

SPS Graduate Student Career Checklist*

*Varies by area of study and length of program

The SPS Graduate Student Career Checklist was designed to assist you with your career development from the start of your graduate program to your post-degree job search. It is also intended to be a resource you can bring to your SPS Adviser for discussion. Your SPS Adviser can guide you through each stage and answer questions along the way.

Year 1

Professional Development

- Assess skills you need to develop for potential career paths, ex: MSPA students might want to develop their modeling skills if they want to be an analyst**
- Review and follow your timeline for degree completion established by your SPS adviser
- View SPS Webinars on Resume Writing, then **write your resume and update quarterly**
- Create and update your LinkedIn profile**
- Meet with SPS Adviser to clarify career goals
- Take on a leadership role relevant to your career interests
- Expand your skills and experience through:
 - Internships, volunteer work, part-time or summer employment
 - Outside of school projects

Explore Career Options

- Conduct online research and informational interviews to learn about career paths within your field of study**
- Shadow NU alumni through Northwestern Career Advancement's (NCA) NEXT program to learn more about a specific field and to make contact within your field
- Explore career option in your field of study, you might take an interest inventory to further examine your career interests (see your SPS adviser for details)
- Attend employer information sessions to learn about opportunities, a complete list can be found in CareerCat. CareerCat is NCA's on-line career management resource** (includes job postings, employer information sessions).
<http://www.northwestern.edu/careers/job-intern-prep/resources/careercat/index.html>

Build Your Network

- Identify mentors who support your career goals and professional development**
- Attend networking events or conferences hosted by professional associations and alumni groups**
- If you are local, meet and network with current and former graduate students in your department and around campus (LinkedIn can help with this)**
- Keep in touch with networking contacts you developed prior to graduate school
- Review SPS Webinar on Networking Skills
- Develop a Networking tracking tool to keep your contacts organized (Excel is an option)
- Attend career fairs in your area to learn about employers who recruit graduate students

Start Job Search process

- ___ Familiarize yourself with hiring cycles for your field of interest
- ___ **Meet with your SPS Adviser to create a job search timeline based on hiring cycles and the length of your program**
- ___ **Examine job descriptions to identify required qualifications to be a competitive applicant**
- ___ Register for CareerCat, NCA's on-line career management resource
- ___ **Identify sources of job postings for your field of interest including websites, professional associations, CareerCat**
- ___ Develop an elevator speech for use at networking events
- ___ Discuss Interviewing strategies with your SPS Adviser
- ___ Familiarize yourself with resources, including Career Insider (Vault), Wet Feet, and Hoover's
- ___ Leverage social media to follow employers and make contacts (LinkedIn, Twitter)

Summer

Professional Development

- ___ Conduct an overall audit of your Career Checklist to note progress and gaps
- ___ **Reflect on experiences in the first year of your program and how they may have influenced your career direction and interests**
- ___ Gain experience relevant to your career goals through volunteer work, internships, part-time employment, taking on new responsibilities at work, outside research, additional classes via MOOCs

Explore Career Options

- ___ Develop a list of desired positions and employers based upon your online research and networking.
- ___ Identify what positions employers are hiring for and the qualifications required

Build Your Network

- ___ Continue suggestions **in bold** from Year 1
- ___ **Use LinkedIn to identify names of alumni contacts at your desired employers**
- ___ **Attend as many networking events as possible to meet contacts in your field of interest**
- ___ **Post articles to LinkedIn to be more visible to employers/contacts**

Continue Job Search Process

- ___ Continue suggestions **in bold** from Year 1
- ___ **Prepare responses for common interview questions**
- ___ Schedule a practice interview with your NCA Adviser
- ___ Draft application materials for the job search (resume, cover letter, etc.) and have them critiqued by your SPS Adviser and your mentors
- ___ Begin process early of identifying at least three potential references who can speak positively about your abilities as a potential employee
- ___ Update your references on your progress and career plans
- ___ Have a clear understanding of how employers within your industry of interest recruit and when

Year 2

Professional Development

- Continue suggestions **in bold** from Year 1 and summer
- Research starting salaries for positions of interest using websites like glassdoor.com, salary.com, & indeed.com
- Review SPS Webinar to learn strategies for negotiating a job offer

Activate Your Network

- Continue suggestions **in bold** from Year 1 and summer
- Inform your networking contacts about your job search and availability
- Engage employers or alumni using informational interviewing, your SPS Adviser can provide tips. For example, how to best leverage professional associations

Continue Job Search Process

- Continue suggestions **in bold** from Year 1 and summer
- Develop a sustainable job search routine that you can manage within your busy schedule, including checking websites, researching new employers, networking with new and old contacts, and actively send our resumes/cover letters
- Tailor resumes and cover letters to the position and employer, ask your SPS Adviser to do a final check
- Login to CareerCat to review positions posted for NU graduate students
- Attend career-related events (professional association conferences, career fairs, panels)
- Attend employer information sessions to market your qualifications to recruiters, see CareerCat for details
- Meet with your NCA Adviser to conduct a mock interview

Special Considerations

For SPS Distance Learning Master's Students

Use Career Checklist, but consider the following:

- Attend SPS Distance Learning Weekend
- Leverage Skype to connect with your professors, advisers, and professional networking contacts
- Leverage LinkedIn, NU's "Our Northwestern", and local Alumni Clubs (can also use Undergrad Alumni) to indemnify Alumni from companies of interest in lieu of attending on-campus events
- Make decisions on whether or not you'll be job seeking outside of your current area

For SPS International Students - Begin these activities Year 1 & continue:

- Research job search differences between where you are applying and your home country
- Seek out opportunities to practice and improve your language skills
- Participate in immersion programs that will allow you to experience the culture where you are applying
- Develop a job search plan for positions in the country where you are applying to and your home country
- Use resources like GoingGlobal and Uniworld to identify potential employers
- Meet with the International Office to learn about the application process for CPT and OPT visas

___ Develop networking relationships with:

- ___ Contacts from home country who are employed where you are applying
- ___ Former NU international students who found jobs where you are applying
- ___ International companies operating in the country where you are applying
- ___ Contacts from home country who are potential employers
- ___ Your home country consulate