CAREERS OUTSIDE OF ACADEMIA

While the culture in many graduate programs operates under the assumption that students will continue within the academic sphere, this is not always the case. Interests and priorities may shift and the labour market for academic positions continues to be extremely competitive. Options outside academia may provide more interesting and viable career paths for many. A brief outline of the process below will guide you in developing your career outside of academia.

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO EXPLORE

One of the largest initial barriers to exploring options outside of academia is a psychological one. Given the familiarity with, and emphasis on the academic route, admitting to yourself and others that you may be exploring a different path can be difficult. This difficulty can be compounded by: fears of making the wrong choice; not wanting to disappoint family and colleagues; uncertainty about other options; lack of familiarity with job search protocol; and uncertainty about where one’s skills may fit. Choosing to explore non-academic careers can be daunting. However, those who make an informed decision to leave academia tend to find the move both satisfying and liberating.

A Statistics Canada survey found that Masters and Doctorate graduates enjoyed a higher income than graduates of both Bachelors and college programs*. This indicates that far from “wasted” time as it is sometimes feared, those who choose to leave academia are well prepared for employment opportunities both in and out of the post-secondary setting.

This same study indicated that those with a Master’s degree experienced lower unemployment rates than those with Doctorate or Bachelor’s degrees and that the salary difference between those with Masters and Doctorate degrees was minimal. Far from negatively impacting your employability or income opportunities, completing your studies at the Masters level, when executed strategically, can be of great benefit to your career.

PREPARE YOURSELF

Ask yourself. Finding satisfying work requires honest answers to what appear to be simple questions. Still, it is not uncommon for students to progress from one academic level to another without considering the cornerstones of career decisions: skills, interests, personality and values. Take the time to ask yourself: What do I really want from my career? What distinguishes me? What do I enjoy doing most? When does ‘time fly’ for me? What’s important to me in a workplace? These questions require you to focus on yourself and articulate your priorities.

Know yourself. Review your experiences, paid and unpaid, academic and non-academic. What skills or qualities stand out? Which would you like to use in your career? Use our skills inventory (available through a Career Counsellor) for help making a comprehensive list of the skills you both have and want to develop. Be they acquired in work, volunteering, hobbies, or academics, all of your skills will help you gain entry to a variety of workplaces and careers. Think about the values you hold, the things that are important to your satisfaction and list these too. The patterns and themes that emerge may point you in new directions. Our Career Counsellors are trained to help students assess their strengths and priorities, explore careers, make decisions, and prepare for the job search. For assistance, make an appointment by contacting our front desk at 905.828.5451 or by coming into the Career Centre at DV 3094.

Know your market. The next step is to think about what companies, organizations, ministries, and associations exist that could use someone with your skills and expertise. You have the primary skill needed to gather this information: research, make note of contacts you may have worked with throughout your education, familiarize yourself with our online job posting system to find out who has hired people like you in the past, attend job fairs and employer seminars to connect with employee representatives, talk to UTM alumni, and meet with a Career Counsellor for guidance in exploring non-academic options. The Career Centre provides a wide variety of resources. For further information on finding your focus outside academia see our Graduate Student Resources: http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/resources-for-graduate-students/find-your-focus/developing-your-career-path-outside-academia

PREPARE YOUR NETWORK

As roughly 80% of all jobs come through networking, the development and maintenance of contacts is an essential component of your job search strategy. In addition, talking to contacts allows you to further your research and understand where your best fit is.
Networking is essentially the development and maintenance of contacts. These could be contacts from previous job/internship experiences, conferences attended, associations joined, industry partners you’ve worked with throughout your education, contacts made through faculty, friends and family and, finally, contacts you initiate yourself. LinkedIn is a great online tool that can help in a variety of ways with networking and career exploration. Attend our workshop: LinkedIn Essentials for Job Search to learn how to use this tool in your job search and get critiques of your LinkedIn profile (check the Career Centre Events Calendar for dates)

To build your network:
- Ask your faculty, friends, and family if they know anyone in industries, companies or areas you are interested in learning more about
- Conduct information interviews to understand your options and grow your network
- Collect business cards and keep in periodic contact with those you connect with
- Attend information sessions and career panels organized by the Career Centre to learn more about opportunities off campus and build connections with company reps
- Build your LinkedIn profile, build an online network and join a discussion group
- Check out the U of T Alumni Group on LinkedIn to search for alumni in your field of interest and connect with them

While some of the on-campus events may be targeted to undergraduate students, this is due more to numbers than opportunity. Use these opportunities to connect with employers on campus and explore options for someone with your expertise. Check out our graduate student networking resources: http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/resources-for-graduate-students/careers-outside-academia/networking-and-developing-your-presence

PREPARE YOUR JOB SEARCH
Applying for a job in industry can be quite different from applying for academic positions. Highly qualified applicants may rule themselves out of the competition by not using best job search practices. Below is a brief overview of steps to follow in your preparation. Our Career Counsellors are here to offer support throughout your job search.

Prepare your resume and cover letter: In academia, a multiple page CV and a two-page cover letter are the norms. By contrast, employers outside academia look for concise documents that clearly exhibit your knowledge of the business and your unique ability to address their needs. Resumes are limited to two pages, cover letters to one page, and both documents are targeted to specific openings as opposed to generic form documents. Check out our graduate student job search resources: http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/resources-for-graduate-students/careers-outside-academia/job-search-tools-and-skills-maximize-your
Make an appointment for a Resume Critique to have your documents reviewed.

Prepare a list of organizations to target: This will be an ongoing task as opposed to a one-time event. Organizations will have different needs at different times. A company without openings today may find themselves with several openings next month. Your job is to develop lists of possibilities, make contact in-person, (as opposed to simply forwarding a resume), maintain periodic contact with those companies and be informed of new possibilities. Find out more about researching organizations in our Graduate Student job search resources: http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/resources-for-graduate-students/careers-outside-academia/how-investigate-careers-various-sectors

Practice your interview skills: Discussing your research and experience in ways that make sense to a layperson and addressing a job opening’s needs can be challenging. Take advantage of the Career Centre’s interview tip-sheets, workshops, and mock interview sessions and practice marketing your skills and experience in advance of your face to face encounters with employers.

Resources tailored to the needs of graduate students are available through our comprehensive Graduate Student Resources pages on the Career Centre web site: http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/resources-for-graduate-students, and in our Library. Our professional staff will support you through each stage of the process, so don’t hesitate to come in or call us with your questions and concerns.

Please note that this information is subject to change. It is best to refer to the original sources for the most up to date information. (Updated April 2018)