



A Career Guide for Liberal Arts Students

INTRODUCTION

If you are a liberal arts student, you may have special needs related to your job search. Although you have a broad educational background and a number of career options, it may seem difficult to get the job-search process started. This guide is for you, whether you are majoring in psychology, history, English, botany or philosophy; whether you are looking for a business career, a career with the government or a nonprofit organization; and whether you are a first-year student, senior, or somewhere in between.

MYTHS ABOUT LIBERAL ARTS STUDENTS

MYTH #1: Job opportunities through on-campus recruiting represent the actual employment market in the “real world.” If you don’t like the opportunities listed in the On-Campus Recruiting Schedule or you don’t see employers you are interested in, Career Services can’t help you.

FACT: You probably have noticed that some organizations such as advertising agencies, publishers, radio and television stations, museums, research foundations, newspapers, and various nonprofit organizations do not recruit liberal arts majors through the on-campus recruiting program. The reason for this is that rarely, if ever, do these organizations recruit on any college campus. Most of these types of employers do not have enough openings at any given time to warrant the expense of recruiting on college campuses. However, the Career Resource Center within Career Services (Hoyt Hall) has a number of directories that identify employers in all these areas and more. In addition, we maintain an extensive website with access to various career and job-search resources (www.muohio.edu/careers/).

MYTH #2: Liberal arts majors can only teach or go into sales.

FACT: The fields of education and marketing are desirable for some liberal arts majors, but not all. The field you choose depends on your individual interests, skills, and experiences. Your liberal arts background has prepared you for a multitude of career fields.

MYTH #3: Liberal arts majors can’t compete with business majors because business majors have an edge based on their academic coursework and background.

FACT: If an employer is willing to interview arts & science students, the employer is indicating their

acknowledgment that a liberal arts education provides the background they are seeking. The key is to effectively articulate the skills the employer desires. In this instance, a liberal arts major is as equally qualified for the job as the business major, or the employer would not indicate an interest in considering liberal arts students. However, it is up to liberal arts students to “sell” themselves effectively.

MYTH #4: You must go to graduate school rather than begin a career right out of undergraduate school.

FACT: Although a liberal education is a strong background for students seeking professional training in law, medicine, business, or other specialized fields, you should not feel like you do not have a choice. You do have a choice . . . several choices! There are many fields in the world of work that require well-rounded graduates at the entry level. Some examples are writing, editing, communications, advertising, mass media, public relations, retailing, insurance, fund-raising, publishing and government work.

WHAT SKILLS ARE EMPLOYERS SEEKING IN NEW HIRES?

It is important for you to have an understanding of the specific skills an employer is seeking in a new hire. Obviously, this will vary depending on the job description. However, there are skill requirements employers tend to cite across all disciplines for most jobs. They are:

- Oral communication skills
- Written communication skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Proficiency in field of study or technical competence
- Demonstrated teamwork
- Leadership abilities
- Flexibility
- Analytical skills
- Computer knowledge
- Internship/co-op experience
- Problem-solving skills
- Decision-making abilities
- Initiative
- Goal-orientation
- Sincere interest in job

WHAT SKILLS DO EMPLOYERS VALUE MOST?

- *Writing Skills* – to express oneself clearly through written words
- *Interpersonal/Social Skills* – to get along well with others

- *Negotiation Skills* – to bring about an agreement by bargaining
- *Problem-Solving Ability* – to identify the source of a problem and provide a solution
- *Global Awareness* – to possess an understanding of other cultures
- *Ability to Synthesize* – to combine separate elements to form a new whole
- *Multicultural Skills* – to relate to people from diverse cultures
- *Foreign Language Skills* – to communicate in multiple languages
- *Creativity* – to bring a fresh perspective to a situation
- *Organizational Skills* – to manage multiple projects effectively
- *Self-starter* – to work efficiently without supervision
- *Teamwork Ability* – to work well with others and put personal interests aside for the good of the group
- *Oral Communication Skills* – to express oneself clearly through the spoken word
- *Flexibility* – to adapt to new and different situations
- *Leadership Skills* – to guide the activities of a group and influence the opinions of others
- *Presentation Skills* – to deliver a message to an audience effectively
- *Computer Skills* – to be knowledgeable about various types of computers and software
- *Critical Thinking Skills* – to sift through large amounts of information and make decisions about what is most useful
- *Analytical Skills* – to examine in detail or to separate data, ideas, or objects into their parts

Derived from *Skills for a Lifetime: “What You Can Do with a Liberal Arts Degree,”* from Connecticut College, New London, Connecticut.

