Top 10 Career Strategies for Freshmen and Sophomores

You control your career destiny! Just going to class and picking up your diploma after four years doesn't cut it. You need to become active on and off campus.

Becoming marketable to employers or graduate schools is a four-year job. Here are the top 10 things you can do during college to make yourself marketable at job-search time. In fact, if you do all 10 of these, you'll be unstoppable:

1. **Keep your grades up—**Employers and graduate schools want candidates with good grades. That will probably never change. Doing well academically not only proves that you have a good knowledge base, but indicates a strong work ethic—a trait that employers value.

2. **Identify your interests, skills, values, and personal characteristics—**The first step to clarifying your career goals is to go through a process of self-assessment. Visit your career center and take advantage of the self-assessment instruments it has to offer.

3. **Actively explore career options—**You owe it to yourself to find a career that enriches your life, not one that brings you down. Actively exploring careers means talking with professionals in occupations of interest and observing professionals on the job. Your career center probably has alumni and other volunteers who are willing to talk to you about their careers. Also, attend any career expos, career fairs, and career speaker panels that are offered.

4. **Become active in extracurricular activities and clubs—**Active involvement in activities and clubs on campus is highly valued by employers and graduate schools. Joining a club is fine, but becoming active within that club is what matters most. Become a leader, hold an office, or coordinate an event. You will develop your skills in leadership and teamwork—skills that recruiters covet!

5. **Get involved in community service—**It's important that you begin to understand and appreciate the importance of giving back to your community, and that you live in a larger community than your college or hometown. Typically, students look at community service as a chore. After they've served, however, it's usually one of the most rewarding experiences they've had! Recruiters love to see that you've volunteered to help in your community.

6. **Develop your computer skills—**Take advantage of the computer courses and workshops your college offers. You can also learn a lot by just experimenting with different software packages on your own. Finally, you should learn how to develop your own web page or web-based portfolio. There are many web-design software tools that make it real easy to develop your own web page! Contact your college's information technology office to see how to get started.

7. **Develop your writing skills—**Over and over, company and graduate school recruiters complain about the lack of writing skills among college graduates. Don't avoid classes that are writing intensive. Work at developing your writing skills. If there is a writing center on campus, have them take a look at your papers from time to time. Remember, the first impression you give to recruiters is typically your cover letter or personal statement.

8. **Complete at least one internship in your chosen career field—**More and more, internships are the springboards to employment and getting into graduate programs. Many recruiters say that when they need to fill entry-level jobs, they will only hire previous interns. In addition to making yourself more marketable, internships also are a great way to explore careers and determine whether or not certain careers are for you. When you work for a company as an intern for three to four months, you get a really good feel for whether the field (and company) is one in which you want to work day in and day out!

9. **Gain an appreciation of diversity through study abroad, foreign languages, and courses—**We are now, more than ever, working within a global work force. For you to be successful at work and in your life, you must stretch yourself, and learn about people and cultures different than yours. Take advantage of the wonderful study-abroad opportunities and the courses relating to diversity. This is your time to travel! Most people find it harder to take time to travel as they begin their careers and start families.

10. **Use your career center all four years—**Your college career center can help you throughout your entire college career. Here is just a sampling of what your career center can help you do:
    - Choose your major and career direction,
    - Explore career options,
    - Obtain an internship,
    - Write a resume and cover letter,
    - Develop your interviewing skills,
    - Identify your skills, interests, and values,
    - Develop a job-search or graduate school plan,
    - Connect you with prospective employers (career fairs, on-campus recruiting, and more), and
    - Connect you with alumni mentors.

Remember, you control your career destiny. Don't wait until your senior year to start realizing your goals. Your career train is on the move. Jump on board now so you can reach your destination!

By Bob Orndorff. Courtesy of the National Association of Colleges and Employers, copyright holder, www.naceweb.org.