by adding skills that are targeted to the job descriptions you are looking after. Add and maintain good contacts who can endorse your skills and make a recommendation. Research professionals and their paths to their current position. Follow companies and join relevant groups in your career field (make time to contribute). You can also link your LinkedIn account with your Portfolium account so that it is easier to maintain both profiles.

**Facebook & Twitter**
On Facebook, update your “Work and Education” section to list all work experience, not just the present. Categorize your contacts onto a professional list. Follow people in your career field and organizations you would like to work for. When posting updates, be sure that you are sharing with the appropriate contact list. Your professional contacts do not need to see pictures about your weekend in Vegas. Be active by sharing industry tips, news, and links. Comment on updates shared by others about tips, news, and links.

You can also maintain a virtual presence by blogging.
Networking continued

Informational Interviews
The purpose of informational interviews is to gather information and plant networking “seeds.” Request to interview someone who has a career you are interested in and find out how they got there. Thank them for their time and ask if they know of anyone else you could speak to. Stay in touch. Let them know how the other information interview went and how the process helped you. Talk to people a few years older than you. Ask them what they like and what they don’t like about their jobs. Find out what things they would do differently. Learn from their mistakes.

Professional Associations
Join a professional association. Student membership is affordable and the benefits are priceless. By joining a professional association, you can be added to their listserv where you can get information about internships and job opportunities in your targeted career field. Many associations send e-newsletters with trends and best practices in the field as well as updates on any relevant policies and codes of ethics. A discounted rate for conferences to hear keynote speakers in the industry can also be available for students.

If it’s not practical for you to attend meetings, you still have access to a membership list. Ask the membership chair for the list so you can contact members.

Your goal when networking is to become an INSIDER...to connect with people who have relationships with decision makers and knowledge of the target company. You are not asking people for jobs. You are asking if they know of anyone in their network who can assist you in the following ways:

- Information
- Names
- Support
- Ideas
- Data
- Energy
- Relationships

(from Job Search Magic, By Susan B. Whitcomb)
Take Action

Take action to maximize your degree in the job market. It is important to make connections long before you start your job search. For example, you will use the same processes and documents to find and contact a professional to ask for an informational interview as you will to conduct a formal job search after you graduate. Make use of the time you have while you are still a student to gain access to professionals to *ask for information*. Professionals who don’t know you might be more likely to give you information if you are referred from one of their colleagues. Professionals utilize networks all the time to accomplish their job objectives and assist colleagues to reach their objectives.

As you gain experience, you may re-assess yourself, and explore new options to ultimately make new choices. In this stage of the career development process you are “trying-out” or testing your tentative objectives. Identify your objective with each type of experience you hope to gain. Are you exploring a career, developing a skill or gaining professional experience (“almost ready to graduate”)?

What actions can you take?

- Conduct informational interviews
- Job shadow a professional
- Approach a professor to work on a research project
- Apply for an internship
- Seek strategic part-time, summer, or volunteer work
- Get involved in a student organization or Service Learning
- Attend employer information sessions
- Attend career or job fairs

By using a step-by-step approach to gain skills, connections, and experience, you will have the competitive edge with the multitude of other new grads. You should begin your formal job search at least 5 to 6 months before you graduate (preparation and networking must begin much earlier). Review the Job Search Checklist on page 8 to see what steps you should be taking. Finally, reflect on all your experiences to learn all that you can so you can identify what your next experience should be. This permits you to continually refine your career options.

Through the job search process, present yourself professionally with strong communication practices, documents, a strong sense of your strengths and the value you can contribute. If you are still looking after you graduate, take a survival job while you keep looking for a professional position, but don’t for one second stop your search for a position that requires a college education.
The “Hidden” Job Market

Impersonal online application processes, such as Applicant Tracking Systems, and the sheer numbers of candidates you are competing with, require you to maximize your time by focusing on networking to tap into the hidden job market. Conduct research to expand your network of contacts and to find valuable job leads. A job lead is information about current or future positions that are not yet advertised, are advertised for a short time, or which may never be advertised. A job lead could be the name of a hiring manager or inside knowledge of an expansion or a new grant.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics says that over half of the positions available are never advertised.

