

Your Job Search

- Start Your Search
- Background Research and Preparation
- Techniques for Finding Jobs
- Tools for Your Search
- When Should I Apply? Hiring Timelines
- Selected Annual Career Fairs
- 6 Month Job Search Plan
- After You've Applied...



Smith College Lazarus Center for Career Development

www.smith.edu/lazaruscenter

413-585-2582

lazarus@smith.edu

Start Your Search

To launch an effective job search, you need to know what you offer, what motivates you, what employers are looking for, and how you both fit together.

Reflect. Think about what you enjoy doing, what you've accomplished, and what motivates you. Some people find structured assessments such as the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator (MTBI), SkillScan, or online inventories helpful. Meet with a Lazarus Center career advisor to discuss which tools may be useful for you.

Your skills and experiences don't always have to exactly match a job's posted qualifications for you to be a credible applicant. In your applications, emphasize skills and experiences that do align with the role.

Plan your first step after Smith, not an entire career. Look for opportunities where you can apply your strengths, take on new challenges that will enrich your skills, and that are in fields or organizations of interest. Seek roles where you'll be able to work with great supervisors and coworkers. It is common to spend 2-3 years in a first full-time job before moving up or moving on to a new role.

Break your search into small steps and set goals that work for you. Schedule time for your job search each week. Focus on aspects of the search that you can control; be persistent and consistent in your efforts. Enlist the support of family, friends, and others.

Ensure your online presence is professional. Review your social media profiles and remove unprofessional photos or video. Update your LinkedIn profile. Google yourself to see how you will appear to employers and networking contacts.

Choose a target location. You may have a first and second choice, but beyond this, it can be difficult to search effectively in several regions at the same time.

Examine your finances. Use our [Housing and Budgeting](#) guide and research the cost of living in your target location(s). If you've saved some start-up money, you'll have more flexibility.

Determine when you'd like to begin working. Soon after graduation? Two or three months later? Sometime within a year? This decision is important in timing your search.

Background Research and Preparation

Research various fields and entry-level jobs. Browse the Lazarus Center's career library and ask for help from a career advisor. Use these Lazarus Center and other resources:

- [Handshake](#)—an extensive database of jobs, internships, and campus interviewing events. If you're uncertain about your job interests, read many posted job descriptions looking for skills that match your own and roles that sound intriguing.
- [Career Field Links](#) organized by field will get you started on your research.
- *Vault Career Insider* (link through Handshake)—in-depth industry profiles and guides, company research, and jobs listed by field and city.
- LexisNexis—access through [Smith College Libraries' databases](#) to research trends, organizations, and people in the field.

Arrange informational interviews. Many professionals enjoy talking about their work and offering advice to those starting out, and this process will build your network:

- Smith alumnae can be excellent sources of advice and information. Find them on LinkedIn.
- Ask faculty, former supervisors, friends, and family to suggest others with whom to talk.
- If you've seen an article about someone, read their bio on a website, heard them speak, or read their work, email or write to request an informational interview.

Read our [Informational Interviewing and the Art of Networking](#) guide for details.

Identify how your interests and goals align with industries, organizations, or professions. From fashion magazines to biotech firms, employers want to know why you want to work for their organization and in their field.

Techniques for Finding Jobs

A comprehensive search uses a range of search methods; don't rely on one approach or too few applications:

Handshake. Search current job listings by keyword, job function, industry, or location to maximize your results.

Apply directly to employers. Organizations may advertise their job openings only on their websites. Address your application to an actual person, not "To Whom it May Concern." No recipient name? Look on the website, email, or phone and ask. If an employer has two jobs that interest you, apply for both, though consider writing separate cover letters. Consult a career advisor or the employer's human resources department for advice.

To identify employers in your target field and location use field-specific websites/directories in the *Vault Career Insider* (connect via Handshake), and search online. Ask professionals in your field for suggestions. If you don't see entry-level jobs on an organization's website, call and ask if there are any.

