

Job Search Process

Your job search success is related to the time you invest and the number of strategies you incorporate. Individuals experience the job search process very differently. Some are excited about beginning the next phase of their lives, while others are worried and view the job search as a stressful process. Wherever you are in terms of your feelings, know that many people have successfully navigated the job search process and there are a variety of career opportunities available to you.

Spend time reflecting on your career goals. Before you begin your job search, think about what you really want in a career. Consider what types of skills you would like to use in a position, what work-related experiences have been positive, and the type of lifestyle you envision for yourself. Clarity of your career goals will help focus your search.

Research your potential options. There are multiple career options within any given field. Job market research will provide you a better understanding of the range of available positions. Your research efforts may include seeking information online, attending career-related programs, asking professionals for informational interviews, or participating in student or professional organizations of interest. Hopefully, your research will give you insight into what positions realistically match your needs, based on your interests, values, and skills.

Understand that the job search will likely consume a significant amount of time and energy.

It is common to underestimate the amount of time and energy required to successfully obtain a position. Approaching your search in an organized and deliberate manner increases your chances of successfully obtaining a position of your choice, and decreases some of the stress that accompanies a job search.

Learn the job search process for your specific industry. The job search will vary depending on your field. Steps such as developing a strong résumé and practicing your interviewing skills are helpful for any industry. If you are unsure how to proceed based on your field, schedule an appointment with an Employment Specialist who will help you develop a job search strategy appropriate for your industry.

Use multiple job search strategies. It is recommended that you include multiple strategies as a part of your job search approach. Relying on one method will inevitably reduce the number of opportunities you locate. Commonly used search strategies include: On-Campus Recruiting (for current students), CareerCat, career fairs, networking, internet/online resources, field specific listings, newspapers/journals, to name a few.

Recognize that rejections are a normal part of the process.

Receiving notification that you were not selected for a position is sometimes difficult to handle. Employers usually have more applicants than available positions. If you experience consistent problems with your job search in a particular industry, schedule an appointment with a UCS practitioner to review your application materials and discuss your options.

Consult with others throughout the process. It is not necessary for you to go through this process alone. If you have questions or need assistance, determine key individuals who can provide you support. This may include Northwestern faculty or staff, as well as friends and family members who are experienced and familiar with the job search process. Successful applicants reach out for the support they need.



“Though I was confident of my skills when applying for jobs, I was not sure how to best highlight my educational and work experience in my résumé. During senior year, with the help of a UCS staff member, I was able to draft résumés and cover letters that led to more phone calls from potential employers. Looking back, I could tell that the staff really cared about my job search outcomes, because they asked me to come back for follow-up consultations, and they even assigned homework for me to do before meeting again.”

ALEC LIU
Alumnus, Chemical Engineering

Job Search Process for Graduate Students

The process of securing a job at the graduate level is more challenging than many students anticipate. While education affords “opportunity,” an advanced degree does not necessarily lead to an easier search. Your search will vary depending on your ability to juggle the completion of your degree requirements, your individual needs, and the norms of the discipline.

Prior to starting your job search, consider the following questions:

- ❖ Is your coursework complete (or near completion)?
- ❖ Are you almost finished with your thesis/dissertation?
- ❖ Have you discussed your plans with your advisor or other faculty?
- ❖ Have you spent time gathering information regarding employment options?
- ❖ Is your résumé/CV updated and prepared to send to employers?
- ❖ Will launching a job search now allow you to complete your program requirements within your anticipated time frame?
- ❖ Have you assessed your strengths and weaknesses as a candidate?

If you answered “no” to more than one question above, you should evaluate whether you are ready to begin your search now. If you need assistance with any aspect of the planning or search process, call UCS to schedule an appointment to meet with a practitioner.

Academic Job Search

The academic job search is a structured process with strict deadlines and specific materials to prepare. Keep in mind that you will have to balance the demands of your job search with time needed to write your dissertation. Securing an academic faculty position typically requires you to begin applying a year prior to your projected start date, making the fall a busy time for applying to positions.

Strategies for the academic job search vary by discipline. For a successful job search, familiarize yourself with the timelines and requirements associated with your discipline by consulting with your advisor, committee members, and other faculty in your program.

As you review job postings and determine where to apply, it is important to evaluate the culture of the institution and department, the academic job market in your discipline, and personal factors, such as relocating family or the demographics of the institution. Consult with trusted mentors for advice and to learn from their experiences with similar issues.

