University Career Services is nationally recognized for our innovative industry-focused model and customized approach to advising, programming, and employer development. Our appointments, courses, and workshops can help you choose a major and set tangible career goals. We can assist you in creating a résumé, networking with Mason alumni, and preparing for the workplace or graduate school. Our location near Washington, D.C., offers unparalleled access to internships and research opportunities. Each year, more than 450 employers participate in on-campus hiring events to recruit our graduates.

Engage with University Career Services early and often. Appointments and walk-ins are available for students five days a week. The workshops and events calendar is available on our website. Call 703-993-2370 or visit careers.gmu.edu for more details, tips, and resources. University Career Services is located in SUB I, Room 3400.

Explore
The Career Counseling team assists students exploring majors and career paths, and offers advice on how to best use their talents, strengths, and interests.

Strategize
The Industry Advising team helps students connect with employers and build a strategy for breaking into their industry of interest through internships or full-time positions.

Polish
The Professional Development team helps to raise the baseline of students’ professionalism to better prepare them for the transition to life after Mason.

Find Your Advisor
Visit careers.gmu.edu/about to meet our team and learn the industry domains of each advisor.

Services
- Career counseling and industry advising appointments (call 703-993-2370)
- Walk-ins (visit careers.gmu.edu for hours)
- Workshops, events, and alumni/employer panels
- HireMason job and internship database (hiremason.gmu.edu)
- Career fairs
- On-campus interviewing
- And more

Topics discussed at Walk-ins and Appointments

WALK-INS
- Co-op information
- Basic résumé or cover letter review
- General questions and inquiries regarding resources, HireMason, or on-campus job searches

APPOINTMENTS
- Exploring/choosing a career
- Exploring/choosing a major
- Graduate or professional school exploration
- Industry research
- Internship search
- Interview preparation
- Job offer/negotiation
- Job search
- Networking
- Practice interview
- Professional development
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The career success plan outlines steps for every year you are in college to help you develop into a qualified and competitive candidate upon graduation. To view the full roadmap, visit careers.gmu.edu/students/jobsearch/ExperientialLearning/upload/successRoadmap.pdf.
Know Yourself

This section will help you identify your interests, values, skills, and certain aspects of your personality that have developed through your studies, extracurricular activities, and work experience. Knowing these things will help you decide on a major and occupation. It will also help you when you prepare for an interview, an internship, or job.

IN THIS SECTION
You will learn...
- What is included in a career plan
- How to identify your interests, values, and skills
- How to choose possible careers and majors

Know Yourself Exercises

EXERCISE 1. HOLLAND INTEREST CHECKLIST
According to the vocational theory developed by John Holland, the activities people engage in and the work environments in American society can be categorized by a set of common characteristics. The more compatible a person’s interests are with the work environment, the greater success and satisfaction the individual is likely to experience.

Follow the directions to complete the Interest Checklist to identify your preferred Holland Interest Themes.

1. Circle the activities that sound appealing to you whether you have done them or not. Do not consider your skill, only your interest in the activity.

2. Review the categories and identify your first, second, and third most appealing themes. This is your Holland Code.

3. Read the descriptions of each theme.
About Your Holland Code

Work environments can be divided into the six broad interest areas: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Knowing your unique combination of interests can assist you in determining what jobs suit you best.

Your Holland Code: First ___________ Second ___________ Third ___________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REALISTIC “Doers”</th>
<th>INVESTIGATIVE “Thinkers”</th>
<th>ARTISTIC “Creators”</th>
<th>SOCIAL “Helpers”</th>
<th>ENTERPRISING “Persuaders”</th>
<th>CONVENTIONAL “Organizers”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use carpentry tools to build items with wood</td>
<td>Solve math problems or quizzes</td>
<td>Design posters, flyers, or brochures</td>
<td>Take a course in interpersonal relations</td>
<td>Make a speech or presentation</td>
<td>Fill out income tax forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant a garden</td>
<td>Work with a chemistry set</td>
<td>Take photographs</td>
<td>Provide care for children</td>
<td>Meet influential people</td>
<td>Take the minutes of a meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repair stereos, computers, or small appliances</td>
<td>Read and solve mysteries</td>
<td>Work independently in an unstructured environment</td>
<td>Belong to clubs or attend conferences and networking meetings</td>
<td>Lead a work project or committee</td>
<td>Keep the books or records for a club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refinish antique furniture</td>
<td>Read scientific books or magazines; watch scientific TV programs</td>
<td>Conceptualize new ways to solve problems or accomplish tasks</td>
<td>Help someone new become acquainted with others and make friends</td>
<td>Sell items or services</td>
<td>Reorganize a filing system to make it more efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt or fish</td>
<td>Work in a laboratory</td>
<td>Sketch, draw, paint, or sculpt</td>
<td>Teach a class</td>
<td>Participate in a political campaign</td>
<td>Write business letters, memos, or reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise or train animals</td>
<td>Use or discuss computers and software</td>
<td>Read or write poetry</td>
<td>Meet and get to know new people</td>
<td>Help settle disputes</td>
<td>Work with numbers and financial data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work independently, solving concrete, practical problems</td>
<td>Compare and analyze budget figures</td>
<td>Dance or act in a play</td>
<td>Learn about different cultures and groups of people</td>
<td>Be a member of the debate team</td>
<td>Collect and organize such items as stamps, coins, or baseball cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop film in a darkroom</td>
<td>Observe behavioral or scientific phenomena</td>
<td>Attend a play, opera, or concert</td>
<td>Listen to your friends’ personal problems and try to help solve them</td>
<td>Own or operate a small business or service</td>
<td>Operate computers and other business machines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time browsing in a hardware store</td>
<td>Develop a survey questionnaire for a research project</td>
<td>Read articles or watch movies with an artistic or musical theme</td>
<td>Do volunteer work to benefit the elderly, needy, or sick</td>
<td>Manage a fund-raising campaign for an organization</td>
<td>Balance a checkbook or manage personal finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve in the military</td>
<td>Use a microscope or telescope</td>
<td>Write a creative story for fun or publication</td>
<td>Entertain friends in your home</td>
<td>Entertain business clients</td>
<td>Make charts and graphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repair or tune up bikes, cars, or motorcycles</td>
<td>Play chess or other strategy games</td>
<td>Visit an art museum</td>
<td>Chaperone a youth group dance</td>
<td>Serve as a club officer</td>
<td>Take or keep an inventory of supplies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operate a sewing machine</td>
<td>Analyze and solve abstract problems</td>
<td>Play a musical instrument</td>
<td>Lead a discussion group on social justice</td>
<td>Supervise a staff of people</td>
<td>Organize items in your room, garage, or attic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive a bus or truck, or operate large machines</td>
<td>Collect data for an experiment</td>
<td>Design a dress, piece of jewelry, or furniture</td>
<td>Work on group projects</td>
<td>Persuade others to accept your ideas</td>
<td>Develop and follow efficient work routines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Link Your Interests to Occupations**

To learn more about your Holland Code and how to use this information when considering a major or occupation

- Schedule an appointment with a career counselor.
- Refer to O’Net OnLine ([www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org)) and Browse Occupations by Interests.

## HOLLAND THEMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>STUDENT ACTIVITIES (that may be of interest)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REALISTIC (Doer)</td>
<td>Enjoys working with machines, tools, objects, and animals. Practical, reserved, and physical Likes to work outdoors on concrete problems and see tangible results.</td>
<td>ROTC Intramural and club sports The Geo Club Event production activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVESTIGATIVE (Thinker)</td>
<td>Enjoys researching, exploring ideas, collecting data, analyzing, inquiring, and using instruments. Methodical, original, and logical</td>
<td>Honors Committee Biology Club Student engineering organizations Student government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTISTIC (Creator)</td>
<td>Enjoys being original, independent, introspective, self-expressive, innovative, and unstructured. Develops skills in music, art, drama, language, and writing.</td>
<td>Program Board Student publications Mason Cable Network Storytellers Club Music Educators National Conference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL (Helper)</td>
<td>Enjoys working with people to inform, train, enlighten, or cure. Perceptive, responsible, empathic, and patient</td>
<td>Sororities and fraternities Campus ministry Peer advisors Mason Ambassadors Orientation leaders or RAs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENTERPRISING (Persuader)</td>
<td>Seeks to use mind, words, and feelings in dealing with people to motivate, persuade, manage, and sell things or promote ideas. May like taking personal or financial risks. Assertive, sociable, ambitious, enthusiastic, influential, and goal oriented</td>
<td>Student Funding Board Debate Team Model United Nations American Marketing Association Management and activists clubs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONVENTIONAL (Organizer)</td>
<td>Enjoys activities that permit organization of information in a clear, orderly manner. Likes structured settings. Is detail-oriented, responsible, and conforming.</td>
<td>Accounting Club Student Government DMIS Club Student Elections Commission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**EXERCISE 2: VALUES**

Values are a set of standards that determine attitudes, choices, and action. Work-related values underlie our choices about work. Some people value creativity; others place a premium on income or contributing. Mapping your value priorities can help you lay important groundwork for making sound career decisions that fit your unique ideals, interests, and talents.

For a values worksheet, visit careers.gmu.edu and click on the Students tab.

**EXERCISE 3: SKILLS**

Functional skills are ones that are transferable to many different work settings. Developing a list of the functional skills you have and most enjoy using can help you focus on positions that fit your talents and provide satisfaction.

For a skills worksheet, visit careers.gmu.edu and click on the Students tab.

**Career Assessments**

University Career Services offers students and alumni the opportunity for formal and informal assessment of personality, skills, and interests as a part of the major and career exploration process. All assessments include a one-hour interpretation session with a counselor. Your career counselor will help you decide which assessments address your specific needs.

**STRONG INTEREST INVENTORY, SKILLSCAN, MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR AND STRENGTHSFINDER**

Students and alumni should contact University Career Services for assessment costs or locate the information at careers.gmu.edu/students/explore/index.cfm.

**Exploring Majors and Careers**

Many students are still exploring majors as they begin college. Whether you are considering a few ideas, wide open to possibility, or somewhere in between, there are resources to help you choose and confirm your choice of major.

**EXPLORING MAJORS CHECKLIST**

- Review the program of study for the major you are considering.
- Identify course requirements and read descriptions of required courses.
- Identify graduate and professional school opportunities for this major.
- Identify opportunities for gaining career-related experience (e.g., volunteering, internships, college activities, or student groups) in this major.
- Identify and contact alumni who pursued this major to find out what they are doing.
- List potential careers for this major.
- Based on your research, identify the advantages and disadvantages of this major for you.
- Skim through texts at the George Mason University Bookstore to get a feel for the subject matter.
- Explore majors links: “Exploring Majors” at advising.gmu.edu/current-students/research-majors and “What Can I Do with This Major” at whatcanidowiththismajor.com/major.com.
EXPLORING CAREERS CHECKLIST

- Identify skills you would like to use in your career.
- Identify the education or training that is required to enter and progress in the field.
- Identify opportunities for advancement.
- Research the projected outlook and trends in this field at www.bls.gov/ooh.
- Find the salary range and types of benefits you can expect.
- Consider nonmonetary rewards.
- Identify the personal characteristics that are required of someone in this occupation.
- Based on your research, determine how well the nature of the work suits your interests, values, skills, and personality.
- List the advantages and disadvantages of working in the occupations you have chosen.
- Research jobs and internships to identify tasks associated with occupations and majors, skills, and knowledge required. Take advantage of research projects, internships, co-ops, part-time or summer jobs, volunteering, or study abroad to learn more about a particular subject area.
- Join organizations that have programs that feature professionals in your field of interest. Information on student organizations and programs is available at si.gmu.edu or the Student Involvement Office in The Hub.

PROFESSIONALS IN CAREERS YOU ARE EXPLORING

Mason Career Link
Visit HireMason.gmu.edu and click on the Networking tab. More than 500 alumni will conduct informational interviews and sometimes job shadowing with you.

Professional Associations
Identify associations related to career fields of interest and contact them for information on local chapter meetings, networking events, career trend information, lists of graduate or professional training programs, special certifications, and more.

Career Advice Sites and Social Media
The following are examples of career-related websites to use as resources. You can also visit them on Facebook and follow them on Twitter.
- O*NET OnLine: onetonline.org
- Riley’s Guide: www.rileyyguide.com/careers
- WetFeet: old.wetfeet.com
The Four-Step Process

Finding an internship or a job involves four steps:

1. Documents
2. Research
3. Network
4. Search

As you begin your search for an internship or job, consider these four steps as a way to ensure a diligent, targeted, and purposeful approach. If you find you are not getting interviews, ask yourself: “Which of the steps am I not spending enough time on?” If you are only focusing on Step 4 and are not spending enough time on the first three, try to change your patterns to rebalance your efforts. Fully engaging in all the steps will help you be more successful in your search and lead to an interview.

