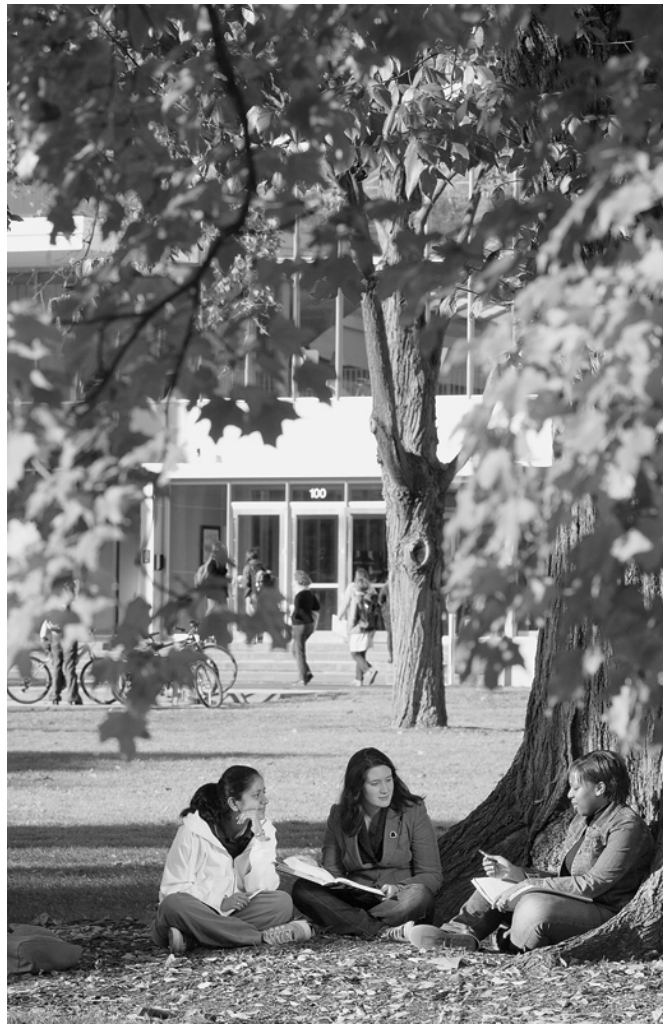


SMITH COLLEGE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

JOB SEARCH, NETWORKING, AND INTERVIEWING TIPS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS



For more information, consult our guide,
Resumes and Cover Letters for Social Workers.

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Starting Your Job Search: First, Assess

Assess your knowledge, skills, and accomplishments. What have you enjoyed most in your courses, field placements, and other experiences? What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Identify the populations, issues, and work settings that most interest you. Think about the kind of supervision, theory base, and work culture you prefer. Consider your geographic preference: A large city offers a wider range of employers than a rural or suburban area.

Informational Interviewing and Networking

Talk with people in your target field and geographic location. Most people enjoy discussing their work and offering advice and information to those starting out. They may suggest others to contact, thereby expanding your network. You may phone, write, or email to arrange an informational interview. Conferences can be excellent networking venues, too.

Networking is building relationships. It's not appropriate to ask a networking contact for a job, but if they know of any job leads, they may share them. You can tap into the unadvertised job market this way, and gain information to strengthen your resume, cover letter, and interview skills.

Use the Smith alum network binders available at the CDO. To expand your search, feel free to meet with a CDO advisor.

Don't overlook the obvious. Former supervisors and colleagues, School for Social Work students and faculty, alums from your undergraduate institution, friends, and members of professional associations such as your local NASW chapter may all be, or lead to, additional networking contacts.

Try to meet with networking contacts at their workplace so you can see the work environment, and perhaps meet their colleagues. If this isn't possible, arrange a phone appointment.

Networking etiquette: Send a handwritten or email thank you note within 48 hours of your meeting.

Resources for Your Job Search

The CDO website, <http://www.smith.edu/cdo/>, has many useful resources for social work students:

- **The School for Social Work page** at http://www.smith.edu/cdo/students/career/social_work.html lists social work-specific job sites, licensing information, funding resources, fellowships, and more.
- **E-Access** is a database of opportunities received by the CDO. Use it to search for jobs by field and location.
- **Career Field Research** has information about related fields including the non-profit sector, human services, government, international, and more. Use **CareerSearch** to locate potential employers by field, location, and keyword.

The United Way in your target location may publish a directory of human service organizations. Go to <http://national.unitedway.org/>.

Directories and client referral networks used during your field placements may be helpful in your job search. Check the CDO, Neilson, and public libraries for others.

Use Google to identify potential employers. Example: “human service agencies Denver.”