APPLICATION MATERIALS

Preparing for an academic job search will include a variety of activities and required materials. Once you determine the positions to which you plan to apply, pay particular attention to the documents each institution requires. Create a tracking system to organize the many aspects of this process.

Frequently requested materials include:

- ❖ Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- ❖ Cover Letter
- ❖ Teaching Philosophy
- ❖ Research Statement
- ❖ Course Evaluations
- ❖ Sample Syllabi
- ❖ Transcripts
- ❖ Letters of Recommendation
- ❖ Writing Samples



THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

If you have been selected by the search committee, the next step is usually an interview. Interviews progress in stages, beginning with a screening interview via phone followed by an on-campus visit lasting 1–2 days. The on-campus interview typically includes interviews with faculty, administrators and current graduate students; a presentation (“job talk”) followed by Q&A with the audience; and a meal or another social event with your hosts. During interviews, committee members are evaluating your potential as a researcher, teacher, and colleague. They also want to determine whether you demonstrate a sincere interest in the position and are a good fit for the department.

During the interview, be prepared to discuss your dissertation research, your future research goals, and your teaching interests. In addition, convey interest and enthusiasm for the institution and the position, reflect on your strengths and weaknesses in teaching and research, and demonstrate adaptability, openness and administrative skills.

Careers Outside of Academia

An increasing number of graduate students are pursuing careers outside of academia. Some graduate students have made the decision based on the academic job market, while others have determined that they are not interested in a career in academic research or teaching. Deciding to pursue a career outside of academia is not an easy choice for all graduate students; for some it is an emotional decision that can generate feelings of fear, confusion, or even failure. UCS Staff are available to work with you in an individual appointment to explore the feelings that may be impacting your career decision making process.

SO WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

There are many career options for graduate students outside of academia. Before you begin applying to job openings, the first step in a successful job search is self-assessment. The self-assessment process allows you to gather information about your skills, interests, values, and motivations that influence your career decisions. Self-assessment will also develop the language to market your academic training to potential employers.

Work environments outside of academia may emphasize skills and experience over academic credentials. As the job seeker, your task is to articulate to prospective employers how the skills you have developed through academic research and study will be an asset in their settings. Through your graduate student career, you have developed strong transferable skills, which are useful in many different settings. To convey your message confidently and clearly, you first need to identify them yourself.

Skills Employers Value in Graduate Students:

- Problem Solving
- Leadership
- Personal initiative and motivation
- Gathering and synthesizing information
- Data analysis
- Collaboration
- Entrepreneurship
- Perseverance
- Oral and written communication
- Critical thinking
- Maturity
- Creativity
- Ability to teach and train others
- Project management
- Leadership and independence
- Comfort with abstract concepts
- Knowledge of technical software

Researching employers and industries is the next step to gaining insight into professional options that match your career direction and provide a good fit for your background. Your research efforts may include seeking information through online and print resources, informational interviewing, and attending career related programs.

RECRUITING PROCESS AND TIMELINE

The process of securing a position can take time. It is common to underestimate the amount of time and energy required to successfully obtain a position, so begin planning for your job search at least one year prior to your degree completion date.

Graduate students must be very proactive and use creative strategies to connect with employers and to learn about potential job opportunities. Networking is essential to the graduate student job search. As you begin your search, connect with your supporters and share your career plans with them. This includes advisors, mentors, family, friends, faculty, former employers, contacts from informational interviews, alumni—anyone who can assist with your job search! Employers are more likely to interview a candidate who comes from a referral, so networking can open up your employment possibilities.

THE APPLICATION AND INTERVIEW PROCESS

Employers differ in the type of materials required to apply for each position so make sure to pay careful attention before you apply. Most positions outside of academia request a 1–2 page résumé, which will require you to transform your curriculum vitae into a shorter document. Once you decide not to pursue academic employment, you must determine the skills employers are seeking and revise your résumé to highlight how your degree(s) and experiences have developed those preferred skills.

The interview format will range considerably for positions outside of academia. Some companies will offer a series of very formal interviews with multiple interviewers, while other positions will have a shorter selection process and only require you to meet with one person. Be prepared to answer questions about your motivations for careers outside of academia and how your academic training has prepared you for that particular position. Leaving the academic setting requires a transition and it is important that you have as much clarity as possible regarding your potential responsibilities and expectations. Your goal is to find a good fit with what you have to offer and what the company needs.