Step 1: Documents
Documents (résumé/cover letter) are Step 1 in the process. Check out the next two sections for details and samples on how to develop your best résumé or cover letter.
Résumés

This section will explain how to create a concise résumé that highlights your skills and accomplishments, and how to write a cover letter that gives more depth to your experiences. Check out the samples in this section and on careers.gmu.edu/students/documents to get a better idea of how you can develop your own documents.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Your résumé and cover letter will change every time you apply for a position. You will revisit this step over and over to tailor your documents appropriately.

### What Is a Résumé?

A résumé is a summary of your qualifications, education, and experiences relevant to your job search. Employers will typically spend less than 30 seconds reviewing your résumé; therefore, the information must be conveyed in a clear, well-organized style.

### Résumé Contents

#### Identifying Information

- **Name**
- **Address**
- Telephone number—Include number where you can be reached during the day as well as evening. **Be sure your voicemail message is set up and appropriate for employers.**
- Email address—While you are a student, we recommend you use your Mason email address. **Your email should reflect your professionalism (e.g., firstname.lastname@gmail.com).**
- Website or LinkedIn URL (optional)—Your website should look professional and contain information you would want an employer to see, such as an online portfolio.

#### Objective (optional)

A strong, targeted objective should include the following:

- Type of position you are seeking (full-time, part-time, internship)
- Type of organization or industry you are pursuing
- Relevant skills you will contribute to position/organization

Like your résumé, your objective should be tailored to each opportunity or position. Avoid general, unfocused objectives, such as “a challenging and rewarding position that uses my education and experience.” If you are pursuing several career opportunities that emphasize different skills and knowledge, you should create a separate résumé for each.
SAMPLE OBJECTIVES
• Seeking a full-time trainee position in real estate property management, with opportunity to contribute strong financial skills and relevant experience
• Seeking a part-time administrative position in community health care education, with special emphasis on community relations and educating local employers

Summary of Qualifications (optional)
Instead of an objective, you may include a summary of qualifications. Be sure to summarize the experience, skills, and credentials most pertinent to the positions you are seeking. The summary of qualifications is brief, usually with no more than five qualification statements in bulleted format.

SAMPLE SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS
• Excel at oral communication skills, evidenced by four successful years on Forensics Team
• More than three years’ customer service experience through retail and restaurant positions
• Extensive computer application experience using Word, Access, Excel, PowerPoint, and Adobe QuarkXPress

Education
The education section follows immediately after the objective or summary of qualifications, unless you graduated several years ago and have job experience that shows stronger qualifications. Begin with your most recent education and list your qualifications in reverse chronological order, putting the most recent first. Include the following:

• Degree(s) awarded
• Major and minor
• Month and year degree was (or will be) awarded
• Name and location of college or university

If you are about to graduate and transferred from a school where you received an associate degree or no degree, you may choose to list the school to call attention to your degree, relevant honors, courses, or accomplishments. However, listing the earlier school(s) is optional.

High school is rarely included unless you are a recent high school graduate or wish to draw attention to something special about your high school experience.

Other academic information, if relevant to the position you are applying for, could include the following:

• GPA (overall and/or in major) if 3.00 or higher (do not round up)
• Relevant courses (list up to five course titles and no course numbers)
• Scholarships, honors, awards, and honor societies
• Course projects
• Thesis or dissertation topic
• Clinical or field experience
• Special training programs, certifications, or licensure
• Study abroad

Note: If you have two or more honors and awards, you may choose to create a separate section titled Honors and Awards in which to list these for greater emphasis. Likewise, if course projects and clinical or field experiences are among your most relevant qualifications, consider creating a separate section, which may be titled Related Experience. For an example of a Related Experience section, see the sample résumé for Ali Mohamed in this section.
SAMPLE EDUCATION SECTION

BS in Economics, minor in Spanish, expected May 2016
George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, GPA 3.15

• Relevant Course Work: Money and Banking, Economic Problems and Public Policies, International Economics, Economic Development of Latin America
• Study Abroad: University of Madrid, Spain, fall 2014 and spring 2015 semesters
• Financed 75 percent of college costs through part-time employment

Experience
This section may include the following:
• Full-time and part-time experience
• Internships and co-op positions
• Significant volunteer, leadership, field, and practicum experiences
• Significant course projects

For each experience, include the job title; name and location (city and state) of organization; the dates you participated; and a description of the skills, competencies, accomplishments, and knowledge you demonstrated. To choose a format that best highlights your experience, see examples of the chronological, related/relevant experience, and functional formats displayed later in this section.

SAMPLE EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTION

Accounting Assistant, ABC Accounting, Fairfax, VA
May 2014–present
• Maintain accounts payable and receivable for more than 200 office clients.
• Created and implemented a system for ordering and maintaining inventory of office supplies using Access.
• Developed a tracking log of client contacts resulting in greater office efficiency.

TIPS FOR CREATING THE MOST EFFECTIVE DESCRIPTIONS

• Action Verbs: State your experiences in phrases that begin with action verbs and show the scope and results of your activity (e.g., improved a procedure, clarified a problem, increased efficiency).

• Quantify: Qualify and quantify your accomplishments (e.g., trained more than 300 persons from 100 companies to use…) Well-chosen descriptive details help communicate your initiative, follow-through, and problem-solving skills.

• Keywords: Use keyword nouns in experience descriptions (and throughout your résumé). Employers often search electronic résumé databases using keywords to locate candidates with preferred qualifications.

• No Passive Phrases: Avoid passive phrases, such as “Responsible for,” “Duties included,” or “Assisted with.”

• Order of Importance: Describe your most responsible functions first even if they occupied only a small percentage of your time.

• Outcomes: Always include the outcome of your efforts or accomplishments (e.g., report was used by the account executive to brief the board).
**Skills**
Specialized skills, such as computer or foreign language skills, are great additions to your résumé. List relevant skills and your level of expertise. Or, if certain skills are particularly relevant to your objective, you may choose to list them under a separate “Computer Skills” or “Technical Skills” section.

**SAMPLE SKILLS SECTION**
- Computer proficiency in MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint
- Familiar with database management using MS Access
- Fluent in Spanish and English; conversational ability in French

**Other Résumé Categories**
Other categories that illustrate competencies might include the following:
- Student activities
- Community service
- Volunteer work
- Course projects
- Presentations
- Leadership experience
- Research
- Publications
- Certifications or licenses
- Honors and awards
- Professional memberships
- International experience
- Security clearances

When deciding whether to create a separate résumé category, ask yourself if the information is important or relevant enough to warrant its own section, or if it would fit just as well under another major heading. Avoid creating a category that has only one item.

**SAMPLE STUDENT ACTIVITY SECTION**
**President, American Marketing Association**
**George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, January 2015–present**
- Coordinate the activities of 75 members and lead a committee of five officers.
- Plan monthly professional development programs with local community businesses.
- Market all chapter activities to students through class presentations, activity fairs, and electronic communication.
Use action verbs at the beginning of each statement describing your experiences.
Résumé Formats
There is no single way to format your résumé. The format you choose should present your strengths.

CHRONOLOGICAL FORMAT
• Is most familiar to employers.
• Presents your experience and education in reverse chronological sequence, starting with the most recent.
• Lists date, job title, organization’s name, and location, and describes your activities as part of the experience section.
• Is simple, straightforward, and especially useful for anyone with directly relevant experience.

RELATED/RELEVANT EXPERIENCE FORMAT
• This format is an effective way to list your career-related experience first if it is not your most recent experience. It allows your future employer to connect the skills that you have with the skills required for the proposed position.
• Use two experience headings: “Related Experience” and “Additional Experience.”

TECHNICAL RÉSUMÉ
• A technical résumé should clearly show a candidate’s technical skills.
• Typically, you should include the following.
  ◦ Upper-level course titles (optional), the duration, and the result
  ◦ Projects completed, including platform used (front-end and back-end)
  ◦ Initiatives and performances that enhanced efficiency (faster work, monetary savings, etc.; focus on your most impressive technical projects and achievements
  ◦ Technical certifications, hardware, operating systems, networking and protocols, programming and languages, web and database applications
  ◦ Qualifications, such as personality development, marketing diploma, or research study

LIMITED EXPERIENCE FORMAT THAT WILL FILL A PAGE
• Use this format if you do not have enough experiences or work history to fill a page.
• Use 12-point font size, and list your name, address, and contact information vertically on the page to fill space.
• If a freshman, note recent high school activities and honors.
SALLY JONES  
1234 Main Street, Fairfax, VA 22030 • (703) 555-5555 • sjones99@gmu.edu

EDUCATION
George Mason University, Fairfax, VA  
Bachelor of Arts, History  
GPA: 3.23/4.0  
- On schedule to complete degree in 4 years while working 25 hours per week to finance tuition

Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale, VA  
Associate of Arts, General Studies  
GPA: 3.41/4.0

Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain  
- Studied the life of Francisco Franco, including guided site tours

RESEARCH PROJECT
The Relationship Between Britain and Imperial Russia  
Aug 2014 - Dec 2014  
- Researched diplomatic issues for the era using multiple databases including EBSCO  
- Analyzed primary source documents via National Archives  
- Conducted interviews with subject matter experts  
- Presented findings at Celebrations of Student Scholarship Day

EXPERIENCE
The National Museum of American History, Washington, DC  
Jan 2014 - Present  
Curatorial Intern  
- Organize research goals for a team of 10 interns  
- Investigate the origin of donated artifacts  
- Review documents for upcoming exhibit proposals  
- Maintain a database of artifacts using Microsoft Access

American Apparel, Arlington, VA  
Apr 2011 - Oct 2014  
Customer Service Clerk  
- Provided excellent customer service to approximately 100 customers per evening  
- Trained new staff on an as needed basis  
- Recommended clothing options to customers based on expressed tastes  
- Recognized 4 times as Employee of the Month

HONORS AND ACTIVITIES
Pi Kappa Phi  
Feb 2013 - Present  
- Philanthropy Chair, 2014

Habitat for Humanity  
Mar 2013 - Mar 2014

Dean’s List, 2 semesters

Arlington County History Scholarship  
- Awarded to outstanding college student majoring in history and maintaining a 3.0 GPA
# Sample Related Experience and Technical Résumé

## Ali Mohamed
4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030 • 703-555-1234 • amohame45@gmu.edu

### Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Degree / Program</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Mason University, Fairfax, VA</td>
<td>Master of Science in Computer Science</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering</td>
<td>May 2013</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Top rated university in Iran, limited to top 1% of applicants

### Technical Skills

- Programming: C, C++, Java, Python, .NET, PERL
- Databases: Oracle, Access, SQL
- Operating Systems: Windows, OSX, Unix, Linux
- Applications: Adobe Creative Suite, Microsoft Office Suite, Netbeans

### Related Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| XYZ Corporation, Dubai, UAE | May 2013–Jun 2014 | Computer Programmer I | • Created Java based projects for contracted companies  
• Tested software for rollout on Windows and Linux platforms  
• Led a team of 7 programmers in completing a nine month audit  
• Designed a cost saving module for the corporation that saw net savings of $5M |
| University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran | Jun 2012–May 2013 | Project Manager-Senior Design | • Led a team of 5 students in developing software to standardize course registration for a university of over 30,000 students  
• Consulted with university officials to determine the needs and capabilities of the institution  
• Designed, developed, and tested code from creation to completion  
• Organized team meetings on a weekly basis to provide regular project updates |

### Additional Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| George Mason University, Fairfax, VA | Aug 2014–Present | Graduate Teaching Assistant | • Instruct 100 students in an Introduction to Java course  
• Provide feedback and personal instruction to students on an as needed basis  
• Create lesson plans based on recommendations from the professor |
| Proma Hypermarket, Tehran, Iran | Apr 2011–Feb 2013 | Cashier | • Balanced sales receipts of up to $300 per day using Quickbooks software  
• Completed closing duties three nights per week |

### Activities

- Member, Association of Computing Machinery
- Member, Tehran Cultural Society
CARLOS BODEGA  
12345 Fairfax Drive  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
703-993-2222  
cbodega@gmu.edu

OBJECTIVE:  
To obtain the Desk Assistant position within George Mason University’s Career Services in order to utilize strong organization skills.

EDUCATION:  
Bachelor of Arts, Communication  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA  
*NCAA track and field student athlete  
Expected May 2018

Advanced Diploma  
Broad Run High School  
Ashburn, VA  
June 2014

EXPERIENCE:  
Volunteer/Coach  
Special Olympics Track and Field  
Fairfax, VA  
May 2011–July 2014

• Organized more than 100 track meets for Special Olympics athletes by scheduling meet times and individual heats, and securing locations for events.  
• Coached five athletes by planning practices and providing advice during track meets.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:  
George Mason University Track and Field Team, Student Athlete  
August 2014–Present

Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), Member  
August 2014–Present

Broad Run High School Track and Field Team, Captain  
August 2011–June 2014

Key Club, Student member  
August 2010–June 2014

SKILLS:  
Written and verbal fluency in Spanish  
Proficient in Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint  
Moderate proficiency in WordPress and Dreamweaver
SAMPLE FEDERAL STYLE RÉSUMÉ

Mahad Ibrahim
1234 Maple Lane Fairfax, VA 22032  703-123-4567  mahad.ibrahim@live.com

U.S Citizen
Clearance: None
Languages: Fluent in Arabic
Highest Previous Grade: GS-04 Pathways Intern
Geographic Preference: Washington, D.C., Northern Virginia

PROFILE
SKILLED RESEARCHER AND ANALYTICAL PROBLEM SOLVER committed to public service. Strong written, oral and interpersonal communication skills gained through coursework and internships. Bilingual with interest in learning new languages.