Industry- and city-specific job databases can be more effective than large "aggregator" job databases. Refer to the career field-specific links on our website and search online. While it's fine to post your resume on job boards, doing so is not a substitute for connecting directly with employers.

Professional association websites and publications often have job listings, conference notices, and industry news. Associations can be easily found online (ex: Google "museum associations") or by asking professionals in your field of interest.

Many job functions cut across a variety of fields. For example, jobs in PR, marketing, communications, finance, business operations, IT, and other roles are available in a range of organizations.

By some estimates, 80% of jobs are discovered through networking, a technique essential to most job hunts. Networking is NOT asking for a job, but while networking you may:

- Hear about jobs before they're posted; be offered access to an employer's internal job board
- Learn about conferences and other networking venues; be referred to a colleague
- Find out about online/print resources and strategies to aid your search

Network in person as well as online. Sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook are great ways to connect but use them in addition to, not instead of, face-to-face connections.

Interesting employer, but no jobs available? Unable to find an alumna or other connection? Find out who leads your specific interest area—look on the website, consult field-specific news, LexisNexis, or phone and ask. Send a resume and letter asking to meet to talk about their experience in the field and hear their advice on getting started. Mention something specific—a news release you’ve read, a talk you’ve heard them give, their new book, etc. (See sample in our guide to [informational interviewing](#).) With no Smith or other connection to the person you’re writing, the letter must be compelling enough to catch their attention and persuade them to take the time to meet with you. If the recipient doesn’t respond, follow up to try to arrange an in-person or phone conversation. If they can’t meet they may be able to suggest someone who can.

The Lazarus Center offers seniors many ways to connect with employers:

- On-campus interviews are held throughout the academic year at Smith or in collaboration with the career offices of Mount Holyoke College and Amherst College
- Employer information sessions—company representatives come to campus to speak about their organizations, hiring processes, and employment opportunities. These are a great opportunity to learn about organizations and speak with recruiters
- On- and off-campus career fairs
- Browse Handshake and our weekly emails for jobs and employer events and deadlines

Paid, one-year, post-BA opportunities are ideal if working for a year before grad school or testing out a career interest. Search Handshake for these positions, often called fellowships. If you lack experience, interning or volunteering—even part-time—may position you for a job if one opens up.

Many large companies offer **Rotational Programs**. These entry-level positions, typically lasting 2-4 years, are often open to a wide variety of undergraduate majors. Employees in these programs gain training and experience in a range of company functions and roles by rotating into new departments every 6-12 months.

Job hunting from a distance? Try to visit your target city during school breaks to network. Read the news and online classified ads for your target region. Career office websites in your target location may offer good local links and resources, too.

Tools for Your Search

A resume and cover letter are an essential marketing team in your job search. The cover letter introduces you and your resume, and the resume is a curated, tailored summary of your experience and qualifications. Together, these documents show where the match is between you and the position, and determine if you’ll be interviewed. For details, see [Resumes and Cover Letters](#).

Create a system to keep track of your networking contacts, job applications, and follow-up actions. This can be an Excel spreadsheet, notebook, or whatever works for you. Stay organized.

Practice your interview skills. An candidate who interviews well may receive a job offer over someone with stronger initial qualifications. Read our guide to [Interviews](#) and practice with a career advisor.

Create **networking (aka business) cards** for conferences, job fairs, lectures, or when traveling.

When Should I Apply? Hiring Timelines

Timing a job search is an individual matter taking into account when you want begin a job, how much time you devote to your search, and the field/location you've targeted. Set goals for yourself—daily, weekly, monthly—based on what works for you. Your job search timetable may differ from other students.

Employers and industry hiring processes and timelines vary

Some employers have regular, predictable hiring cycles each year, while others post jobs and hire only when the need arises. Organizations may list jobs and conduct interviews several months in advance or begin the hiring process a few weeks before they want an employee to start. Most employers don't recruit and interview on college campuses, so you must research and apply to them closer to the time you want to be employed.