Tips for the Graduate Level Job Search

- Start your search early.
- Take an organized approach to your search.
- Work closely with your advisor and mentor(s) throughout the process.
- Conduct informational interviews.
- Network as much as possible.
- Participate in mock interviews.
- Request letters of recommendation early.
- Review job listings offered by professional associations.
- Seek feedback on your application materials.
- Customize your application materials for each position.
- Keep copies of all application materials submitted.
- Avoid applying for positions that you would not accept if you were to receive an offer.

Job Search Process for International Students



Typically, employment options for international students fall into three categories: obtaining full-time employment in the United States, utilizing the practical training option, or returning to your native country. If you prefer to obtain a full-time position in the United States, understanding the distinct challenges of this search is helpful.

Two major job search challenges international students face are related to employment restrictions and cultural differences. Employment restrictions are imposed by the government and require that you have the appropriate employment authorization. Cultural differences may affect the way you approach your job search and perhaps your ability to successfully present your qualifications to an employer.

TIPS FOR SEEKING EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

Know the current laws and policies regarding your status (e.g., H1-B, OPT, etc.). Employers have a legal obligation to hire only authorized persons. Consult with the International Office and other experts in this area and know the requirements for employment. This information will allow you to educate the employer regarding your specific situation.

Start your search early. All students are encouraged to start their job search early. This recommendation becomes especially important for international students due to potential work authorization challenges. Remember to account for extra time in case the required paperwork takes more time than you anticipated.

Use a range of job search strategies. Increase your chances of obtaining a position in the United States by using a range of job search strategies. Networking with professionals in your industry and researching companies that hire international students are both useful approaches. It is also helpful to locate print and online resources that identify specific companies hiring international students.

Understand the cultural differences that may affect your job search. Based on cultural differences, the expectations of an American job search may conflict with values and/or differ from the typical search protocol of your native culture. For example, the American job search often requires self-promotion, directness in communication, and self-disclosure.

Improve your language skills (if necessary). Language skills are a common concern during the interview phase for many international students. Schedule a mock interview with a UCS staff member if you are interested in practicing your interviewing skills. The UCS practitioner will provide you feedback regarding your strengths and areas of development.

While there are sometimes additional obstacles to employment in the United States, a number of international students have found success in recent years. Your individual situation will depend on a variety of factors; however, your initiative in this process is essential. It is never too soon to begin your job search and the UCS staff are available to provide you support and the resources to assist with your search.



GOING GLOBAL is an online subscription that provides expert advice and insider tips for finding employment opportunities within the U.S. and abroad. International students can search for H1B employer petition listings by state, industry, or metro area! Consult the UCS website for access details.



“This is an office that I strongly recommend every student on campus steps foot in at a very early stage in their time at NU, independent of major, school or career aspiration. This office is here to help and will help you get to where you want to go.”

*BLAIR KESSLER
Junior in Economics*

Hiring & Recruiting Cycles

To effectively plan your search, it is important to know how different industries recruit new employees. Recruiting and hiring cycles are terms that refer to the specific timeframe in which employers begin their search for new employees. These cycles vary by company and industry.

UNDERGRADUATE OR GRADUATE STUDENTS SEEKING FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

On-Campus Recruiting (OCR)

College recruiting is a key hiring source for many major employers. The OCR program is designed to provide representatives from various organizations a venue to interview current Northwestern University students for positions that begin after graduation. As a convenience to current students, OCR offers an opportunity to interview with employers without leaving campus.

CareerCat Students are encouraged to regularly search CareerCat listings for available positions. Some employers do not participate in OCR; however, they may advertise their positions on CareerCat. To register and/or update your profile, visit CareerCat via our website at www.northwestern.edu/careers.

UNDERGRADUATE OR GRADUATE STUDENTS SEEKING SUMMER JOBS/ INTERNSHIPS

For summer positions, some employers will post available opportunities as early as mid-fall quarter of the previous year. Early application submissions are driven by the type of position, location of the position, number of positions available, and number of applicants. Early January is also an active time for employers looking to hire for the summer.