EDUCATION
Bachelor of Arts  in Global Affairs, Concentration Middle East & North Africa  May 2016
George Mason University, Fairfax, VA  GPA 3.51

Relevant Coursework

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PROJECT: Researched and wrote 20-page paper on trade and international finance in the Middle East based on literature reviews. Compared economies, analyzing similarities and differences among countries in the region. Assessed influence and consequences of trade and protectionism. Presented overview of paper to class. (October 2014)

CONFLICT ANALYSIS TEAM PROJECT: Led 4-member team project on intercultural communication and conflict resolution. Analyzed the influence of globalization on conflict using case studies. Delegated tasks and organized meeting schedule. Conducted a 60-minute presentation based on research findings. (April 2014)

RELATED EXPERIENCE

10th District Constituent Services Office, CONGRESSIONAL INTERN, Herndon, VA, 08/2015 to 12/2015, 8 hours per week, Supervisor: Ms. Jane Doe (703-234-5678), may contact

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS: Utilized and updated Capital Correspondence Database Information System to respond to written and verbal inquiries from the public. Planned and organized work, coordinated with others to solve complex problems. Demonstrated professionalism and courtesy. Shared information with and sought input from internal and external sources.

PROVEN TRACK RECORD FOR PROVIDING EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE to a diverse body of constituents. Recognized for interpersonal skills with customers and co-workers. Regularly received and responded to high priority requests from constituents. Managed 50+ inbound and outbound call traffic and 70 email requests from constituents each day. Worked successfully under deadlines to achieve daily objectives. Willing and able to work extra hours and take over additional tasks to complete projects.

BUILT RAPPORT and maintained liaisons with internal and external offices to improve operations and flow of information in a high pressure environment under tight deadlines. Participated in 2010 Congressional Grant Conference for researchers and businesses, held at Northern Virginia Community College’s Sterling Campus. Managed supporting logistics, information dissemination, and security.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:
- Recognized and awarded twice for exemplary internal and external customer service by supervisor
- Made recommendations to enhance the Congressional Grant Conference that were implemented for the next year
- Streamlined data entry process for the Capital Correspondence Database Information System allowing the public to easily submit inquiries
Department of Defense Chief of Staff, PATHWAYS PROGRAM INTERN, Arlington, VA, 06/2014 to 06/2015, 8 hours per week, ($13,000/yr.), Supervisor: Mr. John Doe (703-345-6789), may contact

DEMONSTRATED OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE while managing logistics and support of multiple Missile Defense Agency Conferences attended by military officials, defense department employees, and foreign dignitaries. Provided a wide range of direct support and proactive assistance to the Protocol Section of the Chief of Staff for MDA. Maintained professionalism and courteous attitude in a fast-paced, high pressure environment. Used Arabic language skills to assist foreign dignitaries.

ENGAGED IN EFFECTIVE ORAL COMMUNICATIONS AND PERSONAL INTERACTION at various retirement ceremonies, Senior Executive Service and flag officer events, weekly organizational staff meetings, and with transportation arrangements to events.

RESEARCHED AND PREPARED a comprehensive History and Missile Defense Bibliography for use by missile defense researchers and international strategic partners by compiling information from a variety of sources including the Pentagon library, the Pentagon intranet, and materials from the MDA Military History Office.

ANALYZED, EVALUATED, AND INTERPRETED information from missile defense history sources to actively assist the military historian with creating speeches for the Director of MDA to use in congressional testimony given in front of senators justifying budgets and programs.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:
- Wrote parts of speech for the Director of the Missile Defense Agency to give at the MDA Conference that was praised by over 10 senators
- Selected to represent the D.O.D. at multiple meetings and ceremonies
- Created formal brochure explaining the support of the MDA to be used again in the future for Japanese speaking dignitaries

Fairfax County Public Schools, SUBSTITUTE TEACHER, Falls Church, VA, 1/2012 to 6/2014, 24 hours per week ($21,000/yr.), Supervisor: Dr. John Doe (703-732-0123), may contact

MONITOR, TRACK AND EXECUTE, complex daily action plans while adjusting for changing priorities in a fast-paced emotionally-charged environment. Supervise and teach up to 30 students while promoting teamwork and communication. Disseminate written materials and effectively communicate oral instructions while maintaining order using a variety of creative methods. Support and promote primary instructor’s vision in tense situations.

EVALUATE AND DOCUMENT progress of action plans. Prepare and deliver in-depth analysis reports and briefings to primary instructors. Anticipate and respond to needs, maintaining flexible, service-oriented attitude.

MANAGED AND OVERSAW SUPPORT AND ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION for 30 elementary aged children while primary instructor was on leave due to an unexpected illness. Demonstrated quick thinking to adapt schedules and routines, creating lesson plans without guidance to ensure that learning continued uninterrupted.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:
- Repeatedly selected as a long-term substitute for teachers on maternity or extended medical leave as a result of demonstrated teaching ability
- Frequently recognized for enthusiasm, dependability, organization, and effectiveness as one of the Fairfax County Public Schools most in-demand substitutes.
- Awarded Substitute of the Year in 2013 for exceptional dedication to the classroom and students.

TECHNICAL SKILLS
Microsoft Office: Word, PowerPoint, Excel
Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT STYLE RÉSUMÉ

• Federal government style résumés contain additional information that is not found on civilian résumés. This information includes veteran’s preference, full address of employers, supervisor’s name, phone number of the agency, and wage or salary.
• This style of résumé allows you to expand upon your experiences and skills. Multiple pages are allowed.

Federal Style Résumés

Although most U.S. government agencies will accept a “simple” résumé, you can make yourself more competitive by creating the longer federal résumé. There is an excellent federal résumé builder on www.usajobs.gov that can help you properly format your résumé and ensure that you include the necessary information.

The federal résumé requires information not usually included in a résumé for the private sector. It can be up to five pages in length. Your federal résumé should include the following:
• The job announcement number, job title, and job grade of the job for which you are applying
• Your full name, full mailing address, day and evening phone numbers, and home email
• Social Security number
• Country of citizenship
• Veteran’s preference
• Reinstatement eligibility (for former federal employees)
• Highest federal civilian grade held, including job series and dates held
• Education, college name, city, state, zip code, your majors, and type and year of degrees held or number of semester hours completed; also, if requested, your high school name, city, state, zip code, and date of your diploma or GED
• All work experience, paid and unpaid (job title, duties, and accomplishments; employer’s name and address, including zip code; supervisor’s name and phone number; starting and ending dates (month and year); hours per week; and salary. List each experience as a separate entry on the résumé.
• Indicate whether your current supervisor can be contacted for a reference.
• Job-related training courses (title and year).
• Job-related knowledge or skills.
• Current job-related certificates and licenses.
• Honors, awards, special accomplishments, leadership activities, memberships, or publications—both university and job-related.

Additional Résumé Tips

• Analyze the announcements carefully for keywords and government jargon.
• List your accomplishments, including work, academic, extracurricular, volunteer, and other activities; don’t be shy but be truthful.
• Focus on the mission of the agency and translate your experience into terms that make sense for that agency.
• Use more nouns and titles (e.g., writer, team leader, database administrator) to allow for selection in a keyword search.
• After creating a draft of your federal style résumé, schedule a meeting with our Government Industry Advisor.
Quick Tips for Writing Résumés

- Design your descriptions to focus on your accomplishments, using action verbs to clearly indicate the skills you’ve used.
- Take advantage of on-campus positions and activities to express learned skills on your résumé.
- Try quantifying results in your descriptions, such as “Created marketing campaign that increased club membership by 25 percent.”
- Don’t make your margins and font size too small.
- Only include high school experiences if you are a freshman or sophomore.
- Have others look over your résumé for content and grammar. Career counselors and industry advisors are available to critique your résumé.

Additional Resources

**EXERCISE 1: T-CHART FOR ANALYZING POSITION DESCRIPTIONS**

On the left side of the T-chart, write down the requirements/qualifications listed in the job description you are interested in. On the right side, list specific examples of how you have demonstrated that particular skill/requirement. **This is a great tool when trying to figure out what experiences to highlight in your résumé and cover letter.** Include all of your qualifications on your résumé. Select three to five of your strongest qualifications to highlight through examples or stories in the body of your cover letter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements/Qualifications</th>
<th>My Relevant Examples</th>
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<td>1.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What Is a Cover Letter?
The cover letter is a standard business letter that accompanies a résumé. The goal of the cover letter is to encourage employers to look at your résumé further and to provide employers with a writing sample. Effective cover letters are tailored for the particular job and organization to which you are applying. Taking the time to personalize your cover letter will demonstrate to the employer a level of enthusiasm and interest in the position and could help you stand out more as a candidate.

There are two basic types of cover letters:
- **Application Letter**—Used to apply for an open position within an organization; includes pertinent details about your qualifications and requests an interview.
- **Prospecting Letter/Letter of Inquiry**—Used to contact an employer where no known opening exists to express and interest in the organization and request an opportunity to interview for an appropriate position.

Cover Letter Outline and Contents

CONTACT INFORMATION
Your Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Name of Addressee
Title
Organization Name
Address
City, State, Zip
SALUTATION

• Dear Mr./Ms./Mrs. __________ (specific person’s name who will be doing the hiring)
• If you do not have a name, call the department or human resources to find out to whom your letter should be addressed.
• As a last resort, address your letter to Personnel Manager, Hiring Manager, or Recruiting Representative.

FIRST PARAGRAPH

• The main purpose of the first paragraph is to introduce yourself and tell why you are writing. You want to grab the employer’s attention.
• Indicate why you are interested in the position and/or this organization.
• Use your community. If someone has referred you to the organization (a current employee, friend, or family member), include his or her name in the first sentence.

SECOND/THIRD PARAGRAPH

• Tell the employer your story.
• Describe your related qualifications for the type of position you seek using specific examples from academic, work, volunteer, and/or co-curricular experiences.
• Connect your accomplishments, skills, and knowledge directly to the type of position, organization, and/or field.

FINAL PARAGRAPH

• Summarize or give a final statement of interest and qualifications.
• Thank the employer for his or time and consideration.
• Plan to follow up with the employer by phone or email.

CLOSING

• Sincerely,
• Your Name
Types of Cover Letters

Highlighted key words indicate skills, competencies, experience, or knowledge areas that the candidate must possess and include on his or her résumé, cover letter, and supporting materials to be considered for an interview. If the key elements are not there, you won’t be selected. Be prepared to discuss and give examples of your qualifications at the interview.

EXAMPLE #1: CONGRESSIONAL INTERNSHIP DESCRIPTION

Congressional Internship
Student Conservation Association (SCA)
Job Function: Public Administration/Public Affairs/Public Policy/Transportation
Application Deadline: 5/15/2015

SCA and Unilever Corporation have partnered to offer a unique congressional internship opportunity that will give students a chance to change the world. Working in either a Democratic or Republican office, students will gain firsthand knowledge of how government policy shapes our national park system. After spending 15 weeks on Capitol Hill, interns will be placed in the field at a national park to help implement those policies.

Minimum Requirements
- Strong **communication skills, both written and verbal**
- Interest in public policy and **environmental issues**
- **Strong customer service skills** and comfortable manner when dealing with the public
- Willingness to work in a Democratic or Republican congressional office
- Computer proficiency with **spreadsheets or databases**
- Ability to **conduct Internet research**
- **Current undergraduate or recent graduate with a GPA of 3.00 or higher**
- Detailed résumé
- Directed writing sample and college transcript

Location: Washington, D.C., and an assigned national park
Position Type: Internship—Paid or stipend
Desired Major: Public policy, government, political science

To Apply
Send résumé, cover letter, and college transcript via George Mason University’s HireMason database or to SCA Human Resources Office at www.theSCA.org/hr by the May 15, 2015, deadline.
1234 Campus Road
Fairfax, VA 22030

April 15, 2015

Ms. Jennifer Moss
Internship Coordinator
Student Conservation Association
963 New York Avenue
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Ms. Moss:

Your recent posting on HireMason for the Congressional Internship caught my attention immediately. The opportunity to work on Capitol Hill and also in the field is the perfect match for my academic pursuits and career interests. As a government-international politics major and environmental-sustainability studies minor with a 3.2 GPA in my senior year, I believe I have the skills you are looking for.