Newspapers, online at <http://newslink.org/>, or in hard copy list local job listings and career fairs. Read the newspaper or search LexisNexis to overview issues and events in your target location.

Placement firms can help you locate temporary, part-time, contract, *per diem* (per day), or *pro re nata* (p.r.n., whenever necessary) opportunities. These positions can be a good interim solution if you don't land a full-time job as soon as you need to.

Professional associations can be excellent sources of information about the social work field, job boards, and listservs. Find them online, in the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, or in CareerSearch.

For a long distance job search research and contact organizations for informational interviews. Use professional associations and the websites of social work schools in your target location. Once relocated, join in your new community as a volunteer, board member, or mentor. This will serve others, build your resume, and expand your network.

REMEMBER: While many jobs are posted on agency websites and in publications, **unlisted** jobs are best discovered through networking and by contacting organizations that interest you. Most job searches cover both avenues.

Preparing for Job Interviews

Research the organization. Study its website, phone for written materials, and talk to people who work there. Know the client population, theory base, programs, staffing, culture, and budget constraints. Think of questions you may be asked, and some you would like to ask.

Know the licensure requirements in the state where you're interviewing. Go to aswb.org.

Phone ahead for details about your interviewer(s) and the format of the day. You may have individual or group meetings or role playing exercises. Get directions and parking information, too.

Practice! The sample job interview questions on page 5 will provide an outline for your prep, but each interview will vary. Practice stating your skills and experience concisely, and prepare a case or two to discuss. If you can, tape yourself. Feel free to set up a practice interview at the CDO.

You may prepare a portfolio to bring to the interview including published/unpublished papers, a tape/outline of a presentation you've given, recommendations, and other non-confidential materials.

During the Interview

Social work training gives you many skills for effective interviewing such as the ability to communicate, listen, and read/use body language. See the Interview Skills Checklist on page 7.

Arrive a little early. Phone ahead for directions and parking details. Bring extra resumes.

Dress professionally. Find out what people in the region wear, and dress up a little more. Leave your student accessories behind. Look tailored but not overly formal unless in a corporate setting.

A smile, firm handshake, and good eye contact will help put you and your interviewer(s) at ease. If being interviewed by more than one person, address your responses to everyone. Use body language and tone of voice to convey confidence and enthusiasm.

Speak positively about former supervisors and experiences. If you and a supervisor didn't get along you might say, "My placement was an interesting and challenging experience. It helped me identify the further training I need and the kind of supervision I prefer."

Be specific. Think of two or three specific examples ahead of time that demonstrate your clinical skills and reveal how you work and learn. Plan in advance how to answer open-ended questions such as, "Tell me about yourself."

Prepare a few questions to ask at the interview. By the end of the interview be sure you have a clear sense of the job. Find out what the next step will be and what the decision-making timetable is.

Don't ask about salary or benefits. Discuss these matters after an offer has been made. Research beforehand the salary range for your level of experience and geographic region. If asked what your salary expectations are, give a range rather than a specific figure.

When interviewers go "out of bounds." You're not required to answer questions about your age, gender, marital/family/relationship status, religion, ethnicity, disability, politics, or sexual orientation. Most interviewers who ask about these things don't mean to be unethical, but it is important to be prepared and to decide how you'll answer these questions if they come up.

During a phone interview speak clearly and with energy so the interviewer can imagine your active listening skills. Arrange a quiet time and space and have your resume and notes at hand. If you need to compose your thoughts, say so: "That's an interesting question—let me consider it for a moment." If there's silence at the other end, your interviewer(s) may be thinking about what you've said and planning the next question; don't feel you need to fill the silence. If using a cell phone, charge it.

After the Interview

Send handwritten or email thank you notes 48 hours. If you had individual interviews with more than one person, or met especially helpful staff, write to them as well. If you had a group interview, it is sufficient to thank the main interviewer. Reiterate your interest in the position and organization, and if you didn't have a chance to discuss an important point, mention it in your thank you note.

Follow up. If you're told you'll hear a decision by a particular date but don't, call the employer. Express your continued interest in the position, and ask when they expect to make a decision. This and your thank you note will keep your name in mind. Be patient—the hiring process usually takes longer than employers anticipate. Don't call too frequently.

During a second interview you may be asked more behavioral questions such as, "How would you work with a client who came to you with xxx presenting issues?" Prepare for these questions by reviewing what you know about the organization and brainstorming possible cases and situations you'd encounter on the job.

Stay positive and try not to take rejection personally. Remember, it's not just the employer who decides; you, too, are choosing an organizations to fit your needs.