While many positions are posted during the winter, some employers are not aware of their hiring needs until later in the year. As a result, their positions are not listed until the spring quarter. Contact a UCS practitioner for assistance with understanding the recruitment cycle for your industry and finding available positions.

TYPICAL OCR SEASON DATE RANGE

Fall Quarter
EARLY OCTOBER—EARLY DECEMBER
Winter Quarter
EARLY JANUARY—MID MARCH
Spring Quarter
EARLY APRIL—LATE APRIL

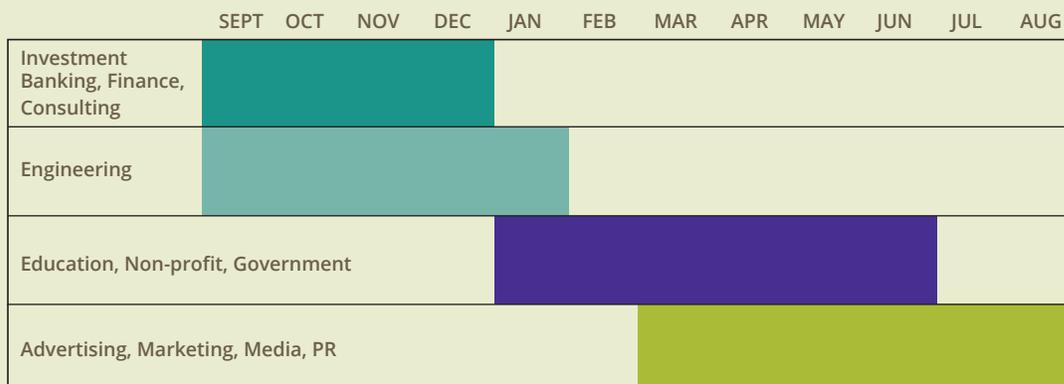
ALUMNI RECRUITING AND HIRING CYCLES

Employers use the term “immediate hires” when recruiting alumni candidates. Available positions are posted on CareerCat. Once jobs are posted, employers typically hope to fill the positions as soon as possible or within 1–3 months.

Although all industries and employers have openings throughout the year, there are often hiring peaks and valleys. Hiring trends and the number of jobs available at any given time will depend on economic factors, supply and demand for your field of expertise or interest, geographic considerations, global issues, and industry trends.

For alumni who are interested in starting a position in the near future, it is best to allow approximately 3-6 months (or more) for a quality job search. Understand your industry’s hiring trends to allow yourself enough time to make good decisions. For more information, contact the UCS Senior Assistant Director for Alumni Career Services.

TYPICAL RECRUITING TIMELINES BY INDUSTRY*



* This table reflects typical recruiting timeframes. UCS continues to receive job postings throughout the year for every industry. Please consult with a UCS practitioner for more specific information. This table does not reflect internship postings.

Job Offers & Negotiations

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Employers may offer other benefits or forms of compensation that add to your overall hiring package. When evaluating job offers, consider the “total package.”

- Health Insurance
- Retirement Plans
- Stock Options
- Tuition Reimbursement
- Professional Memberships
- Professional Development Opportunities
- Training
- Sign-on Bonus
- End of the Year Bonus
- Relocation Reimbursement
- Parking
- Vacation Days
- Health Club Membership

JOB OFFERS

There are many factors to consider when negotiating a job offer. Prior to accepting a position, assess how a particular job aligns with your career interests, skills, values, and goals. This knowledge will assist you in making appropriate decisions as you evaluate each job offer.

Make sure you clearly understand the expectations, roles, and work environment. Evaluate the nature of the work, work duties, level of responsibility, work hours, and any additional requirements. Reviewing the organizational structure may help you understand existing roles within the company. You should know who you will report to, who reports to you (if applicable), and which colleagues work closely with you in the position. Work environment considerations may include staff collegiality, level of interaction with colleagues, and quality of management, as well as physical components such as location and type of work space.

Compensation packages are often an important aspect of evaluating a job offer. Companies vary in what they offer, so it is essential that you pay attention to the details. Two major aspects of your decision-making likely include the salary and benefits offered.

Salary Know the salary range for comparable positions and your worth in the job market. You should have a clear idea of what is acceptable to you and what is appropriate for the job, given your specific qualifications. Remember to review and analyze your financial needs.