The past two summers, I worked as a receptionist and group leader for Fairfax County’s Hidden Oaks Nature Center. In this role, I answered a multi-line telephone, provided information about the center, and performed general administrative duties. As a group leader, I educated and engaged children ages 3-12 about ecology, preservation, and woodland trails. This experience has helped me to develop my customer service and verbal communication skills while also understanding how government policies and funding affect our parks. Additionally, my volunteer experience over the past four years with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay has reinforced my interest in public policy and environmental issues. My college coursework is writing intensive, and the enclosed writing sample illustrates my research skills on the topic of Maryland’s Annual Cleanup Day and Project Clean Stream. My skills in Microsoft Office, including Excel, are advanced, as I am able to create formulas, run macros, and develop pivot tables, all of which I learned in an economic policy course last semester.

Attached is my résumé that highlights my customer service and research experience along with my transcript and writing sample. Next week I will follow up to inquire if any additional information is needed. You can reach me by email at sstudent15@masonlive.gmu.edu or telephone at 703-555-3456. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Samantha Student
Quick Tips for Cover Letters

- Use social media and the organization’s website to gather information about the company/organization for your cover letter. Focus on skills and attributes the employer is seeking in applicants and discuss these skills in the body of your cover letter.
- Cover letters also showcase your writing abilities. It is imperative that your cover letter is error-free and grammatically sound. Don’t begin every sentence with “I.”
- Letters addressed to a specific person demonstrate a higher level of investment and enthusiasm for the position, so try to find out the name of the person you want to read your letter.

EXAMPLE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOB DESCRIPTION

Fairfax County Public Schools  
Title: School Counselor, Rachel Carson Middle School  
Job Function: Counseling/Consulting/Crisis Intervention/Program Assessment and Evaluation

Duties: School counselor will work with students from multicultural and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Provide developmentally appropriate information, knowledge, and skills to promote student success in academic, career, personal, and social areas. Serve as a consultant to parents and teachers helping them to be more effective in working with students through individual or group conferences, staff development activities, or parent educational workshops. Provide crisis intervention addressing specific concerns of students at risk or with identified needs consulting with parents and/or teachers as appropriate. Assess needs of students and staff, evaluate programs, and make changes in the school counseling program to increase effectiveness. Act as liaison between teachers, parents/guardians, support personnel, and community resources to facilitate successful student development. Be an advocate ensuring equitable access to programs and services for all students.

To Apply: Email résumé and cover letter to afford@fcps.edu by August 15, 2015.
2201 Wentworth Way  
Fairfax, VA 22030  

August 1, 2015  

Alice Ford, Recruitment Specialist  
Fairfax County Public Schools  
8115 Gatehouse Road  
Falls Church, VA 22042  

Dear Ms. Ford:  

As a recent graduate from George Mason's MEd Counseling and Development program with a concentration in school counseling, I believe my education and experience match the needs of your position. I was excited to see the school counselor opportunity at Rachel Carson Middle School posted on the Fairfax County Public Schools website on July 31, 2015. The possibility of working with a diverse student body at a school known for its nontraditional teaching methods and innovative programs is exactly where I would like to build my career.

For the past year and a half, I have held a school counseling internship working with students from various multicultural and socioeconomic backgrounds at Irving Middle School. My experience includes leading individual and group counseling sessions on anger management, social skills development, study skills, friendship, grief, deployment, and divorce. In addition, I worked with a diverse student body that included many non-English speaking recent immigrants at Arlington High School for the Arts and Sciences. During this practicum, I conducted individual and group sessions addressing attendance, academic, career, and social concerns. One project I initiated was to update community resources, brochures, and intake forms. Additionally, I had the opportunity to co-facilitate a parent-teacher workshop on the topic of social media and bullying. While pursuing my degree, I balanced a part-time job at a group home for battered women and volunteered at a crisis hotline. The culmination of my education and experience provides a strong foundation to provide counseling services to your student body.

Attached is my résumé for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have. I look forward to discussing my background and passion for supporting students, families, and staff with you. The best way to reach me is via cell phone at 703-987-6543.

Sincerely,  

Joanna Spellman
EXAMPLE OF PROSPECTING COVER LETTER

987 Main Street
Fairfax, VA 22030

March 1, 2015

Mr. Mark Parker
Internship Coordinator
EC International Development Inc.
11 Connecticut Avenue
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Mr. Parker:

Through my research on the field of international development on LinkedIn, I came across your organization. The current projects you provide in Latin America in support of human rights are of particular interest to me. As I delved deeper, I was pleased to find an internship opportunity was previously listed on HireMason. I would like to inquire about anticipated internships for the upcoming summer. My passion for human rights in Latin and South America, along with my Spanish language skills, would allow me to make a valuable contribution to EC International Development Inc.

While pursuing a bachelor of arts in global affairs with minors in social justice and Spanish, I have consistently received positive feedback from my professors concerning the accuracy and efficiency of my research projects. To date, my coursework has included topics such as: Latino cultures and global issues associated with human rights and poverty. In fall 2014, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Argentina where my Spanish language skills were further developed while also serving as a volunteer for a community project to benefit orphans. I would like to contribute these relevant skills to your organization as an intern. In addition to being on the Dean’s List for the past three semesters, I am a teaching assistant in a global economics course, a Spanish tutor, and a student assistant in the School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs.

I look forward to speaking with you further about potential opportunities within your organization. My résumé is attached for your review. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone (202-555-1234) or by email (aramx@masonlive.gmu.edu). If I do not hear from you by March 15, 2015, I will call you to follow up. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Amanda Ramirez
Letters of Recommendation

Recommendation letters are typically requested when applying for graduate school or a scholarship, and by employers in certain fields.

Provide your letter writers with the following:

• Four to six weeks lead time to write the letter
• A copy of your résumé
• Written highlights of your academic courses
• Examples of projects and research papers
• Your transcripts
• Any other information that serves to distinguish you for the purpose of the recommendation
• Stamped and addressed envelopes (if they need to mail in the letters)
• A handwritten thank-you letter or card

Save copies of your recommendation letters. They may be used again but should be updated by the original writer after one year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHER LETTERS</th>
<th>Visit careers.gmu.edu for samples.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NETWORKING Letter</td>
<td>Written to develop a contact in a field or organization and may be used to request an information interview, job lead, or help with preparing job search materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THANK-YOU Letter</td>
<td>Follows an interview. Conveys appreciation for the interview and reiterates your interest in the position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter of APOLOGY</td>
<td>Expresses your regret for missing an interview. Conveys your continued interest and states your desire to reschedule the meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCEPTANCE Letter</td>
<td>Serves as an ethical contract between you and the employer after you have been offered a job. It should be brief, express your appreciation, restate the terms and conditions of employment (salary and benefits), and the starting date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REJECTION Letter</td>
<td>Declines a job offer and expresses appreciation for the employer’s time and the offer in a positive, tactful manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WITHDRAWAL Letter</td>
<td>Notifies an employer in a considerate and positive tone that you no longer wish to be considered for a position with that organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References
Employers may require you to provide a list of references to be contacted. References verify your experience and confirm your credibility. Unlike writing a recommendation letter, your references, if contacted by the employer, will speak with the employer by phone or email about your accomplishments and credibility, as well as answer any questions about you the employer may have. Employers use references to assess past job and school performance as an indicator to determine whether you would be a good fit for the position. Careful consideration should be given to whom you ask to serve as your references.

IDENTIFYING YOUR REFERENCES
- Consider asking professors, advisors, supervisors and bosses, or co-workers to be a reference.
- As a college student or recent alum, you should have at least one reference from a professor or faculty member.
- Choose wisely. If an individual has minimal knowledge of your professional experience, do not ask him or her to serve as your reference. You should select an individual who knows you well and can speak of your skills, rather than a well-respected professional in your field who knows very little about you.
- If the person seems hesitant to serve as your reference, ask someone else.

REQUESTING REFERENCES
- Personally contact each person to ask whether he or she would be able to serve as a strong reference before you provide the employer with his or her contact information.
- Share the types of positions you are interested in applying for, along with your résumé, and how you see your qualifications fitting with those positions.

REFERENCE LIST FORMAT
- The names of references should not be included on the résumé. Create a separate page with your complete contact information at the top followed by a list of your references and their contact information.
- Do not send your list of references with the résumé unless requested to do so; instead, give it to the employer at the interview.
- Employers will usually contact your references by phone or email.
- Keep your references updated on your job search.
REFERENCES

Daniel Faircloth
9118 University Drive
Fairfax, VA 22030
703-555-8120
dfair1111@gmu.edu

REFERENCES
Jocelyn Weaver, PhD
Assistant Professor
School of Systems Biology
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA 22030
703-555-2014
jweaver9@gmu.edu

Melissa Graybar
Manager
Britches
88766 Maple Street
Alexandria, VA 23049
703-444-1000
mgraybar@britches.com

Rhonda Kalish
Project Manager
National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases
National Institute of Health
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Career Research

It is critical to conduct research into the industry that interests you. The more research you do, the more likely a career path and effective job search strategy will become evident to you. This section will explore how you can effectively implement some research methods.

IN THIS SECTION
You will learn...
- What to research to find out more about a company or industry
- How you can conduct career research
- Which online links for general and industry-specific information might be best for you

CAREER RESEARCH IS STEP 2 IN THE FOUR-STEP PROCESS.

1 Documents
2 Research
3 Network
4 Search

Step 2: Research
- Research your organizations of choice by visiting their websites to learn about their mission, products, or services offered, major divisions, and location.
- Research your industry of interest to learn the lingo and current trends in the field.
- Develop a list of 50–100 organizations that may be a fit for you. You are not looking for companies that have openings, just places that you feel could be a fit.

ABOUT CAREER RESEARCH
A major element of a successful job search and career is understanding the full scope of the position to which you are applying. Often a job description is limited in explaining what is required of the applicant for that particular position. It is essential to discover more about the job, the company, and most important, the industry. Once you know more, you can go back to your documents and tailor them appropriately. Important questions that you may want to consider researching include:
- What is required of me, both in the day-to-day work, as well as the overall goals for achieving success in this position?
- What are the goals of this company, and how does it go about achieving them?
- Who are its competitors in this industry, and what, collectively, does the industry stand for? What obstacles does it face?
- What are the emerging trends in this industry, and how might this position or company play a part in this larger context?
- How does the company’s mission match my own values?
It is important to remember that through doing your research, you are not committing to an organization. You are simply gathering information to help you determine if you would like to pursue the next step in seeking employment with them. Use this opportunity to learn about options and expand your list rather than limit your choices. If it is clear a company would not be a good fit for you, you can move on from them; otherwise, consider exploring further through the next steps in the process.

**CAREER RESEARCH CHECKLIST**

- Read about various occupations and learn about the nature of the work, working conditions, training and educational requirements, earning potential, future job outlook, and more in the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Occupational Outlook Handbook at [www.bls.gov/ooh](http://www.bls.gov/ooh).
- Talk with your network of contacts—family, friends, professors, teachers, neighbors, peers, colleagues, and mentors—about potential careers. Use social media, including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.
- Use Mason’s Alumni Association to build connections. The Mason Alumni Association’s LinkedIn group is a great way to access a large number of connections very quickly.
- Conduct career research online. Learn more about your industries of interest by visiting [careers.gmu.edu/students/jobsearch](http://careers.gmu.edu/students/jobsearch).
- Explore current job openings. Different companies have variations of jobs within the same career field. This information can help you learn which skills are important in your industry.
- Consider volunteering in your industry of interest.
- Conduct informational interviews and attend customized recruiting events at University Career Services.
- Go to one or more career fairs.
- Arrange to job shadow one or more people who have careers that interest you. Take a Patriot to Work Day is a great opportunity to conduct a job shadow.
- Locate one or more professional associations related to your career field.

**LINKS**

Below are some of the websites you can use to conduct career research.

**General Information**
- O*Net OnLine ([onettenonline.org](http://onettenonline.org))
- Riley Guide ([www.rileyguide.com](http://www.rileyguide.com))
- WetFeet ([www.wetfeet.com](http://www.wetfeet.com))
- LexisNexis—Use Mason’s library site to access this database

**Industry-Specific Information**
- For industry-specific information, visit the University Career Services “Industry Resources” page at [careers.gmu.edu/students/jobsearch](http://careers.gmu.edu/students/jobsearch).
- Use LinkedIn to research groups relevant to your industry or interest area and to research company pages.
- Access information through national or regional associations related to your industry. You can also locate professional associations through Career OneStop.
- Visit [TheCareerProject.org](http://TheCareerProject.org) to research thousands of real careers and jobs through the eyes of the people who work in them.
We’re Hiring
Forward Thinkers

LOOKING TO TRANSFORM TOMORROW, TODAY

Leidos is hiring forward thinkers. We’re a company with over 40 years of elevating careers and solving national security, health, and engineering problems in ways no one else can. We evolved from SAIC, and we’re on the cutting edge of cyber network protection, taking on cancer at a genetic level and re-engineering America’s critical infrastructure. Leidos offers internships and is currently seeking problem solvers for entry-level positions in:

- Computer Science
- Computer Engineering
- Electrical Engineering
- Aerospace Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering
- Cybersecurity
- Geospatial Technologies
- Biological Sciences
- Business
- Civil Engineering

A New Perspective in National Security, Health & Engineering
Help tackle the biggest problems in national security, health and engineering today, to transform the world tomorrow and make the world a better place for generations to come.