DOES A LIBERAL ARTS STUDENT POSSESS THESE SKILLS?

The response to this question is a definite “YES!” Why then do many liberal arts majors have difficulty recognizing that they possess these skills? The primary reason is that many students simply fail to take an adequate assessment of themselves. As part of this assessment, a personal skills inventory such as the following may be helpful.

Formal Assessment

A more formal assessment of your interests, values, needs, and personality can also be very enlightening, and can be obtained through Career Services. An appointment may be easily arranged by calling 529-3831.

Targeting and Focusing Your Goals

After you define what you have to offer, it is time to think about how to apply it. WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? and WHY? are questions you will need to be able to respond to.

- WHO? Who do you want to work for? Government ... advertising agency...social services...retail...market research...public relations...sales...? The advantage of a liberal arts education is that it provides options to you. Therefore, it is all right to be considering various options. However, it is equally important to develop some focus among your options.
- WHAT? What skills do you want to use in your job? Organizing skills...research skills...writing skills ...analytical skills...managing skills...computer skills...?
- WHERE? Where do you want to be geographically? Ohio...Midwest...South...East Coast...? Realize that Career Services has many employers who recruit on campus who are looking for candidates to locate throughout the U.S. Also, there are resources and directories in our Career Resource Center and on our website (www.muohio.edu/careers/) that identify employers in various geographic areas in which you may want to work.
- WHEN? When will you be available for employment? January...May...August...?
- WHY? Why are you interested in a particular job or organization? This is a very important question you must be prepared to respond to in an interview.

If you do not have difficulty responding to the WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? and WHY? questions, you probably have good career focus. On the other hand, if you do have difficulty in responding to these questions, it is important for you to take the time to talk with one of our Career Advisors to help you define your career objectives and goals. Several resources that are available in our Career Resource Center, 205 Hoyt Hall, are listed at the end of this guide to assist you in this process.

PERSONAL SKILLS INVENTORY

Educational Degrees/Majors	Skills Needed	Your Best Skills
1.		
2.		
3.		

Educational Degrees/Majors	Skills Needed	Your Best Skills
1.		
2.		
3.		

Educational Degrees/Majors	Skills Needed	Your Best Skills
1.		
2.		
3.		

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2.		
3.		

(Developed by Larry Roper, The University of Delaware)

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING AS A STRATEGY TO DEVELOP FOCUS

One of the best ways to gain insight into specific careers is to talk to people in those careers—interview them for information. Informational interviewing can help you obtain information about a specific field or organization and can help you decide on a career path. Also, it can help you become more skilled at interviewing, increase your self-confidence, and give you insight that can enable you to gain a competitive edge in the job market. For more information on how to arrange and conduct informational interviews, refer to the *Job-Search Strategies* guide available in our Career Resource Center or via our website. Also review the suggested readings in the resource section of this guide.

Other written resources such as *Great Jobs for Liberal Arts Majors* and *Top Careers for Liberal Arts Graduates* are also helpful in exploring various careers and jobs available to liberal arts majors. The Career Resource Center has a great deal of literature about careers, as do most libraries. Also, do not overlook the career-related literature available from most professional and trade organizations that can generally be obtained free upon written request or on the organization's website. An important note is that most liberal arts students are presumed to have good research skills—prove it to prospective employers by carefully investigating the various sources of career information.

HOW TO MARKET YOUR SKILLS TO EMPLOYERS

Now that you know the skills an employer is seeking in new hires and you have done a personal skills inventory of your own, how do you articulate your skills to an employer? This is a crucial point that liberal arts students must understand. It is not enough to know the skills and abilities developed by your liberal education; *you must be able to articulate those skills and abilities as they relate to the position you are seeking.*

To articulate your skills and abilities effectively, you must have an understanding of the job. This is where your research about the job and doing your homework about the organization are essential. You will not be able to “sell” your skills and qualifications competitively if you are unable to do this. In addition, you must be prepared to cite specific examples about how you developed these skills and abilities.

What are the skills you possess as a result of a liberal education background? They are:

Information Management Skills

- The ability to synthesize facts, concepts and principles.
- The ability to evaluate information against standards.