During an interview, you should not initiate the salary discussion. Once you receive an offer you may then engage in any negotiations. For some higher level positions, employers may ask for your salary expectations. If asked, you must provide a response with a preferred salary range. If you are asked to provide a salary history, which is more common for experienced level jobs, offer this separately from your résumé.

Some companies may offer an initial salary, but inform you of potential options to increase your salary once hired. It is not uncommon for companies to indicate that your salary will increase after a review or a designated probationary period. Make sure to inquire when and how often reviews are conducted and salaries increased.

Benefits Understanding benefits or “compensation packages,” as they are also called, is another consideration when selecting a job or evaluating a salary. Benefits are typically available for full-time positions rather than for part-time, internships, or temporary positions. Research the current state and federal laws regarding the minimum hours you must work and job classification requirements for eligibility of health benefits.

It is not unusual to discover, as you are weighing different aspects of the offer, that you have additional questions, lack some factual data, or simply need a better sense of the position and/or organization. If you have questions, it is usually appropriate to contact one of your interviewers for clarification.

NEGOTIATIONS

The leverage you have in negotiating job/salary offers often depends on how competitive you are for the position. Your work history, previous work performance, range of skills, and ability to self-market (promote yourself) all influence the process. Also, remember that not everything is negotiable. The ability to negotiate will additionally depend on economic times, the salary structure within the company, your qualifications, industry and market trends, etc.

Need time to decide? Typically employers will allow you time to evaluate their offer. Ask the employer when they would like a decision and determine if this is enough time for you. You can ask an employer for additional decision-making time if you have a legitimate reason (e.g., if you need more time to investigate housing options given the salary they offer).

Ready to make your decision? Many employers will put full-time offers in writing. Accept the job offer when you are absolutely sure this is the position you want. It is considered a professional courtesy that you do not renege after accepting an offer. Once you formally accept an offer, it is appropriate to notify employers who are still considering you as a candidate that you have accepted another position. Also, remember to inform everyone who assisted you throughout this process, including your references.

Graduate & Professional School Application Process

Graduate programs expect each applicant to have a specific career goal in mind and demonstrate his/her ability to successfully complete an advanced degree program. Once you have decided that graduate school is the road to helping you achieve your career goals, understanding the process required for applying is essential.

HOW DO I FIND THE RIGHT SCHOOL FOR ME?

Thoroughly research the schools that offer programs of interest. Knowing your academic goals and developing a strategy for achieving them will help as you explore programs. During your selection process, a range of variables will impact your final decision. Some areas of importance are the program, faculty, and student life. Ask yourself these questions:

Program

- ❖ Does the program cover my areas of interest?
- ❖ Are assistantships/fellowships available for students enrolled in this program?
- ❖ Who hires the people that graduate from this program?
- ❖ Will I grow personally and professionally from attending this program?
- ❖ Do they have experiential education built into the program?

Faculty

- ❖ How accessible are the faculty to students?
- ❖ Are the professors well-known in the field?
- ❖ What is the relationship between students and faculty?
- ❖ Will I have the opportunity to work with faculty on research projects?
- ❖ Has there been a high turnover of faculty within the past five years?

Student Life

- ❖ What types of services are provided for graduate/professional students?
- ❖ Where do graduate/professional students typically live?
- ❖ How diverse is the student population?
- ❖ What graduate/professional student organizations exist in the department and/or on campus?
- ❖ Is there any additional support for students with partners, spouses, and/or families?

WHEN DO I NEED TO APPLY?

Application deadlines vary. Some schools review candidates throughout the year and make admissions decisions when applications are received. Other programs have specific cycles and will only consider applications during a particular time frame. Still other programs will review applications during a designated cycle, but may extend offers to candidates prior to the published deadline. Given the various scenarios, it is best to research individual program deadlines and apply early.

WHAT APPLICATION MATERIALS DO I NEED TO APPLY?

The exact materials required for each program varies, but will likely require a combination of the following materials: a completed application form, a personal statement, official copies of transcripts from all schools attended, letters of recommendation, financial aid forms, an application fee, and test scores.

WHAT TEST DO I TAKE?

Each type of school/program requires specific tests and examination dates vary. Listed below are some of the major areas and tests required to apply:

Medical *Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)*

Dental *Dental Admission Test (DAT)*

Pharmacy *Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT)*

Law *Law School Admission Test (LSAT)*

Sciences/Liberal Arts

Graduate Record Examination (GRE), Miller Analogies Test (MAT)

MBA *Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), Graduate Record Examination (GRE)*

WHERE DO I START?