Join us at
jobs.leidos.com
WHERE WILL YOU GO?

LIVE, LEARN AND WORK OVERSEAS
AS A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

PEACECORPS.GOV/LEARN
Networking

Networking = Relationships. This step is the most important and the most time consuming, but effectively building your network will ultimately lead to a successful internship or job search.

**IN THIS SECTION**
- Networking basics
- What should be included in a personal pitch
- How to prepare for an informational interview
- Sample networking questions
- About social media and other networking strategies

**NETWORKING IS STEP 3 IN THE FOUR-STEP PROCESS.**

**Step 3: Network**
Put simply, networking means building relationships with people and exchanging information. If you can add a new friend to Facebook, you have already proven that you can network!

Up to 80 percent of jobs are filled through networking. When employers have a position to fill, they first think of anyone they already know who needs a job and would be a good fit for their organization. Second, they turn to those around them for recommendations of great candidates. Lastly, (and only if necessary) they advertise their position publicly to solicit a large number of applicants.

**WHERE CAN YOU NETWORK?**
Networking can take place anywhere you come into contact with people. Informal places include the classroom, a sports game, or your religious service. Formal spaces, specifically designed for networking, include a career fair, professional association meeting, or conference.

**WHO IS IN YOUR NETWORK?**
Your network is probably bigger than you think! Just to get started, add up all the contacts in your phone and email address book. Networks are built over time. Remember, with each new person you meet you are expanding your network.
YOUR PERSONAL PITCH
The first thing you do when you meet someone or are trying to establish a relationship is to introduce yourself. Imagine you are on an elevator with someone who has the ability to give you your dream job, or you are at a career fair with a long line of students waiting to speak with the same employer. What would you say to make a positive first impression? A personal pitch allows you to provide the following in 30 seconds or less.
1. Information about yourself (e.g., name, year, major)
2. Your interest in the industry or organization
3. Your top two to three strengths and qualifications, supported by concrete examples
4. A relevant question to initiate a conversation

THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW
An informational interview is a structured meeting to gather advice from a professional about an industry, occupation, or organization. This information can be used to help you decide about a major or career and how to prepare yourself to successfully enter that line of work. Take the following steps to arrange informational interviews.

Develop a List of Possible Contacts
Identify individuals who work in the industry or do the type of work you are considering as a possible career. Think through people in your personal and professional circles:
• Family, neighbors
• Friends and their parents
• Fellow Mason students and alumni in Mason Career Link* or the Mason Alumni Association LinkedIn Group
• Faculty and industry experts who have published in your field
• Foundations, members of professional clubs and associations

*Mason Career Link is accessible via HireMason (hiremason.gmu.edu) under the Networking tab. Mason Career Link mentors indicate the ways they prefer to be contacted.

Request an Informational Interview Meeting
Once you have found someone you would like to interview, use the following script to request a meeting.

Hello, my name is _________. I obtained your name from_________ (person who referred you, Mason Career Link database, etc.). I am a _________ (year in school, major) at Mason, and your career field is of interest to me. I am trying to learn more about the nature of your work, industry trends, and what skills employers seek in new hires in this field.
Could I make a half-hour appointment to meet with you in person at your workplace or speak with you over the phone? I would like to ask you about your career path and any advice you have on what I can do while in college to better prepare to enter the job market.

Prepare for the Informational Interview
• Update your résumé in case the interviewee asks for a copy of it or if you would like to ask for feedback on it.
• Research the person’s field and organization.
• Develop a list of questions. (See samples on page 39.)
**Informational Interview Etiquette**

- **Never** ask for a job during an informational interview. Save that for follow-up communication if you find you are still interested in working for the organization.
- If you are meeting someone in person for your informational interview, dress in the most professional attire that your wardrobe allows. (The closer you are to interviewing for a job, the more critical it is to dress professionally.)
- Arrive or call on time for the interview. If an emergency or unexpected problem arises that prevents or delays your arrival, notify the person immediately.
- Ask your interviewee if there is anything you can do to help them. Remember, networking is a two-way street.
- Thank the interviewee for his or her time and send a follow-up thank you note or email.
- Enjoy the experience! Because you are the interviewer, you do not have the same pressures as in a job interview. At the same time, the experience helps you develop your interviewing skills—firm handshake, good eye contact, relaxed but erect posture, clear speaking, careful listening.

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE NETWORKING**

Social media and online resources are great tools for you to identify and connect with people who may know about jobs and internships. A positive online presence can also attract recruiters to you.

**LinkedIn**

With more than 330 million users, LinkedIn is the premiere professional networking site. Create a profile on LinkedIn and invite everyone you know to join your network. You may be surprised to discover that your uncle, professor, or former supervisor is connected to someone who works for your dream employer.

- Market yourself and create a professional brand.
- Establish and build your professional network by connecting to friends, family, supervisors, co-workers, classmates, professors, advisors, and others with similar interests or skills.
- Join groups based on your career interests.*
- Gain and share information about industry trends, companies, and job leads.
- See whether you have connections to a company and ask for an introduction.

*Search through the members of groups you have joined on LinkedIn. If the “Contact” section of a profile says “Expertise Requests,” this is a good indication that the individual would be willing to talk with you. Use the “Send a Message” feature to request an informational interview.

**Twitter**

Use Twitter to follow and have real-time communication with hiring managers and working professionals in your industry area. These are some tips for using Twitter for networking:

- **Maintain a professional profile**: A Twitter profile bio is limited to 160 characters. Be sure to include your location and the type of work you do or are looking for, plus keywords that recruiters might use to search for prospective candidates. Don’t forget to add a professional-looking photograph.
- **Use Twitter add-on applications for job hunting**, including Tweetmyjobs or Twitjobsearch.
- **Follow** career coaches, résumé writers, job industry experts, and government employment agencies to keep up with hiring trends. Regional groups (@dcjobscouncil) and job boards (@indeed) are also on Twitter.
• **Follow hashtags.** Twitter uses hashtags (# single word) to tag individual tweets or conversations on specific subjects. Examples of job-related hashtags include #job, #jobs, #jobsearch, #career, #employment, #salary, and #hire.

• **Participate in chats** sponsored by professional groups, career experts, or agencies.

To locate job resources that fit your interest, you can use the **Twitter search function** and select relevant keywords based on your interests. For example, if you want to work in the public relations field in New York City, you could type “job openings,” “public relations,” and “New York.”

**Facebook**

Use Facebook to stay up to date with what is going on with your network of classmates, friends, family, and co-workers. Highlight your work experience and education on your profile. Post status updates about the type of work you are seeking and where to solicit advice and referrals. Facebook also has networking applications such as BeKnown, Branchout, and Glassdoor. Most importantly, be sure to keep your profile professional and tasteful.

**OTHER NETWORKING STRATEGIES**

**Professional Associations**

Just like there are organizations here on campus for students, there are organizations for working professionals in the “real world.” These groups are often referred to as professional or trade associations. In order to attract the next generation of professionals, many of these groups allow current college students to join at a discounted rate. Benefits of membership in a professional association can include access to industry publications, job and internship opportunities, mentors, and conferences.

**Networking Events**

Events hosted by professional associations, academic departments, or University Career Services can be intimidating, but they can also help you to connect with industry experts, alumni, and employers you might not meet otherwise. Follow these tips to prepare for and make the most of these opportunities.

• Practice your personal pitch so that you will feel comfortable introducing yourself to new people.
• Conduct research about the speakers and participants before an event by reviewing their bios and LinkedIn profiles. Researching speakers will give you ideas of topics to discuss with them.
• Make sure your own LinkedIn profile is updated so that you are ready to send invitations to connect with any of the people you meet at the event.
• Remember, you have been successful in networking if you shared your career interests with someone, gained a piece of useful advice, or provided someone else with beneficial information.

**Volunteering**

As stated previously, many positions are filled by referrals from employees within an organization. Volunteering is a great way to strengthen your résumé, while building a relationship with individuals at organizations where you might like to intern or work.
SAMPLE NETWORKING QUESTIONS
In case of a planned or chance meeting, you should always have questions prepared to ask a new professional contact. Here are some examples:

- What trends are most impacting your industry/company right now?
- In class we just discussed _______ (current issue); how is that impacting your work?
- What are the most pressing needs/issues for your organization/department?
- What most surprised you about working in this industry/company?
- What’s the best lesson you have learned on the job?
- What do you know now that you wish you had known when you were my age/in my position?
- How did you enter this field?
- What should I be doing now to prepare myself to enter this field (classes, activities, experience)?
- What does an average day on the job look like for you?
- What skills, abilities, and personal qualities do you find most important in your work?
- What do you like most and least about your field/job?
- I’ve built a target list of potential employers. Would you be willing to take a look at it and give me your feedback?
- From your perspective, what are the job prospects for the next few years in this line of work?
- What next steps do you recommend I take?
- May I follow up with you if I have further questions?
- Based on my interests, is there anyone else you would recommend I speak with?
Emerging Leaders Program
Operations Management Track

Are you looking for a rotational management program that will utilize your degree and further develop your leadership ability? If you answered “yes,” then our Emerging Leaders program may be a great place for you to launch your career.

What we look for in candidates:
- Bachelor’s degree in business or related field
- Master’s degree and MBA graduates are encouraged to apply
- At least a 3.5 overall GPA in undergrad and graduate studies
- Very good analytical and problem-solving skills
- Effective written and verbal communication skills
- Demonstrated leadership experience
- High level of dependability
- Desire to one day become a manager
- Willingness to relocate

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As an intern, you will work on real business issues, receiving mentoring, present your ideas, interact with management... and much more. And, you’ll have some fun along the way, too, by taking part in team and social activities. Who knew an insurance company had so much to offer college students!

We’re looking for bright, driven students who:
- Have completed their junior year
- Are pursuing a business major or minor
- Possess at least a 3.0 overall GPA
- Have demonstrated leadership experience
- Have effective analytical, time management and communication skills
- Are inquisitive, diligent and enjoy working in teams

Apply today @ geico.jobs

When applying, please upload your resume, cover letter and transcripts, preferably as Word documents or PDFs.
Job Search

Through your research and networking, you should have a solid idea of where you need to be searching for opportunities in your industry. This section will build on what you learned in the previous sections, and provide tips as you embark on your job/internship search.

**IN THIS SECTION**

You will learn...

- How to identify employers/positions
- More about online resources for job searching
- About the process for applying for federal jobs

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**Step 4: Search**

Explore options and identify prospective sites and contacts using HireMason and web resources.

**IDENTIFYING EMPLOYERS AND POSITIONS**

You created your résumé and cover letter and had them critiqued. You identified certain fields of interest and researched the industry. You networked using social media and at events. Now is the time to search and apply! Make sure you cover all your bases when searching...

- Your networks
- Industry-specific databases or listservs (an email you subscribe to in order to receive targeted information and jobs)
- Social media platforms (particularly popular for certain industries and growing in popularity for many others)
- Individual company websites
- General databases

**RESEARCHING EMPLOYERS**

Every field is unique and it’s critical for you to learn where and when openings are advertised. Target social media platforms or job boards that are specific to your professional goals such as those found through professional associations. Use the information provided in the “Research” section to target employers.
THE “OPEN” JOB MARKET
The “open” job market means anything that is advertised or published. These include all jobs promoted in HireMason, employer job listings, placement agencies, and ads in trade journals, job and career fairs, and newsletters. Become familiar with the resources that have the kinds of jobs you are interested in applying to, and make it a habit to frequent these sources. But don’t spend too much time using this approach!

THE “HIDDEN” JOB MARKET
Most jobs (70 to 80 percent) are not advertised. While it takes more time and energy to uncover these opportunities through networking, it has a much larger rate of success. In the end, you will often find yourself with less competition and a better chance of obtaining an interview.

Job Search Resources
Below are a few key resources you should keep in mind when conducting your search:

YOUR NETWORK
You can network or not work! Talk to as many people as you can about your career interests and job search goals. Remember to conduct informational interviews (refer to the Networking section for more information) to learn more about your target industry, companies, and types of opportunities.

MASON CAREER SERVICES RESOURCES
• Mason Career Services website (tips, advice, and more): careers.gmu.edu
• HireMason: hiremason.gmu.edu
• On-Campus Interviewing: Interview on campus with employers for full-time positions and internships.

INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC DATABASES
• Target industry-specific internship/job boards or listservs and national or regional associations related to your industry: careers.gmu.edu/jobsearch

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS
• LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com
• Twitter: www.twitter.com
• Facebook: www.facebook.com

INDIVIDUAL COMPANY WEBSITES
• Through your research and networking, you should have determined some target companies that pique your interest.
• Regularly check the “careers” section of company websites to ensure you’re capturing any and all opportunities that may be posted (not all companies will post to a general database).