Job Boards

Job Agencies

Networking

Hire Known Quantity

Job seekers often spend too much time searching here.

Employers hire qualified candidates through these methods.

Focus most of your time networking and becoming “The Known Quantity”
Job Boards and Campus Resources

Use selected job boards and set up search agents to save time. Type in keywords such as a title, skill, or knowledge you want to use. Use quotation marks around the terminology to get specific job results. For example "graphic design." Second, if you have a geographic preference, put in the location.

If you like this search, set up an email notification for new jobs. Set up a time weekly to review the websites of targeted organizations and specialty sites in your area of expertise that don’t have the capability of setting up email notifications. Search company websites where you can set-up job alerts if possible.

**Be a smart job seeker and avoid online fraud.**
Online scam artists take advantage of people looking for jobs to try and get them to apply for fake jobs or pay money for false job leads.

Students, in particular, must keep a close eye out for possible scams, phishing schemes, or fraudulent employers.

For more information on how to avoid job scams and to report a job scam, please visit [https://www.csustan.edu/career/employment-opportunities](https://www.csustan.edu/career/employment-opportunities).

**Campus Resources**
To continue your job search efforts, look through Career & Professional Development Center job board on HireStanState at [https://www.csustan.edu/career/hirestanstate](https://www.csustan.edu/career/hirestanstate). We receive postings from employers for full-time jobs, part-time jobs, internships, and volunteer opportunities. Create your account and get access to current opportunities.

LinkedIn – Professional networking and job search site. Create your professional profile and connect with colleagues, alumni and professionals in your field of interest.

LinkedIn Learning- Online educational platform that helps you discover and develop business, technology-related, and creative skills through expert-led course videos. As a student, you have unlimited access to these videos and offers certification for some course completions.

Career Fair – The Career & Professional Development Center hosts fair(s) each semester. Be sure to check the event calendar and save the date. Business majors be sure to check out Meet the Firm Night hosted by the College of Business Student Success Center offered each semester. Employers participate in the Career Fair to recruit for full-time and internship opportunities. For a list of upcoming fairs, visit HireStanState fair page at [https://csustan.joinhandshake.com/career_fairs](https://csustan.joinhandshake.com/career_fairs).

On-Campus Recruitment – Meet employers on campus! Employers visit Stan State for on-campus interviews, information sessions and tables in the Quad to present information on their organization and
open positions. Take advantage of the opportunity to network with recruiters and sometimes alumni who work in the organization. To view upcoming sessions, visit HireStanstate events page.

Warrior Wardrobe Career Closet - Dress professionally for information sessions. The Warrior Wardrobe Career Closet is a program that provides students with new or gently used clothing donated by alumnus, faculty, staff, professionals and the community. Students can attain professional clothing for job interviews, job fairs, networking events, new jobs, or classroom presentations.

Follow us on social media platforms such as Instagram @ stanstatecareer and Facebook @ Career and Professional Development Center to get the latest hot jobs and updates on events.
Job Search Checklist

Ensure you conduct an effective job search by preparing in the following ways:

- Have a clear understanding of the job search process
- Understand the jobs that interest you
- Understand the jobs you are qualified for (recent grad positions versus managerial)
- Evaluate your strengths and marketable skills
- Outline a tentative career path
- Develop a unique selling proposition which distinguishes you from other job-seekers
- Identify key accomplishments from all school and work
- Identify core transferable skills
- Identify and research the main industries/companies that interest you
- Develop a job-search strategy
- Develop your resume and cover letter
- Gather a list of references
- Prepare and practice for interviews
- Attend job fairs and employer information sessions
- Utilize the Career Services job board
- NETWORK
- Create a portfolio on Portfolium
- Create and maintain a LinkedIn profile
- Search for openings and job leads by visiting websites and setting up job site searches
- Send out targeted resumes and tailored cover letters to job postings
- Join a professional association
- Register with an employment agency
- Stay positive and enthusiastic!