SEC: Senior Empowerment Center

Graduation is in less than 50 days, in case you hadn’t noticed. But we’re sure you’ve noticed. We’re guessing that you’re probably concerned with your prospects post-May 19th and could use advice during this hectic race towards the finish line. You might have a job lined up, a graduate school selected, or an idea of what you want to do in life with no concrete plans. But, maybe you don’t fall into any of those categories and have no clue what you’re doing after graduation. Whatever your case may be, facing the abyss of life after college is intimidating. Together, after having spent a cumulative 7 years at the Student Engagement Center, logging thousands of jobs and internships, answering hundreds of student and employer questions, editing dozens of resumes, and engaging in our own job/internship/graduate school application processes we hope to offer you some peace of mind by giving you a piece of our minds: the best boiled-down help and encouragement we can offer to soon-to-be-grads.

The most important starting point in your job search is a solid resume and a generic cover letter that you can mold to positions you are applying to. Oftentimes, job applications will not require a cover letter and, in the chaos that is senior year, writing one for each application can seem like a Herculean task when you are running on vats of caffeine and shreds of sleep. But, a cover letter can set you apart from the crowd and give you the depth and personal touch that a resume does not always allow. A great jumping off point for resume and cover letter writing is the Student Engagement Center website. The resume examples and the “Action Words” document we have posted can help you describe your experiences in the format that employers are looking for with the words that will catch their attention. We know it’s tempting to Google “cover letter” and “resume” and use the templates and examples that pop up in the first three links; but we guarantee you that our examples are better, easier to follow, and allow for more flexibility than a template.

Once you’ve got a stellar resume, we suggest registering with iEngage. This new system gives you access to job postings both on and off-campus and allows you to upload your resume. Whitman College also provides access to the Nationwide Internship Consortium and NACE, two internship and job databases that provide thousands more opportunities searchable by interest and location. Indeed.com, Idealist.org, Monster.com, Craigslist, and numerous other job/internship databases exist too; and the Student Engagement Center website provides links to these and others. Finally, we want to highlight that one of our favorite online sources for jobs and internships is LinkedIn. We recommend that you start a free account. This wildly popular website lists reputable job and internship offerings, while also providing the opportunity to join groups and network.

Network, yes we just said it; and you’ve probably heard the word so many times it has lost all meaning. But truly, networking is one of the most effective steps you can take on the pathway to job attainment. Whether it’s utilizing the Career Consultant Network or firing off an email to neighbors and family friends, networking can open doors to
mentoring and job opportunities. Some people feel that networking can be intrusive and awkward, but most people find it flattering to have young graduates asking for advice. It might sound corny, but the professionals you’re networking with are people too and were likely in very similar shoes to the ones you are wearing now. Best scenario, they offer you a job. Worst scenario, they don’t email back. Either way, it’s worth a shot. And if they can’t help you, they probably can connect you with someone else who can. It’s hardly the scary situation many people build it up to be. We both speak from personal experience in saying that networking is fun, fulfilling, and well worth your time.

Many people believe that following graduation, alumni are severed from the services that Whitman College offers like a pruned branch forced to sprout new roots. Luckily, this is far from the case. Following graduation, you are still able to take advantage of the wide variety of Student Engagement Center resources. Staff continue to edit resumes and cover letters, conduct mock interviews (over phone or in person), provide graduate school guidance, assist with job and internship searches, and help you access the Career Consultant Network (a database of over 1300 alumni and parent volunteers who offer informational interviews, job shadowing, and internships). Of course, these services are also available to you while you are still at Whitman, and an appointment to explore any of these services is only an email, phone call, or stop by the SEC office away. Alternatively, you can drop in to the Student Engagement Center without an appointment on Tuesdays and Fridays from 3:30-5 for 10 minute appointments.

As graduation draws closer, it is important to remember that you will be okay. It’s possible that your job search won’t pan out by the time you graduate, maybe it will take a few months or more. But as Phillip Phillips would say, “just know you’re not alone.” We may not be able to “make this place your home,” but we can do a pretty mean resume edit.