



## GENERAL CAREER STRATEGIES FOR ARTS & SCIENCES MAJORS

Many students believe that, if they just earn high grades and successfully finish college, their dream job awaits on graduation day. Yet other students believe that an A&S degree is not marketable, and that there is little they can do to gain a competitive edge in the marketplace. Both of these statements are false. In fact, there is much that you can do – and much you need to do – to make yourself a desirable candidate in the world of work!

### 1. **Begin exploring your career options early.**

Many students wait until the final semester of their senior year before they begin thinking about how their major might connect to the world of work. While it is never too late to begin the exploration process, you will discover that you will have more choices, and will probably be able to make a more informed decision, if you start early. In fact, experts have found that a lack of knowledge about the workplace and the world of work can be one of the greatest career barriers that students experience.

#### What can you do?

- Make an appointment with your Career Development Facilitator (CDF) to begin the process of exploring your interests, values, skills, and abilities; the “building blocks” of the career decision-making process.
- Consider taking our career assessments – including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Strong Interest Inventory.
- Research occupations through the Occupational Outlook Handbook and O\*NET:  
[www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm) <http://online.onetcenter.org>
- Conduct a job shadow or attend an employer panel to gain information about the workplace.

### 2. **Gain experience related to your career interests and goals.**

Employers consistently place a high value on students who bring related experience to the workplace. In fact, employers often look within their own pool of interns to recruit new graduates, and many offer higher salaries to new graduates who have *any* co-op or internship experience. Most employers are in agreement that, while they prefer related experience, *any* work experience is better than no experience (NACE *Job Outlook*, 2006). Clearly, related experience can often be a greater determinant of success than your specific major in securing post-graduation employment. In fact, the majority of college graduates are successfully employed in fields not directly related to their majors.

#### What can you do?

- Gain experience in the form of internships; part-time work; summer jobs; work-study positions; volunteer positions; cooperative education; and involvement in student organizations, teams, and professional organizations.
- Utilize Career Services’ eRecruiting job posting system, participate in on-campus interviewing, attend career fairs, and visit your CDF for information on additional opportunities.

### 3. **Connect with your professors and professionals in your area of interests.**

Often times, students are intimidated by the thought of speaking to these individuals. However, these people are often your best source of career information! Through a process called *informational interviewing*, you’ll receive first-hand information on what the profession is like, what skills and

experience you need to enter certain occupations, what classes you should focus on, and what you can be doing between now and graduation to increase your chances of securing your dream job. Don't know anyone working in your interest area? The UNM Alumni Association has formed the Career Mentors Program, which connects UNM alumni in a wide range of professions to provide real-world career information to UNM students.

What can you do?

- Visit the UNM Career Mentors Program at: [www.unmalumni.com/careerexp/mentor/index.cfm](http://www.unmalumni.com/careerexp/mentor/index.cfm)
- Read the UNM's Career Guide on informational interviewing
- Gain student membership in a professional organization; attend meetings and conferences.

**4. Recognize the flexibility of your degree and market upon it, rather than hiding behind it.**

Many A&S students lament that their majors often do not lead down one specific occupational path. However, this flexibility is often one of the most distinct assets that an A&S student brings to an employer! The skills taught in liberal arts courses are needed in virtually every occupation, which is why we find liberal arts majors employed in nearly every field. This flexibility is required in today's world of work, which frequently requires that employees learn new information quickly and apply it in diverse ways. Additionally, your major does not necessarily dictate your occupation. In fact, within 3-5 years after graduation, more than 50% of all college graduates are in a career which is not directly related to their major. Remain open to the possibility that your major can lead to *many* different career possibilities. With employees now changing jobs an average of eight times during their working life, the liberal arts provides a core foundation from which to operate from in each transition.

What can you do?

- Think deeply about your major: What have you learned? What can you apply? Why did you select your major? What was your favorite course? How might this course or the knowledge acquired apply to a career? Begin journaling the answers to these questions.
- Learn to communicate the value of your diverse and flexible skill set to employers.
- Research the different occupations/industries in which your background could be put to work.

**5. Develop strong “transferable skills” and learn how to communicate them to employers.**

Transferable skills refer to those skills that are developed in one setting and can be transferred to another. A recent study from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (*Job Outlook*, 2006) found that amongst the top ten skills and qualities that employers value most are: communication, teamwork, analytical, flexible/adaptable, interpersonal, motivation, and a strong attention to detail. In other words, those skills that are typically well-developed in A&S students!

What can you do?

- Focus on acquiring and honing these skills through your coursework and related experience.
- Practice communicating to employers how you have developed these skills.
- Develop a portfolio, with the help of your CDF, which demonstrates these skills to employers.

**6. Be creative about the different ways in which you could apply your major-specific skills.**

Many A&S majors fail to see how their major coursework would be useful to an employer. This perception often leads students to operate from the stance that they're *just* a liberal arts major. You must develop an ability to identify and “market” the value of your degree if an employer is to also see the value. In addition to transferable skills, every major contains “content skills” that can be applied in the workplace. Consider, for example, the art history student who uses her expertise in antiquities to work as an underwriter for an insurance company.

What can you do?

- Use job shadows and informational interviewing to explore the diverse ways in which your degree could be applied.
- Follow your curiosities and talk to the people who are doing the work you *want* to be doing.
- Refer to the “What Can I Do With a Major In...” series on the CSO website for ideas!