



Gaining Career-Related Skills

The Value of Gaining Skills through Experience

Many ways exist for you to gain career-related experience that will help you both develop valuable professional skills outside the classroom and assist you in exploring your professional, personal, and civic interests. This handout includes a variety of options you should consider during your time at Grinnell.

Thinking About Your Transferable Skills

There are two categories of skills which you can gain through your experiences: *hard skills* and *soft skills*. Hard skills are technical, industry-specific skills such as C++, lab equipment operation, or grant writing. In contrast, soft skills are those that depend on interpersonal interactions and emotional intelligence, such as communication, adaptability, or problem solving. In either category, you will find skills that are transferable and those that can be applied anywhere, and it doesn't matter where you learned them. It only matters that you can use them. According to the 2012 NACE Job Outlook Survey, the top 10 skills employers seek are:

Engaging in Campus Organizations

Through involvement in student organizations, you can practice and gain many skills that will develop your professional abilities—and that employers will love. You don't have to hold a title (e.g., "president") to be a leader. Note that you can build an impressive skill set through involvement in any organization—regardless of whether it is directly related to your future ambitions.

1. Ability to **work in a team** structure
2. Ability to **verbally communicate** with others
3. Ability to **make decisions and solve problems**
4. Ability to **obtain and process information**
5. Ability to **plan, organize, and prioritize** work
6. Ability to **analyze quantitative data**
7. **Technical knowledge** related to job
8. Proficiency with **computer software programs**
9. Ability to **create and/or edit written reports**
10. Ability to **sell or influence** others

Do it: Engage deeply with a select few organizations about which you are most passionate: chair a committee, organize an event, or take charge of annual responsibilities (e.g., recruitment, marketing, budgeting).

Interning

Completing an internship can help you clarify your career goals by gaining skills and experience as you apply and connect classroom knowledge. You can also network with contacts in the field while you develop your teamwork and leadership abilities. Internships come in all shapes and sizes: they can be part-time or full-time; with or without academic credit; during the summer or academic year; paid or unpaid; local, national, or international; and pursued at any point during your time at Grinnell.

Do it: Make an appointment today with a CLS adviser to get started on your internship plans.

Participating in Service and Civic Engagement

Volunteering offers you the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the community while building professional and avocational skill sets. Students currently volunteer their time with over 80 different local community partners. Federal community service work-study positions are paid opportunities where students collaboratively develop and lead particular, sustainable service or social justice projects related to an organization's philosophy and scope of practice. Service-learning and civic-engagement courses offer you opportunities to apply what you are learning in class through collaborative civic partnerships with local non-profit partners. They also provide an avenue for reflection that allows you time to integrate your values, academic interests, and emerging professional skills intentionally with your personal, civic, and professional goals.

Do it: Speak to CLS adviser Susan Sanning about how to connect with these opportunities.



Conducting Research

The Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program supports active research participation by undergraduate students in any of the research areas funded by the National Science Foundation. REU projects take place at various universities and institutes throughout the USA and involve students in meaningful ways in ongoing research programs or in projects specifically designed for the REU program. At Grinnell, students can complete a Mentored Advanced Project (MAP) for a similar experience.

Do it: Talk with your adviser about your interest and visit the REU website at www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/.

Working Part-Time

Working part-time during your years at Grinnell can prove valuable to your career exploration, professionalism, and work-life balance. There's no such thing as "just a job." A part-time position can help you identify your skills, abilities, and interests. Many skills you develop—such as professional communication, responsibility, and teamwork—are transferrable from experience to experience, so you should start developing these skills as early as possible. Positions exist for student workers all across campus, or you can venture into the community to find part-time work either in Grinnell or back home over the summers.

Do it: Speak to a CLS adviser about how to find these opportunities or how to relate a part-time position to your long-term career goals.

Job Shadowing

A job shadow is a chance to experience "a day in the life" of a person in a certain profession; it involves going to work with your job-shadow host to learn about his or her profession from the inside. Job shadows vary in length but usually last a few days, offer no pay, and are something you organize yourself (as opposed to pre-arranged opportunities that are posted and for which you apply). A job shadow is an effective experience option for semester breaks and for students of all class years.

Do it: Talk to a CLS adviser about strategies for reaching out to alumni or other professionals.

Participating in Off-Campus Study

Off-Campus Study (OCS) is an opportunity for you to broaden your liberal education; enhance your major, concentration, or other area of academic interest; and develop hard and soft skills. Although Grinnell College recognizes that just being and studying in a new and challenging environment is a valuable learning experience, the college believes the opportunity will be even more enriching if closely integrated with your coursework on campus. Work together with your academic adviser and the OCS Office to choose a program that supplements and enhances your Grinnell education. The college offers two of its own off-campus study programs: Grinnell-in-Washington (DC) and Grinnell-in-London (UK). Both programs feature a liberal arts curriculum led by Grinnell faculty as well as internship opportunities that take full advantage of their locations.

Do it: Talk with your adviser about your interest and visit the OCS website at www.grinnell.edu/offices/ocs/.

Conducting Informational Interviews

Not sure about your career goals? Or are you ready to start networking with professionals in some professional fields you might be interested in? One of the best ways to learn an industry, company, or position is to talk with people, ideally alumni, in careers you are considering. No one else can give you a better sense of the real-life experiences, the challenges and opportunities, the work-life balance, the specific (and perhaps hidden) demands, and the drawbacks and limitations of a particular career field. You can also learn about the skills necessary to be successful in various industries from people using those skills everyday. Informational interviews are best when you can arrange them face-to-face—and ideally in the setting in which you are interested in working—but they can also be conducted by phone, e-mail, or Skype. You can also begin to develop soft skills while conducting your informational interview; you'll practice listening with objectivity and speaking effectively, while identifying your own beliefs, values, and self-efficacy. Setting up informational interviews is easy; they can be coordinated through personal referrals, written requests, or even cold-call contacts.

Do it: Visit the CLS to discuss strategies for reaching out or to pick up a list of potential interview questions and topics.

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Center for Careers, Life, and Service

To make an appointment, call 641-269-4940

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