GENERAL DATABASES
• CareerShift: careers.gmu.edu/resources
• PassportCareer: careers.gmu.edu/resources
• Internships.com: www.internships.com
• Indeed: www.indeed.com
• Simply Hired: www.simplyhired.com
• Career Builder: www.careerbuilder.com
• Glass Door: www.glassdoor.com
ON-CAMPUS JOBS

- Working on campus is an excellent way to gain career-related experience as you clarify goals and acquire skills and self-confidence, while developing professionalism and building your network.
- George Mason University is a top employer for students, offering a variety of on-campus positions including Federal Work Study, Research, Graduate Assistantship, and part-time student employment. You can search and apply for on-campus jobs through HireMason by clicking on the "Jobs" tab, then choose the CSM jobs, followed by the Advanced Search option and select On Campus job for position type.
- In addition, check out jobs.gmu.edu to search for positions throughout the university. For most students, searching in the section titled "Hourly/wage employment opportunities" will likely provide the best matches.

Federal Government Job Search

The federal government is a major employer in the Washington, D.C., area, offering a wide variety of employment and internship opportunities. With more than 2.7 million civilian employees nationwide—and attractive benefits—the federal government is the employer of choice for many Mason students. Moreover, federal internships offer students an opportunity to gain professional experience that can lead to full-time federal employment after graduation.

MANAGING THE FEDERAL JOB SEARCH

To manage your federal job search, you should treat the more than 450 federal departments, agencies, and bureaus as if they were separate organizations. The federal government has three categories of employment: Competitive Service, Excepted Service, and Senior Executive Service.

Competitive Service jobs constitute the majority of all federal jobs and are housed in an online system called USAjobs.gov, which is managed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Excepted Service agencies include all intelligence agencies, the State Department, the General Accounting Office, and a select number of others. Each excepted service agency runs its own hiring process, so you will have to visit the individual agency's website to apply. The intelligence community has a portal to its agencies at Intelligence.gov. The third category of employment, Senior Executive Service, is for executive level hiring after many years of experience have been earned.

For your search, your main source for finding federal positions will most likely be USAJobs.gov. As you begin your search on USAJobs, you will notice several key pieces of information in each listing: grade levels, occupational series, and KSA questionnaires.

Grade Levels

The General Schedule (GS) is the federal government’s most common pay scale for civilian employees. It contains 15 grades ranging from GS-1 to GS-15. Based solely on education, you may apply for a GS-5 after completing your bachelor’s degree. After completing a master’s degree, you are eligible for GS-9 positions. Keep these grade levels in mind as you search for positions. You want to be sure you are applying for positions for which you qualify. For more information on grade levels, visit www.opm.gov.

Occupational Series

Also a part of the GS are occupational series codes. These will be listed as sets of numbers ranging from 000 to 8800. Each hundred level represents an occupational group. For example,
jobs in GS-500s all fall within the Accounting and Budget Group. Jobs in the GS-800s all fall within the Engineering and Architecture Group.

Each grouping is then further broken down by what are called series. For example GS-592 is the Tax Examining Series, and GS-810 is the Civil Engineering Series. These series are much like job descriptions and can also be found on www.opm.gov. By looking up each series, you will have a good idea of what that job entails. This information will help you in your job search in two ways. First, it will assist you in finding the positions you are qualified for, and second, it will assist you in knowing what information you need to highlight on your résumé.

**KSA Questionnaires**

As part of the application process, many federal agencies include a questionnaire to assess your Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs). KSAs ask you to rate your experience level based on your past experiences, education, or training. Since the best predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations, they are looking for you to prove you can do the job better than others in the candidate pool. Think of all of your experience (in and outside of the classroom) and rate yourself as high as you can on the questionnaire. You must be able to rate yourself at a 90 in order to be considered for most positions. Also, be sure that the level of proficiency you are expressing on the questionnaire is supported by your résumé. If there is a discrepancy between the two, your application could be thrown out of consideration.

In addition to questionnaires, some agencies may request your KSAs in an essay format during some later point in the application process. Should they request narrative essay responses, draw on your past experiences, education, and training to demonstrate you possess the particular KSA, and include answers to the following:

- An estimate of when the experiences occurred
- A description of the problems you faced or the objectives you were trying to accomplish
- A specific statement of what you actually did
- A description of the outcome or results of the activity

**APPLY!**

Now that you know what you are looking for, begin applying for positions! When creating your résumé to apply for positions on USAJobs, you may use the site’s Resume Builder feature and/or upload your résumé into the system. Whichever you choose, be sure to adhere to the federal résumé writing format. See the Résumé/Cover Letter section for tips on writing a federal résumé and a sample. Make sure to include keywords from the vacancy announcement and highlight your accomplishments. Apply quickly, as it is common for federal employers to stop accepting applications after a certain threshold is reached (e.g., first 75 applications).

**Be Open and Accurate**

The federal application process is very competitive, particularly if you are not a veteran. Do not make your job search too narrow. Prepare as many applications as you can and keep applying. For instance, if you want a job as a writer, do not apply only for Writing and Editing jobs. Look under the entire Information and Arts group (GS-1000) and others to uncover additional position titles because writing is a major skill used in
many positions. In addition, always accurately follow all application instructions in the job vacancy announcement! This is critical to having your application considered.

**Know Your Options**

In 2010, President Obama signed the Pathways initiative in order to create opportunities for students and recent graduates. The Pathways Programs include the Internship Program, the Recent Graduates Program, and the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program. Internship and Recent Graduate opportunities can be found on USAJobs.gov. The PMF application can be found by visiting pmf.gov. Don’t forget about volunteer experiences, virtual internships, or temporary or seasonal work as great ways to get your foot in the door.

**Patience, Persistence, and Networking**

The federal government is currently averaging six months to process applicants from the initial résumé submission to a Conditional Offer of Employment (COE) for full-time career positions. Do not lose heart! Students applying for internships and other student programs have an advantage because the application process is much shorter.

Federal agencies are required to notify applicants of the status of their applications. If you have not heard anything or received an acknowledgement of your application within two weeks after applying, call or email the agency contact. Most agencies have automated application tracking systems, which allow applicants to check their own application status.

Network with everyone you know who has some connection to the federal government—friends, relatives, neighbors, professors, and others. Conduct information interviews with federal workers to find out about hiring trends, identify upcoming needs, and obtain feedback on your qualifications. Start early and network, network, network!

**Background Investigations and Security Clearances**

*This section was reviewed by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence*

Background investigations and security clearances determine an applicant’s trustworthiness and reliability before granting access to sensitive information. Only the federal government can grant people “clearances” for work purposes through a background investigation and/or an in-depth security clearance process. To get a clearance, you must be sponsored by or have a job offer from a government agency or contractor, and you must be conducting business that justifies granting access to sensitive information. All federal job offers are contingent on a clearance and are withdrawn if the candidate does not receive the clearance required by the organization for the specific position.

**BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS**

- SF 85, non-sensitive background investigation
- SF 85p, public trust background investigation
- SF 86, national security clearance

The forms needed to be filled out for these types of investigations are available at [www.opm.gov/forms](http://www.opm.gov/forms). Maintaining a career diary to record all prior and current employment, education, residences, and domestic and overseas travel will be useful. It is critical to be absolutely truthful on clearance forms, in interviews with investigators, and on polygraphs. Situations explained or described untruthfully will end the process. Truthfulness and explanations of some behaviors may be considered, and the process can go forward. If the process is curtailed, the candidate is
not likely to receive an explanation. Agencies are not required to provide explanations; however, candidates may appeal the decisions and ask for reconsideration.

Non-sensitive or public trust investigations can take as little as a few weeks and will include a National Agency Check with Inquiries (NACI). A NACI will look at five years of the candidate’s employment history, education, and references, and require a personal interview. The public trust investigation will also include a credit check.

SECURITY CLEARANCES

- **Confidential**: Provides access to information or material that may cause damage to national security if disclosed without authorization
- **Secret**: Provides access to information or material that may cause serious damage to national security if disclosed without authorization
- **Top Secret**: Provides access to information or material that may cause exceptionally grave damage to national security if disclosed without authorization
- **Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information**: Provides access to all intelligence information and material that require special controls for restricted handling within compartmented channels and for which compartmentalization is established

The paperwork for a security clearance will include federal form SF-86 (National Security Questionnaire) and other supporting documents. Your signature on these documents will allow the agency to check your medical history, credit and financial history, military background, police record, and other areas of your life. Make sure you understand the process before applying. This process is an in-depth probe into your personal and professional life. With the threat of spies, terrorism, and other issues of national security, the level of scrutiny will be intense. The investigation focuses on an individual’s character and conduct, emphasizing such factors as honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, financial responsibility, criminal activity, emotional stability, and other similar and pertinent areas. All investigations consist of checks of national records and credit checks. Some investigations also include interviews with individuals who know the candidate, such as neighbors, current and former co-workers, and family members, as well as the candidate himself or herself.

The federal agencies that can provide a security clearance include all national security and intelligence-gathering agencies (e.g., CIA, National Security Agency), federal law enforcement agencies (e.g., FBI, Secret Service, Drug Enforcement Agency, Naval Criminal Investigative Service), combat support agencies (e.g., Defense Intelligence Agency, Defense Security Service), certain occupations in the U.S. military, diplomatic agencies (e.g., State Department), certain government scientific agencies, and a number of others depending on their mission and role in national security.

**Timelines**

Interim security clearances may be obtained in 26 to 45 days. Interns sometimes receive interim clearances and their access to sensitive material is restricted. The amount of time to obtain a security clearance can be 9 to 12 months or more! Security clearances obtained in previous employment usually can be reactivated within a 24-month period following the end of employment in which the clearance was obtained. If the candidate had a clearance more than 24 months in the past, the process of obtaining a clearance must begin again.
FACTORS PERTINENT TO BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS AND SECURITY CLEARANCES

Violations of any of these factors may not necessarily prevent clearance. Consideration may be given for activity in the past and extenuating circumstances.

- **Alcohol use**: excessive use, patterns, abuse
- **Allegiance to the United States**: anything to suggest allegiance to other countries above allegiance to the United States
- **Criminal conduct**: particularly any felony convictions
- **Drug use**: patterns of use (how frequent and how recent), type of drugs
  
  NOTE: While there have been changes to some state laws, the sale, possession, and use of marijuana is still illegal under federal law and must be reported.
- **Emotional and mental stability**
- **Financial problems**: mostly focused on current issues with credit and debts that cannot be repaid
- **Foreign influence and preference**: including dual citizenship
- **Misuse of information technology**: music and video downloads and other copyrighted material are included and will be questioned in the investigation process as well as in polygraph interviews
- **Outside activities**: investigators review community and extracurricular activities
- **Security violations**: while as a federal employee, contractor, or intern
- **Sexual behavior**: focus is on behavior not preferences
- **Personal conduct**: behavior indicating a lack of trustworthiness to protect federal information
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The interview is your opportunity to convince an employer that you are the right person for the job.

**About Interviewing**

A key element of successful interviewing is positively presenting yourself to demonstrate how your qualifications meet the employer’s needs. Preparation, practice, and a well-articulated presentation are critical. Remember that the employer has asked you to interview because of genuine interest in you. Now it is your turn to demonstrate your interest and provide proof of your qualifications.

Interviews are used to:
- Expand on information contained in your résumé.
- Supply information to the employer that is not contained in your résumé (e.g., personality).
- Gain additional information about the organization and the position you are considering.
- Ensure fit between the interviewee and interviewer.
- Provide an opportunity for both parties to discuss the possibility of employment.

**Before the Interview**

- Prepare copies of your résumé and a list of references. You may wish to bring a writing sample or portfolio, if appropriate, and a copy of your transcript(s). You do not want to assume that everyone you speak to will have a copy of your provided documents on hand.
- Dress to project an image of confidence and success. Understand the culture of the organization for which you are interviewing. Business dress is considered standard attire for most interviews, even if more casual clothing is typically worn at the workplace. Traditionally, this means a suit that has been pressed or dry-cleaned, an appropriate button down shirt or blouse, and matching dress shoes. You will want to choose conservative colors in general (black, grey, navy), but you can incorporate color into your complementary items such as a tie or jewelry. Hair should be neatly trimmed. If jewelry is worn, it should be simple and tasteful. If a fragrance is worn at all, it should be very subtle. Visit careers.gmu.edu/students/interview.cfm for details on this topic.
- Know how to get to the interview and leave plenty of time to get there. Arrive early but don’t check in with the employer more than 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment. It may even be a good idea to do a test drive of the route in advance.
- Find out how long the interview will take. Be prepared to stay longer, if necessary.
- Smile and have a firm handshake. While waiting for an interview to begin, maintain positive posture and remain attentive.
- Practice, Practice, Practice!
RESEARCH: INFORMATION TO GATHER BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Obtain information on the job and organization from people in the field, the company website, public and career libraries, trade journals, newsletters, business magazines, and directories. Career Services offers subscriptions to a number of resources that can help with this, such as CareerShift, Vault, and the Book of Lists. LinkedIn is also a great tool to learn more about the company and its employees. Be prepared to discuss your knowledge of the organization and industry at the interview. Be sure to gather the following:

- Job description
- Knowledge, skills, and personal qualities required for the job
- Trends and major issues in the industry
- Realistic salary for the position
- Size, location(s), and structure of the organization
- Past, present, and projected growth
- Types of clients, and products and services offered
- Relationship of the organization to its competitors
- Management philosophy and style

PREPARE QUESTIONS TO ASK

You should prepare thoughtful questions to ask during the interview that demonstrate an interest in the employer and help you learn whether the position and organization will fit your interests, values, and qualifications. Asking questions will also show the employer that you hold a genuine interest in the position and the organization. Avoid asking questions that are answered on the employer’s website or in the documents provided prior to the interview.