Design and Planning Skills

- The ability to identify alternative courses of action.
- The ability to predict future trends and patterns.

Research and Investigation Skills

- The ability to identify problems and needs.
- The ability to identify information sources for special needs or problems.

Communication Skills

- The ability to speak effectively to individuals and groups.
- The ability to use various forms and styles of written communication.

Human Relations and Interpersonal Skills

- The ability to generate and maintain group cooperation and support.
- The ability to interact effectively with peers, superiors, and subordinates.

Critical Thinking Skills

- The ability to identify quickly and accurately the critical issues when making a decision or solving a problem.
- The ability to analyze the interrelationships of events and ideas from several perspectives.

Management and Administration Skills

- The ability to motivate and lead people.
- The ability to organize people and tasks to achieve specific goals.

Valuing Skills

- The ability to identify one's own values.
- The ability to appreciate the contributions of art, literature, science, and technology to contemporary society.

Personal/Career Development and Learning Skills

- The ability to identify one's strengths and weaknesses.
- The ability to accept and learn from criticism.

(Taken in part from *76 Career-Related Liberal Arts Skills* by Paul Breen, American Association for Higher Education.)

What is apparent in reviewing these general skills areas is that they are very similar to the skills and qualifications detailed in the “WHAT SKILLS ARE EMPLOYERS SEEKING IN NEW HIRES?” section of this guide. The key is to articulate these skills effectively to the employer.

Prepare a Good Presentation

A good presentation comes from knowing yourself well. Well-written resumes and cover letters and strong interviewing skills will help prove your strengths to prospective employers. It is not enough to say, “I have good leadership skills.” It is much more effective to say, “My leadership abilities are evident in several positions I have held; for example, as chair of the X group, I was able to A, B, and C. I learned the importance of communicating closely with people and motivating them to do their best work.”

Keep in mind that your resumes and correspondence must be professional in content and appearance and that you must be able to interview comfortably. Knowing how to get a job is as important as being qualified for one. Take full advantage of Career Services’ resources when beginning and conducting your job search.

Show You Have a Working Knowledge of the Field and Organization

Read articles in the popular press, trade and professional journals, and books and literature about skills required for certain types of work. Learn about current issues and future trends in your chosen field of work. Learn as much as possible about a specific organization before contacting them. Know their products, services, and competition. This information can be obtained by reading employer literature, reviewing the employer’s website, or accessing company research sites via Career Services’ website (www.muohio.edu/careers/).

Additionally, King Library has several business databases that are linked under the heading “business” in the indexes/databases section of the library’s website at www.lib.muohio.edu/subjects/Business/indexes. The databases include such indexes as *Business Source Complete*, *Business and Industry*, *Hoover’s Online*, and *Lexis-Nexis*. Another useful database is *Associations Unlimited*, which gives information about various trade and business associations. With this knowledge, you are better prepared to communicate to the employer why you are interested in them and how you can meet their needs.

Show the Organization Why They Should Hire You Over Those Who May Appear Better Qualified

Know your competition. Be familiar with the training other applicants might have had. Know what it is about liberal arts that enhances your assets. Be prepared for the inevitable questions, “Why did you major in (political science) instead of . . .?” Also, emphasize any and all skills and experiences related to the position you are seeking. Show that you have made an effort to commit yourself to the profession or career field you have chosen.

Although it may not seem apparent, most employers are much more interested in whether you can do a job successfully than they are in what your major was. Skills, interests, and experience count for a great deal more in most cases than one’s academic background.

HOW CAN YOU MAKE YOURSELF MORE COMPETITIVE?

If you are a first-, second-, or third-year student, you can greatly enhance your marketability by making yourself competitive in the ways listed below. If you are a senior and are looking for strengths to “sell” to an employer, capitalize on the following strategies that fit your current status. The following suggestions are based on surveys of employers and research by Career Services officials.

Take Career-Related Coursework

Consider two psychology majors applying for a research position. Both have solid backgrounds in psychology. But one has also taken courses in research, statistics, principles of research and development, and has completed an independent study in research. The other has not. Who is the stronger candidate? The moral of the story: taking courses specific to your field of interest or perhaps minoring in that field, enables you to learn the field’s “buzzwords” and what they mean. Pursuing such a concentration allows you to explore the concerns and issues in the field, demonstrates your level of interest and commitment to employers, and helps you to distinguish yourself positively from other candidates.