According to a 2014 employer survey, the average time between a job posting and the beginning of candidate interviews was approximately 39 days. The same study reported that the average interview-to-offer period—the time it takes an employer to make a job offer to a candidate after her or his interview—was nearly 23 days. (Source: NACE [Recruiting Benchmarks: Cycle Time](#), Oct 15, 2014.)

Year-round activities for all job seekers include following industry news and attending relevant talks and events. Arrange informational interviews and connect with people in your interest areas. Develop or refine your resumes. Practice your interview skills.

September-December are the busiest months for on-campus recruiting of seniors as full-time hires in finance, management consulting, and increasingly in science and technical fields. This is also an active time for full-time postings in the federal government.

Recruiting and hiring for full-time hires in not-for-profit organizations, research, media and marketing, business, other industries occurs throughout the year, with **January-April** the most active posting period for positions that begin in the summer.

Many graduate and professional school application deadlines occur **November-January**. The initial application period for medical and dental schools begins in **June**.

November-March are especially active months for summer internship postings across professional fields and for on-campus recruiting of sophomores and juniors seeking summer internships in finance and consulting.

Selected Annual Career Fairs

- Smith College's Fall Career Fair—late September
- UMass Amherst Engineering, Sciences & Technology Career Fair—late September
- Selective Liberal Arts Recruiting Consortium (SLAC) - Video Interviews and Off-Campus Recruiting Days (September - February)
- Smith College's Science & Technology Career Fair—late January
- Amherst College's Not-for-Profit & Government Career Fair—mid-February
- UMass-Amherst Diversity Career Fair—February
- Massachusetts Educational Recruiting Consortium (MERC) Career Fair, Northeastern University—April

6 Month Job Search Plan

5-6 months from the time you want to be employed:

- Meet with a career advisor to discuss your search strategy and goals
- Research fields, entry-level jobs, salary ranges, and locations
- Begin keeping a list of organizations where you might like to work; bookmark their careers sites
- Make a list of field-specific and association job sites
- Arrange informational interviews—this will build your industry knowledge and professional network.
- Revise your resume—if you're exploring various several fields, create several resume versions, each emphasizing experiences and skills most relevant to a particular field of interest
- You may try to arrange a short-term internship or shadow someone whose career interests you—this might during be a school break, with an alumna, or someone else you've met networking

3-4 months before:

- Practice your interview skills. Schedule a mock interview with a career advisor
- Have a cover letter reviewed during the Lazarus Center's daily drop-in hours
- Check organization and field-specific websites for new openings
- Many employers post jobs 2-3 months before the start date—your application activity should pick up
- Regularly check your bookmarked websites for job posts
- Create Google Alerts to automatically notify you of selected keywords or phrases related to your search
- Reconnect with contacts with whom you had informational interviews. Tell them you're actively searching for a job; ask if they'd be willing to keep you in mind if they hear of opportunities

1-2 months before:

- Some of the employers you've applied to will be interviewing—practice with a career advisor
- Continue networking—you can contact organizations even when there are no jobs posted
- Some employers are just posting jobs, others already doing follow-up interviews—stay organized
- Stay focused—keep actively applying, interviewing, and networking

After You've Applied...

Follow up. A friendly, confident call or email can keep your resume at the top of an employer's pile. Ask if your application has been received and try to set up an interview. If an ad says "No calls please," don't.

It's typical to ask for a few days or even a week to consider an offer. Express your enthusiasm for the job and agree on a specific date for your reply. If you have other applications pending, call the employers to see when they expect to make a decision. Once you have accepted a job, withdraw other active applications.

If the job sounds great but the salary does not meet your expectations, you can often negotiate. Research the salary range for the field and location in advance so you can suggest a reasonable range. Talk with a career advisor regarding your approach to negotiation.