

SPS Graduate Student Career Checklist

(Varies by area of study and length of program)

The SPS Graduate Student Career Checklist was designed to assist 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.

Year 1:

Professional Development

- **Assess skills you need to develop for potential career paths, ex: MSDS 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: [Resume Fundamentals](#) and [Advanced Resume Writing Strategies](#), then **write your resume and update quarterly.**
- **Create and update your [LinkedIn](#) profile.**
- Meet with your [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 the [NEXT program](#) to learn more about a specific field and to make contacts within your field.
- Explore career options in your field of study, you might take an interest inventory to further examine your career interests. Check out the [Northwestern Career Advancement \(NCA\) webpage](#) for resources.
- Develop a list of desired positions and employers based on your online research and networking.
- Identify what positions employers are hiring for and the qualifications required.

Build Your Network

- **Identify mentors who support your career goals and professional development.**
- Create a [Northwestern Network Mentorship Program](#) profile to connect with alumni and develop mentoring relationships.
- **Attend networking events or conferences hosted by professional associations and alumni groups.**
- Keep in touch with networking contacts you developed prior to graduate school.
- View SPS Webinar: [The Networking Advantage](#)
- 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.
- **Use LinkedIn to identify names of alumni contacts at your desired employers.**
- **Post articles to LinkedIn to be more visible to employers and contacts.**

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 the length of your program.**
- **Examine job descriptions to identify required qualifications to be a competitive applicant.**
- Register for [Handshake](#), NCA's online career management resource.
- **Identify sources of job postings for your field of interest including websites, professional associations and [Handshake](#).**
- Develop an elevator speech for use at networking events.
- View SPS Webinar: [Interviewing](#)
- Discuss interviewing strategies with your [NCA Adviser](#).
- Familiarize yourself with [Northwestern career resources](#), including Career Insider (Vault), Wet Feet, and Hoover's.
- Leverage [social media](#) to follow employers and make contacts (LinkedIn, Twitter).

Year 2:

Professional Development

- Continue suggestions **in bold** from Year 1.
- 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, and additional classes via MOOCs.
- Research starting salaries for positions of interest using websites like glassdoor.com, salary.com, and indeed.com.
- View SPS Webinar: [Negotiating](#)

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 [NCA Adviser](#) can provide tips. For example, how to best leverage professional associations.

Continue Job Search Process

- Continue suggestions **in bold** from Year 1.
- Draft application materials for the job search (resume, cover letter, etc.) and have them critiqued by your [NCA Adviser](#) and your mentors.
- Begin the process 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.
- 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 out resumes/cover letters.
- View SPS Webinar: [Cover Letters](#)
- Tailor resumes and cover letters to the position and employer, ask your [NCA Adviser](#) to do a final check.
- Login to [Handshake](#) to review positions posted for NU graduate students.

- Attend career-related events (professional association conferences, career fairs, panels).
- Prepare responses for common interview questions.
- 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 Symposium for Online Programs](#).
- Utilize Skype to connect with your professors, classmates, and professional networking contacts.
- Leverage LinkedIn and Regional [Alumni Clubs](#) to identify 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:

- 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 [career 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 your home country who are potential employers
 - Your home country consulate