Sample Questions to Ask the Employer during the Interview

- What specific skills and experiences would you ideally look for in the person filling this position?
- How would you describe a typical day in this job?
- What qualities and characteristics does it take to be successful in this position?
- What needs to be accomplished in this position in the next 6 to 12 months?
- What significant changes do you foresee in the future for this position and the company?
- What career paths are available in this organization to someone with my background?
- What kind of training do new hires receive in this position in the first three months?
- How much travel is normally expected?
- What kind of support does this position receive from co-workers, supervisors, and management?
- What kinds of programs are offered for professional development?
- What is the work environment like?
- What do you enjoy about working at this company?
- What else can I tell you about my qualifications?
- When can I expect to hear from you?

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Make eye contact immediately and continue to do so throughout the interview.
- Have a relaxed but erect posture.
- Answer questions completely. Be direct and concise. Avoid rambling.
- Speak clearly with appropriate volume.
- Control nervous habits (such as tapping your foot or rotating your ring) and use natural hand movements for emphasis.
- Initiate discussion appropriately. For example, make a positive comment about the
organization and how you see yourself contributing to it. Ask a question about some of the job requirements.

- Be an active listener.
- Be specific and use examples to talk about your experiences.
- Be positive and enthusiastic!

PRACTICE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Employers are interviewing you hoping to find a reason to hire you, not to rule you out. You want to use examples to discuss your experiences. You can use examples from the following: class projects, academic classes, work in a student organization, volunteer experience, athletic activities, and part-time or full-time jobs. It is a good idea to do a practice interview with someone you trust. Employers, University Career Services staff, parents, and professionals are all great resources in preparing for your interview. You can schedule a practice interview with your industry advisor at any time! InterviewStream is also available on the Career Services website to help you practice your skills from home.

THE SIX MOST FEARED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. “Tell me about yourself.” Focus on your academic background and why you chose your major, accomplishments during college, activities that helped you develop personally and professionally, lessons learned, and what excites you about working in your chosen field and with this employer specifically. This is an introduction to what you will be talking about throughout the interview.

2. “What is one of your weaknesses?” Think of this question as “What is one area I need to develop in order to be more effective in my field?” Avoid offering personal or character flaws, as well as anything that will disqualify you from the job. State the weakness, own it, and tell the interviewer what you are doing to work on it. Give examples of how you are already improving and will continue to improve.

3. “Why do you want to work for us?” Discuss the research you have done on the company and the job description. Talk about how your interests, skills, and experience match the job requirements. Show them that you have been very intentional in choosing their organization.

4. “Why should I hire you?” Focus on your strongest points, as this is often one of the final questions of the interview. You want to make a strong final impression. Keep the focus on all the positive traits you bring to the job and focus only on yourself; avoid making references to any other candidates, as you want them only thinking about you. If there is something you had not yet talked about that you wanted to bring up, this is the time to do so.

5. “Where do you want to be 10 years from now?” Think about tasks and roles you would like. Would you like to advance into management, manage major projects, supervise or train others, or simply become so competent at what you do that others ask you to consult with them? Employers want to see that you have goals and are forward thinking.

6. “What are your salary requirements?” Avoid giving a specific figure. Research salary surveys such as salaryexpert.com or the NACE Salary Calculator to learn what the entry-level salary ranges are in the field or industry you are entering. Then state the salary range. See more on this topic in the “Offers and Negotiations” section that follows.

Practice Interview Questions

- What do you consider to be one of your strengths?
- How do your qualifications relate to our position? What do you have to offer?
- How would you describe your own work style?
THE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

More than 80 percent of employers who recruit at Mason use a structured competency-based behavioral interviewing approach, which assumes that past performance is the best predictor of future success. Behavioral questions require job candidates to give specific examples of how they handled specific real-life situations. This approach elicits the candidate’s competencies, skills, abilities, and knowledge more reliably than standard interview questions. While behavioral interviewing questions may initially seem more intimidating, they are often easier to answer because you can draw on actual experiences, rather than responding to hypothetical scenarios or giving vague or generalized responses.

It is helpful to prepare a handful of stories that you want to tell before the interview, as you do not know exactly which behavioral questions will be asked. Having these stories on hand can allow you to quickly adapt them to any given question. In the rare case that you cannot recall a real example related to the question, you can tell the interviewer, “I’ve never actually been in that situation; however, I think I would…. Then, give your best appraisal of how you would respond in that circumstance. The following questions are typical of behavioral questions. When thinking about how you would answer them, remember to use the STAR Formula.

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<td>Identify the SITUATION or problem you solved or encountered</td>
<td>What was the specific TASK or targets? (who, what, when, what’s required)</td>
<td>Detail your specific ACTION. What did you do? How did you do it?</td>
<td>Explain the RESULTS. Quantity. (savings, accomplishments, recognition, etc.)</td>
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**Practice Behavioral Interviewing Questions**

- Describe a time when you were faced with stresses in school or at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Tell me about an experience in which you had to speak up and tell other people what you thought or felt.
- Give an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem; tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.
- Give an example of an important goal you set and describe your progress in reaching that goal.
- Tell me about a time when you had to take on a leadership role.
- Tell me about a time you failed to meet expectations.
THE CASE INTERVIEW
The purpose of the case interview is to determine whether the candidate can do consulting work and can make a good impression on clients, and to scrutinize the skills that are important in management consulting.

In particular, case interviews examine quantitative, analytical, problem-solving, and communication skills. The employer is looking for you to demonstrate your creativity and flexibility, business acumen, professional demeanor, powers of persuasion, and the ability to think under pressure and synthesize findings. Organizations that typically use case interviewing are management consulting firms, investment banking companies, and consumer goods companies for brand management positions. Some firms use cases for MBA-level job candidates only, and some firms do case interviewing in second or third rounds of interviews. Case interview questions may be brainteasers, market-sizing questions, factor questions, or business case questions.

Handling Interview Challenges

INAPPROPRIATE OR BIASED QUESTIONS
Questions that seem to be inappropriate or biased could be indicators that something is wrong with the interview. Biased questions are those that suggest an opinion through their structure (i.e., Don’t you think that green is better than gold?). You will want to remain focused on the job at hand when answering the questions and tie everything back to why you are a good candidate rather than focus on the question that should not have been asked in the first place.

HIGHLY TECHNICAL QUESTIONS
Interviewers often ask the interviewee to answer questions related to their particular industry or organization. Be prepared for this type of question. You should know common jargon and be ready to define terms and discuss trends in the particular industry. If you don’t know the answer, try to work through the problem, as often companies want to see your process as much as the actual answer.

DISABILITY ISSUES AND POTENTIAL ACCOMMODATIONS
A job seeker who has a disability is, first, a fully qualified candidate for a position and, second, a person with a disability. If you do not require accommodation for the interview, you may or may not choose to disclose a disability to potential employers. If technological or other types of accommodations will equalize or maximize your effectiveness on the job, they can be discussed during the information exchange or closure stages of the interview, before a job offer is extended. The decision to disclose a disability is personal and may vary depending on the situation and the job requirements.

If you do disclose a disability, it is important that you feel comfortable and confident in your approach. All job seekers are advised to approach a discussion of their qualifications in a positive manner. You can highlight your relevant skills and give evidence of your qualifications for the position in the form of examples from past academic, employment, or volunteer experiences. A proactive approach will be most effective and emphasize your adaptability, flexibility, and talents.

For additional resources, visit Mason’s Office of Disability Services at ods.gmu.edu.
After the Interview
If you determine that the position would be a good fit for you, be sure to express interest in the position and briefly summarize why you are well qualified for it. Then ask what the next step will be or when you can expect to hear from the interviewer. This inquiry demonstrates your confidence and interest and gives you important information. Proceed to follow up with your interviewer(s) via a thank you note.

Quick Tip
Personalize any thank you notes you send. Many interviewers will compare notes they receive to see if you took the time to make a personalized connection.

InterviewStream allows you to email your recorded attempts to send to anyone for additional review.
Offers and Negotiations

For many people, discussing salary is a nerve-wracking experience; however, when managed correctly, it can contribute to a positive and more fulfilling professional relationship between you and your future employer.

About Offers and Negotiations
Timing is key. You are in the best position to talk salary and bargain after the employer has determined you are the best person for the job. Therefore, always wait for the employer to initiate the salary discussion.

Salary Request on the Application
If you are asked about salary as part of the application, it is generally because an employer wants to know whether or not they can afford to hire you.

Salary History
List what you earned or write “unpaid” next to each position on your résumé. Remember to be honest because it is easy for potential employers to verify your salary with previous employers.

Salary Requirements
Answer the question while still allowing room to negotiate later.

- If the application allows you to enter text or you are asked to include this information in a cover letter, consider writing that your salary requirements are “flexible.”

- If the application forces you to enter numbers, consider entering a salary range instead of an exact amount. Do your research to determine what an appropriate range is for the geographic location, industry, and job function of the position, as well as your experience level. For example, if your research shows that the average person in a similar position makes $40,000, you might enter $38,000–$45,000 for the range.

Salary Requests During the Interview
Try postponing discussion of salary until the interviewer is prepared to make you an offer. However, if pressed, provide a salary range that you are comfortable with based on your research, as further avoidance will only make you seem defiant and thus upset the employer.

Consider using one of the following responses.

- **Option 1:** “Since salary is only one piece of the puzzle for me, I’d like to find out more about the job before determining my salary requirements. This sounds like an excellent opportunity so far. Can you tell me a little more about…[insert an area where you have additional questions]?”
**Option 2:** “Thank you for asking. Would you mind telling me the average salary for this position or similar positions within your agency, as well as the other benefits as part of your overall compensation package? My requirements are flexible, and I’d like to consider that information before deciding on a number.”

**Option 3:** “I prefer to have a full understanding of everything I can offer an organization before discussing salary. With that said, do you mind if we delay this conversation until we’ve talked a bit more about my fit for the position and where we are in the interview process? (Follow up with specific questions.)

**Option 4:** “Based on my market research and qualifications, I am expecting a competitive salary in the range of _____________ (e.g., $45,000–$55,000).

**Negotiating Your Offer**

Most offers are negotiable and you should not assume an employer’s first offer is the best offer. It’s not uncommon for employers to initiate salary discussions by proposing a salary figure that is at the lower end of the position’s allocated pay scale. This allows room for the candidate to negotiate. Generally speaking, the amount of flexibility an employer has to adjust a starting salary will vary based upon the level of the position and the competitiveness within the market to fill that position.

If you encounter an employer who is unable to adjust the starting salary, consider negotiating other elements of your offer, such as funding for professional development, extra vacation days, health insurance, flexible hours, loan forgiveness, technology and equipment (company computers, phones, cars), opportunities for advancement, bonuses, relocation expenses, or reimbursement for commuting expenses.

Employers expect that you will negotiate your salary responsibly and respectfully. Ensure you do the following to prepare for the negotiation process:

- **Conduct research to determine what a competitive salary is.** Salaries will vary based upon the industry, position, company size, and region of the country. Helpful resources for conducting salary research include using salary websites such as glassdoor.com and speaking with individuals employed in the industry or specific organization with which you are seeking employment.

- **Know what you are worth based on your qualifications.** To determine an appropriate salary range, think critically about the skills you are bringing to the position and your years of relevant experience. Pay particular attention to the ways in which you exceed the requirements for a particular position. Your financial situation (e.g., student loan debt) should not be stated to the employer as rationale for a higher salary.

- **Practice your negotiation skills.** Negotiating can be intimidating but practicing what you will say can help to reduce your stress about the process. Setting up an appointment with your Industry Advisor to prepare for the negotiation process can also be helpful. Consider the following responses.

  “Thank you for the offer. From what I learned in the interview process, I would love to work for your organization. Based on the market value of someone with my qualifications, I was expecting an offer of $____. Can you do anything to get closer to that number?”

**Quick Links**

- **Salary.com**
  Online salary information

- **Salaryexpert.com**
  Employee-provided data from 10 million job incumbents

- **Glassdoor.com**
  Search millions of job listings and see salaries, reviews, and inside connections for any company.

- **bestplaces.net**
  Compare cost of living.

- **paycheckcity.com**
  Paycheck calculator
“Thank you again for an offer of employment. Over the past few days I have thought more about what I have to offer the organization and the nature of the job and its responsibilities. What would help me make the decision to accept the offer would be a tablet for work-related travel and reimbursement for commuting expenses. Is that something we can discuss?”