Get Practical Experience

Summer employment, internships, independent study, and/or volunteer work in an area related to your career choice shows interest in the field, helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and provides you with a working knowledge of the field. Also, these experiences can help you decide if a particular field or type of work is for you, thus solidifying your career objectives or permitting you to explore other career options.

Develop Your Skills through Extracurricular Activities

The majority of employers look very favorably upon extracurricular and civic involvement. These activities can help you develop and enhance your skills and interests and turn them into strengths. Especially beneficial are those activities involving development of leadership potential, interpersonal relations, competition/cooperation, and responsibility and decision making, all of which are potential transferable work skills.

Join Career-Related Organizations

A good career exploration idea is to join career-related student organizations and attend presentations of visiting speakers. Better yet, help arrange some of those programs and events—you will learn a great deal and make some excellent contacts. Most organizations are open to students of any major, even though their names may suggest otherwise. Remember, the more you know about the career you have chosen, the more tension will be alleviated in the entire job-search process, and the more confidence you will have in yourself.

Take a Course in Career Development

In addition to the other career services available to you, Miami University offers two levels of career development courses:

EDL 100 & EDL 302

Career Services offers two levels of career development courses: *EDL 100—Career Development and the College Student* and *EDL 302—Career Entry Skills/Post-College Planning*.

- **EDL 100** is a two-credit sprint (eight-week) course. It takes students through the exploration process of learning about one's self (through testing and assignments), learning about majors and careers, and learning how to find the best "fit" between themselves and potential career paths. It is open to first-year students and sophomores.
- **EDL 302** is a two-credit semester-long course. It is designed to assist students in making the transition from college to the world-of-work. Resume building, cover letters, job-search strategies, and interviewing skills are a few of the learning outcomes. It is open to juniors and seniors.

Develop a Support Network

Family, friends, and professors can be invaluable sources of job leads and contacts. You have heard the

expression, "two heads are better than one." The more people who can help you put out feelers for job leads and provide moral support, the better for your job search.

COMMON NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

You need to understand that there are employers who may have negative stereotypes about liberal arts majors. Some typical criticisms are:

Liberal arts majors lack clearly defined career goals and commitment to a chosen field of work. Research indicates that employers look favorably upon a prospective employee who has done some thinking about his/her future. The student who says, "I like people," or "I'm looking for something in science," or "I'd like to work for awhile and then go to graduate school" is a risk for a prospective employer. Putting yourself in the employer's shoes, would you want to invest time and money in training someone who may leave after they decide what they really want to do?

Liberal arts majors have little or no preparation for the world of work. Some liberal arts majors tend not to have knowledge of the realities of the fields they pursue. Therefore, not knowing the issues in the field and not "speaking the employer's language," they are not considered serious candidates. Furthermore, often they know little or nothing about the firm or organization to which they are applying.

Liberal arts majors rarely see how their skills and training will match the needs of the organization in which they seek employment. A job candidate with the attitude that "I can do anything—make me something" cannot compete with other candidates who have researched the employer and can articulate what they have to offer that employer. It is your responsibility as a job candidate to make the connection between the employer and yourself. Instead of having them make you something, think in terms of what you have that may be of value to them.

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

In any job search there are certain tendencies one must avoid. The tendencies particular to liberal arts majors in their job search are listed below.

Failure to Show Sincere Interest

Show employers, through examples of what you have done to be competitive, that you are definitely interested in their field. Actions and experience

Speak louder than words. Remember, employers are looking for genuine commitment from prospective employees, and they are unlikely to take a chance on a job candidate who seems to just be “going through the motions” of seeking a position.

Being Too Versatile

The “I’ll take anything” approach is not a virtue in the job search. Have goals and a target for those goals. Know what you want and what you have to offer. Be able to convincingly articulate your career interests and skills to prospective employers.

Overselling Inadequate Qualifications

A single related course, activity or work experience is unlikely, in and of itself, to land you a job. Sell all your qualifications, but do not “oversell” a single accomplishment. Once again, be realistic.

Expecting High Starting Salaries

Usually, non-technical fields have lower starting salaries than technical fields. Keep in mind the whole package though—benefits, possible educational opportunities, promotions, and the opportunity to gain experience for future career goals.