Develop a plan. The key to managing the application process for graduate/professional school is simply good planning, preparation, and organization. Starting early will allow you to develop a timeline that includes the important steps for your successful submission of applications. If you need assistance with any aspect of this process, please schedule an appointment with a UCS Career Counselor.



“Career Services has been extremely helpful in the law school application process. The counselors genuinely care about helping the students succeed and they are absolutely willing to guide you throughout the entire application process.”

FABIANA COHEN Senior in Psychology



PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Your personal statement is a significant component of your application package. Strong personal statements are well-written, interesting, and attract the reader's attention. Maximize this opportunity to discuss important information not reflected in other parts of your application materials.

Ten Steps for Writing a Winning Personal Statement

- 1. Assess yourself.** Take time to consider who you are, why you are interested in additional education, and what you have to offer advanced programs.
- 2. Brainstorm your ideas.** Simply list all your thoughts and ideas related to your character, experiences, future goals, etc.
- 3. Select the most appropriate ideas.** Using your list of brainstorming ideas, select the combination of topics that will help you form a strong statement.
- 4. Write a first rough draft.** Incorporate ideas from your brainstorming and write! Do not worry about length in your initial drafts—you can edit it later.
- 5. Take a break.** Taking a break will provide you time to process what you have written. When you return you may discover you have ideas for improvement.
- 6. Revise and edit.** Rewrite and modify, as needed. Your personal statement should touch you personally in some way, while reflecting what you want the admissions committee to know about you.
- 7. Seek feedback.** Have a variety of people read your personal statement and provide feedback. Ask readers if your statement conveys your interest and enthusiasm about entering graduate/professional school.
- 8. Incorporate feedback.** After soliciting feedback, determine what advice to include and revise your statement accordingly.
- 9. Develop the final draft.** Read your essay to make sure it conveys an accurate, clear, and appealing message that demonstrates the strength of your candidacy.
- 10. Proofread, proofread, proofread.** Prior to submitting your application, it is essential that you have thoroughly checked your document for grammar and spelling errors.

Graduate/Professional School Application Timeline

Each graduate school program has its own requirements and deadlines. The timeline below is a general overview of the application process. In using this timeline, remember the materials and timing required for each application you plan to submit.

Junior Year

Fall & Winter Quarter

- Attend UCS graduate/professional school workshops.
- Research schools and programs.
- Explore financial aid resources.
- Register and begin preparing for appropriate graduate admissions tests.

Spring & Summer Quarter

- Open a recommendation file with UCS.
- Identify faculty and/or professionals to ask for recommendation letters.
- Order an unofficial transcript from all undergraduate institutions attended.
- Check unofficial transcripts and correct any discrepancies.
- Take appropriate graduate admissions tests.
- Visit prospective campuses and when possible talk to students/faculty.

Senior Year

Fall Quarter

- Write the first draft of your personal statement.
- Request your letters of recommendation.
- Order official transcripts.
- Write the final draft of your personal statement.
- Complete and submit your applications.
- Apply for financial assistance (e.g., assistantships, scholarships, fellowships, etc.).

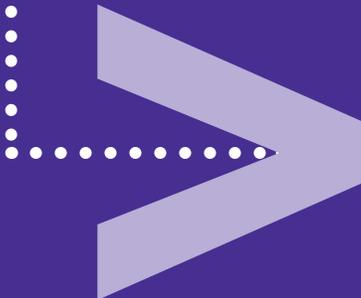
Winter Quarter

- Complete and submit financial aid applications.
- Follow-up with schools to verify that your file is complete.
- Visit institutions of interest to help evaluate your options.

Spring Quarter

- Interview, if necessary.
- Make decisions and notify all institutions.
- Submit required paperwork and/or payments.
- Arrange housing.
- Write thank-you notes to those who helped you.

northwestern
UCS
university career services



University Career Services (UCS) provides comprehensive and centralized services to Northwestern undergraduate students, graduate students and alumni. We offer an array of services and programs to assist with your career-related needs:

Walk-In Advising
Individual Counseling Appointments
Internship Advising Services
Graduate/Professional School Advisement
Employment Advising Services
Employment Databases and Research
Career Fairs
On-Campus Recruiting
Career Information Center
File Services
Alumni Career Services

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