**Evaluating Multiple Job Offers**

If you are lucky, you will find yourself in a position where you are juggling multiple offers or you are still in the interview process with other organizations when you receive an offer. Make sure to keep the following things in mind before committing to an employer.

- Ask for a copy of the job offer in writing. If your hiring manager leaves his or her position before you start, it is important that you have a copy of what was agreed upon.

- Take time to evaluate all the factors involved in a job offer. Although the salary is important, you also want to pay attention to the job responsibilities, opportunities for career advancement, and company culture when deciding which offer to accept.

- Ask for time to make your decision. Employers generally give candidates between one and two weeks to decide. This time span may vary depending on your needs and those of the employer, but allow at least 24 hours for evaluation before accepting any position. If you are asked to decide sooner than you wish, ask for an extension, which may or may not be granted. It is perfectly reasonable to say that you have other interviews scheduled that you want to attend before making your final decision.

- Follow up with other organizations that are still considering you for employment. Explain that you have received another offer, and because of your interest in their organization or position, you are following up to learn the status of your candidacy.

- If you are unsure about whether to accept a position, use your Industry Advisor as a sounding board.

**Committing to Your Offer**

Congratulations! You have successfully negotiated and accepted an offer! When you have officially accepted an offer, you should contact the hiring managers of other positions to which you have applied to remove yourself from consideration. Failing to remove yourself from the job or internship search process after you have accepted an offer demonstrates a lack of professionalism and respect for employers. Students who renege on a job offer, or go back on their commitment to start working for an employer, negatively impact their own professional reputation, as well as that of George Mason University. Once you have accepted an offer, tell University Career Services about your success by filling out the Career Plan Survey.

**SALARY RESOURCES**

See salary information at [careers.gmu.edu/students/jobsearch/salary](http://careers.gmu.edu/students/jobsearch/salary).
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- Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement
- Cyber Crimes
- Data Analytics and Sciences
- Economics
- Finance
- General Counsel
- Communications
- IT Applications Development, Network Operations, Security, and Support
- Contracting
- Data Visualization
- Human Resources
- Knowledge Management
- Mission Support

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HOW TO APPLY…
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Deciding to Go to Graduate School

For students considering an advanced degree, many factors must be considered. Approaching this decision in an organized manner can lead to successful progress, application, and acceptance into a graduate or professional degree program.

IN THIS SECTION
You will learn…
• What factors to consider when looking into graduate programs
• Steps and timeline in the application process

Making the Decision
When making this important decision, carefully weigh the time commitment, financial considerations, personal adjustments, and your readiness to pursue graduate-level coursework. Assess the value of a graduate degree in terms of earning potential, entry into a profession, advancement, and competitiveness. Seek guidance from faculty, people in the profession, and your career counselor or industry advisor. Review the information on applying to graduate or professional school located on the University Career Services website, careers.gmu.edu/students/gradschool.

Consider taking a course or two as a non-degree student (e.g., special student or continuing education student) before applying for admission. The course(s) are often transferable to a graduate degree program and can help you decide whether the degree program fits your goals.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GRADUATE SCHOOL OPTIONS:
• Visit the Career Resource Room in SUB I, Room 3400, for books about graduate school.
• Visit the Career Services website at careers.gmu.edu/students/gradschool.
• Attend the annual Mason Graduate Showcase in September and the Idealist.org Graduate School Fair in the fall at www.idealist.org/info/GradFairs.
• Meet with a career counselor at University Career Services: 703-993-2370.
• Many schools offer Information sessions on their graduate programs. Contact the schools that interest you.
• At Mason, the Financial Aid Office lists scholarships, grants, and other financial resources: financialaid.gmu.edu.

Factors to Consider in Choosing a School
• Faculty—number of faculty; their credentials and reputation; where they received their training; their research and teaching interests; publications; involvement in professional activities; their availability; and balance of gender and ethnic representation
• Academic program—accreditation; course offerings and availability; difficulty; availability of assistantships or fellowships; internships or practica; size of program; degree requirements; length of time/rate of completion; admissions policies; reputation/ranking
• **Resources**—facilities for students; library collections; laboratories; computer access; location; cost of living; financial support; housing and transportation options

• **Students**—satisfaction with program; gender/ethnic diversity; academic ability; employment and professional accomplishments of graduates

• **Suggestions/Tips:** [www.gradschools.com/article-category/before-you-apply-201](http://www.gradschools.com/article-category/before-you-apply-201)

### Applying to Graduate School (Steps to follow)

- Take required **admissions test(s) for graduate school**, preferably in September or October if you plan entry the following fall; for professional school and law school, complete testing in June through October at the latest.

- Ask graduate admissions staff about how test scores from multiple test administrations will be treated. Send your **test results** to the schools to which you are applying.

- Note **deadlines** for both the graduate school applications and the financial aid, fellowship, and assistantship applications. Send in the application form and fee well before the deadline.

- Develop a concise and well-organized **personal essay** that reflects your carefully examined objectives for attending graduate school. Consult with faculty, a career counselor at your Career Services Office, and mentors for guidelines and strategies for writing an effective essay. If essay writing is not your strength, take your draft to the Writing Center, A114 Robinson Hall.

- Request **recommendations** from faculty, administrators, and employers who know you and the quality of your work. Use the same courtesy in the process of obtaining recommendations for graduate school as you do when you are requesting references for a job search. Avoid using a person’s name for a reference or recommendation without obtaining their permission in advance. Write a thank you note or letter to each person who serves as a reference or writes a recommendation. Allow **recommendation writers** four to six weeks to write and send letters.

- Provide your writers with recommendation forms, stamped envelopes, and written highlights including academic courses, projects, research papers, résumé, and a copy of your transcript. Pay close attention to the requirements of each graduate program regarding number and type of recommendations.

- Request **transcripts** at least one month before the application deadline from each college you attended. Have official transcripts sent directly from the Office of the Registrar to the graduate schools. Keep an unofficial transcript for your records.

- **Follow up** with the graduate school(s) to be sure that all your application materials have been received.

- If possible, **visit** the campuses. For some programs, **personal interviews** may be used as a part of the application process. Prepare to discuss your goals and qualifications as you would for any interview.

- **Admission decisions** typically are made by April 1 at the latest, and registration commitments will be requested by May 1.
TIMETABLE FOR APPLICATION PROCESS

Start 16 to 24 months before you wish to begin graduate school.

Spring
• Clarify career objectives to determine if graduate school is the appropriate next step to achieving career goals.
• Research graduate and professional school programs.
• Consult with faculty and professionals in the field.
• Develop your application process timeline.

Summer
• Prepare for and practice to take admissions test(s).
• Sign up for required admissions test(s) offered in fall. See a listing of dates at kaplan.com or princetonreview.com.
• Review application materials.
• Research scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships.

Fall
• Attend the Mason Graduate and Professional School Fairs in the fall and spring hosted by Mason’s Graduate Admissions Office. View their website details at admissions.gmu.edu/grad/resources.
• Take the required admissions test(s).
• Verify deadlines for admissions and financial aid materials.
• Compose your personal essay.
• Ask for letters of recommendation.
• Order transcripts from all post-secondary schools.
• Complete applications forms.

Winter
• Submit applications.
• Follow up with institutions.
• Prepare for personal interviews, if required.

Spring
• Evaluate offers and decide which one to accept.
Professionalism

Professionalism is defined as the skill, good judgment, and polite behavior expected from a person who is trained to do a job well.

10 Tips for Keeping and Advancing Within Your First Job or Internship

You tailored your résumé, did your research about the company, rocked the interview, negotiated your salary like a pro, and now you have your dream job or internship! Keep these top 10 tips in mind to help you keep and advance within your first position so that all of your hard work does not go to waste.

1. Portray a professional image in person and online. You never have a second chance to make a first impression, so make sure your first impression is a professional one. Understand your company’s dress code before your first day of work so you can dress accordingly. For example, does your supervisor expect you to wear a suit to work every day (business professional), or can you wear dress pants and button-down shirts or blouses (business casual)? Regardless of the dress code, make sure your clothing is clean and wrinkle-free. Finally, remember your professional image also includes the way you conduct yourself online. Use social media to positively promote your accomplishments as well as those of your organization, and never post content you would be embarrassed for your supervisor to see.

2. Remember you can’t be the CEO overnight. A desire to make positive changes and advance within your organization is great, but you need to prove you can meet the expectations of your current position before you can be trusted with additional responsibilities. Take the time to learn your job, ask good questions, observe your environment, and exceed expectations in your current role before offering recommendations for improvements to your organization. Consistently carrying out the responsibilities of your current position and exceeding your supervisor’s expectations will build the credibility you need to advance within your company.

3. Learn your supervisor’s leadership and communication style. Your supervisor can have a positive or negative impact on your ability to advance within the company, and if you want to increase your likelihood of success, you need to learn what your supervisor values. Whenever you have a new supervisor, take the time to identify his or her preferred communication channel (e.g., face to face, email, text, virtual) and meeting frequency (e.g., weekly, monthly, biweekly). You should also make sure you are on the same page with your supervisor about the level of autonomy you have to make decisions and how your supervisor defines the successful completion of your assigned projects. Finally, gain some insight into what your supervisor cares about by paying attention to the topics that produce the most excitement, frustration, or anxiety for him or her.
4. Strive to be a solution-oriented employee. You were hired because your supervisor thought you could contribute to the success of the organization, so prove it by being a problem solver. If you see a problem within your organization, don’t wait for someone else to fix it. Do some research and develop a possible solution to share with your supervisor. If you have a question, try to find the answer on your own before asking a co-worker or supervisor and let them know what steps you took to find the answer before asking the question. Remember, your supervisor is busy and you want to become the person who is known for identifying and solving problems, not the person who creates them.

5. Understand the problems your organization is tasked with solving. Your organization has problems it is responsible for addressing, and to be successful, you need to understand how your skills can be used to solve those problems. To identify your company’s greatest challenges, read a copy of the annual report or strategic plan to identify goals, objectives, and accomplishments for the organization. You can also keep a copy of your job description and think critically about how your responsibilities contribute to achieving the organization’s goals. Finally, review a copy of your company’s organizational chart to better understand who the key decision makers are in your company and how your department contributes to the success of the company’s goals and objectives.

6. Observe and adapt to the organization’s culture. If your company had a personality, what would it be? If you are able to answer this question, then you understand your company’s organizational culture. Knowing the organization’s culture can help you figure out how to get your work done effectively and what behaviors will be rewarded (or frowned upon) by your supervisor. For clues to your organization’s culture, pay attention to how decisions are made, how people use their time in the office, how formal the communication is between employees in the organization, and what values are demonstrated through the company’s mission statement.

7. Be open to constructive feedback about your performance on the job. The only way you will grow within your company is by receiving feedback about your areas of growth as well as your areas of development. When you receive negative feedback about your performance, monitor your verbal and non-verbal response to ensure you do not sound overly defensive or sensitive. For example, do not interrupt speakers when they are providing you with feedback, maintain eye contact to show you are listening, and be aware of your body language (i.e., crossing your arms, frowning, etc.) Once the feedback has been shared, ask for examples of what you could do differently in the future, and thank the person sharing the feedback for their perspective.

8. Study successful people in your organization. Who are the most successful people in your company? Knowing the answer to this question will help you identify what traits you need to demonstrate to advance within the company. To find successful people in your company, pay attention to who is assigned to high-profile projects, recognized publicly by senior staff members, and frequently mentioned by your co-workers or supervisors in a positive way. Once you identify the successful people in your company, seek out opportunities to connect with them and reflect on what their skills, experience, and personality traits are so you can learn from their success.
9. **Build relationships with people inside and outside of your organization.** Networking is the process of building mutually beneficial relationships, and to advance within your organization, you will need to continue to network even after you begin a job or internship. Networking within your new company does not need to be a stressful process. For example, you can connect with co-workers outside of your department over lunch to learn more about the projects they are working on. You can also volunteer to serve on a planning committee for your office, or join a professional association related to your industry to meet other people in your career field.

10. **Pursue professional development opportunities to upgrade your skills.** You will need to constantly update your skill set to stay relevant within your desired career field and advance within your company. Work with your supervisor to identify professional development opportunities within your organization and remember there are many free resources you can use to help you grow professionally over the course of your career, such as LinkedIn, YouTube, or your local library. Examples of professional development opportunities include joining professional associations, going to industry conferences to learn about new ideas in your career field, participating in certificate programs, or reading industry-specific publications.
Graduation And Beyond

We hope the information provided in this guide will help you find, pursue, obtain, and excel in your first position after Mason. University Career Services is here to support you throughout your career journey and we welcome the opportunity to stay connected with you even after you graduate. Consider doing one or all of the following:

1. Complete the Career Plans Survey to tell us about your post-graduation success.

2. Join Mason Career Link, our alumni student connection tool, to share your industry experience, career path advice, and job search expertise with students.

3. Encourage your company to post open positions in HireMason.

4. For information about UCS offerings for alumni, please visit our website at careers.gmu.edu/alumni.