Expecting Too Much from Training Programs

Many liberal arts majors pride themselves on the fact that they are “trainable” and emphasize this as a selling point to prospective employers. Well, everyone is trainable. Rather than turning off employers by over-emphasizing the obvious, concentrate on special skills and abilities that make you an outstanding candidate to employers. The key to a successful job search is in positively distinguishing yourself from other applicants. Your unique qualifications, coupled with the ability to conduct an effective job-search campaign, will get you job offers—not the fact that you are “trainable.”

Overlooking Smaller and Medium-Sized Employers

Too many new college graduates get caught up in “the Fortune 500 game.” Although smaller- and medium-sized organizations rarely recruit on college campuses, they frequently provide excellent career opportunities for liberal arts graduates who seek them out. Often, these types of organizations allow for a much greater degree of autonomy and creativity than their larger counterparts. Moreover, since “small business” comprises a majority of the American economy, career opportunities with these types of companies should be carefully considered.

MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

You may be wondering if you will be successful in the job-search process. The staff at Career Services knows you can be if you follow the strategies suggested in this guide, and if you take full advantage of the resources and services available to you. Know from the outset that your job search will require increased effort on your part because there are more possibilities to consider and because it may take more time for you to develop focus in your career objective(s). Conducting a personal skills inventory, researching fields of interest, managing your options, identifying prospective employers, and learning effective job-search strategies all will require time and commitment. However, if you are willing to put this time and effort into the process, we are confident you will be successful in your pursuit of your career goals. Career Services is committed to assisting our liberal arts majors and hopes you will take full advantage of the services available to you.

CAREER SERVICES WEBSITE

For additional information about Career Services, please refer to our website at www.muohio.edu/careers/.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE CAREER RESOURCE CENTER FOR LIBERAL ARTS MAJORS

10 Things Employers Want You to Learn in College, Bill Coplin, Ten Speed Press.

40 Best Fields for Your Career, Michael Farr and Laurence Shatkin, JIST Works.

50 Best Jobs for Your Personality, Michael Farr and Laurence Shatkin, JIST Publishing.

175 Best Jobs Not Behind a Desk, Michael Farr and Laurence Shatkin, JIST Works.

200 Best Jobs for College Graduates, Michael Farr and LaVerne L. Ludden, JIST Publishing.

The Back Door Guide to Short-Term Job Adventures, M. Landes, Ten Speed Press.

Best Entry Level Jobs, Rob Lieber & Tom Meltzer, Princeton Review.

Best Jobs for the 21st Century, Michael Farr and Laurence Shatkin, JIST Works.

The Big Book of Jobs, U.S. Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics, McGraw-Hill.

The Career Guide for Creative and Unconventional People, C. Eikleberry, Ten Speed Press.

Careers for Non-Conformists, S. Gurvis, Marlowe & Company.

College Majors and Careers: A Resource Guide for Effective Life Planning, Paul Phifer, Ferguson.

Current Jobs in Liberal Arts, Vacancies published monthly for liberal arts professions.

Encyclopedia of Careers and Vocational Guidance, Vols. 1-4, Ferguson Publishing Company.

Enhanced Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor.

The Everything Alternative Careers Book, James Mannion, Adams Media.

The Everything Career Tests Book, A. Bronwyn Llewellyn and Robin Holt.

Great Jobs for Liberal Arts Majors, B. Camenson, VGM Career Horizons.

Guide to Your Career (Princeton Review Series), A.B. Bernstein and N. Schaffzin, Random House, Inc.

How to Get Any Job with Any Major, Donald Asher, Ten Speed Press.

I Went to College for This?, Amy Joyce, McGraw-Hill.

Keys to Liberal Arts Success, Figler, Carter, Bishop, and Kravits, Prentice Hall.

The Networking Survival Guide, Diane Darling, McGraw-Hill.

Odder Jobs, Nancy Schiff, Ten Speed Press.

*O*Net Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, JIST Publishing.

Quick Guide to College Majors and Careers, L. Shatken, JIST Publishing.

Smart Moves for Liberal Arts Grads, Sheila Curran and Suzanne Greenwald, Ten Speed Press.

Top Careers for Liberal Arts Graduates, Facts on File.

What Color is Your Parachute?, R. N. Bolles, Ten Speed Press.

Your Career Is an Extreme Sport, Eileen P. Gunn, Adams Media

Please note that there are many more resources available at King Library, too numerous to list here, which would also be helpful to liberal arts students pursuing employment.

Career Services website: Be sure to access our website for additional resources and job-listing information at www.muohio.edu/careers/students/internetsites