When you're offered a job, it's OK to ask for some time before you accept it. Establish a reply date, and if you have any questions, ask the employer.

The CDO staff is happy to discuss any aspect of your job search with you. We can assist you in person, by phone, or via email.

Sample Questions for an Informational Interview When Networking

- What do you find meaningful in your work? What are the frustrations?
- How does your training and experience relate to what you're doing now?
- Has your social work experience differed very much from what you imagined it would be? How?
- What tasks take most of your time? How many hours a week do you work? What are your working conditions? How much paperwork do you do?
- What kind of lifestyle choices have you had to make? Do you work evenings or weekends?
- Do you have any advice for someone just entering the field? Is there anything you wish you'd known when you were starting?
- What additional background, training, special programs, or other learning experiences does one need to advance and be successful?
- How is feedback given?
- Tell me about the work culture at your organization.
- What current issues and trends do you see in the field?
- How are you dealing with changes in social work and the impact of managed care?
- I'm looking for X type of supervision. Can you suggest where I can find it?
- Which organization(s) do you recommend in the area? Do you know anyone who works there with whom I could talk?
- How did you find your position? Are there other ways? How does one advance?
- Are there other people you suggest I contact? May I use your name in contacting them?

Sample Questions Asked at Social Work Job Interviews

- Tell us about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position? Why should we hire you?
- Tell us about your first year (or second year) placement.
- How would your supervisor describe you and your work?
- How would your colleagues describe you?
- What was the most difficult case you worked on? Why? Discuss the course of treatment. What readings were particularly useful? What would you do differently? How did you use supervision?
- Discuss a case of your choice.
- What authors have been most meaningful to you in your clinical practice? Why?
- What is your theoretical orientation?
- What was your favorite class at Smith? Why?
- What do you think of your graduate education?
- How well prepared are you for this position?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What client population is most difficult for you?
- We see many clients of X population. What are the issues of this population?
- Your training is X; our approach is Y. Why are you interested in us and in our approach?
- The following is a description of a client. What is your assessment and diagnosis? What kind of treatment and plan would you implement?
- How would you assess whether someone was suicidal?
- Give an example of a crisis you handled.
- What experiences prior to your placements have added to your knowledge and ability?
- Have you ever supervised other people?
- This job involves coordinating services. Describe how you have been involved with other agencies.
- Tell us about a group you've led.
- How much experience have you had working with people taking medication?
- Tell us about your experience with brief intervention therapy.
- Tell us about your experience with cross-cultural treatment.

SAMPLE ALUM NETWORKING LETTER

Susan Gregory
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413-585-0000
sgregory@smith.edu

June 16, 2008

Ms. Britta Lassiter, MSW
Chicago Youth Services
836 L Street, Suite 30485
Chicago, IL 50876

Dear Ms. Lassiter:

I obtained your name from the Career Development Office at Smith College where I am in my final summer at the School for Social Work. After receiving my MSW this August, I will be relocating to the Chicago area.

If convenient, I would enjoy meeting with you informally to hear about your experience at Chicago Youth Services when I am on break July 7 -11. I welcome any advice, ideas, and information you might be able to share with me based on your experience working with at-risk youth in Chicago. I would like to identify organizations where I could receive the supervision required for Illinois licensure, and I hope you might make some suggestions about this as well.

Having looked over the CYS website, I notice that you provide outpatient mental health services to adolescents and facilitate group sessions on self-harm. This is particularly interesting to me because I am writing my thesis on the increase of self-harming behaviors in college women.

I will telephone you next week to see if you'll be able to meet with me during my break. If you like, feel free to email me at the above address. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

If postal mailing, sign in black ink; if emailing, double space after closing before name.

Susan Gregory

Interview Skills Checklist

Use this checklist to assess your interview strengths and areas needing improvement. Check the column to the right of each quality which best describes the degree to which you feel you have this quality now. For each item which you checked as hard, brainstorm with a friend or counselor ways to "move to the right" on this quality. Do you need to develop it more or demonstrate it more effectively?

Quality	This is hard for me	50/50	This is easy for me
Appearance, poise			
Interest and ability in the field; clear, in-depth understanding of social work			
Body language; maintaining eye contact			
Personal energy and vitality			
Assertiveness (not passivity, not aggressiveness); leadership			
Uniqueness			
Self-awareness			
Perceptiveness, alertness			
Team player			
Broad range of interests and experience			
Sense of humor			
Self-confidence			
Motivation			
Independence			
Sense of audience			
Ability to handle tension and stress			
Ability to communicate effective clinical skills			
Handling inappropriate questions			
Listening skills			