

CAREER READINESS GUIDE

Prepare for success with your
liberal arts advantage



COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS IS DEDICATED TO ADVANCING SOCIETY.
WE FIND ANSWERS IN THE WISDOM OF THE PAST, THE DATA OF THE NOW,
AND IN THE ELEVATION OF THE HUMAN CONDITION. TOGETHER WE ARE
SHATTERING EXPECTATIONS OF WHAT A LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE CAN BE.

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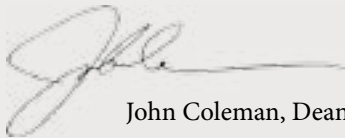
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“CLA ALUMNI WILL BE THE MOST DESIRABLE GRADUATES AVAILABLE.”

This is how I articulated our vision for undergraduate education in the CLA Roadmap, our strategic plan for the college. In fact, Career Readiness is the very first goal of the Roadmap, which shows how important I believe that goal is, and how focused we are in CLA on making you ready for post-graduation life.

We are implementing the *CLA Career Readiness Initiative* to make the Readiness goal a reality. We started planning the initiative in Fall 2015, and are now rolling out the initial stages this academic year. In fact, this guidebook is one of those initial steps. In it, you will see how Career Readiness is an integral part of your education and how academic and career preparation can go hand in hand. It is designed to be a companion for your entire undergraduate career and has advice and handy tips for you regardless of whether you are a first-year student or looking to graduate. There is a lot more of the initiative in development than what we describe here, so be sure to read next year's edition of the guide to see the progress we are making.

Your liberal arts education is preparing you for a life of continuous growth and discovery—exactly what you need to lead successful careers in a world where technologies and professions are always in flux. We in CLA, including administrators, faculty, and staff, dedicate ourselves to ensuring that you are well prepared for that kind of world—that you are career ready.



John Coleman, Dean
College of Liberal Arts



HELPFUL CAREER READINESS RESOURCES

For a complete list of the helpful career readiness resources you can use as a CLA student, visit: cla.umn.edu/career-resources

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READY?

This guide is a key element of CLA's Career Readiness Initiative, and it has one simple purpose: To help you be **READY** for your future career, whatever that career may be. Whether you're in your first year or your last or somewhere in between, and whether you came here as a freshman or transferred in: This book is for you.

In CLA, *career readiness* means:

- Developing the *Core Career Competencies*, which reflect the very essence of liberal arts education—and the competitive advantage it offers in today's uncertain and dynamic economy.
- Learning to articulate your competencies.
- Being able to translate your competencies into the language of employers and others.

The first part of this guide provides a detailed overview of what career readiness is and why it matters. You'll learn about the rationale for the CLA Career Readiness Initiative, get a sense of its organizing framework, and discover the collegiate resources available to help you become career ready. Most of what you need is already present in a liberal arts education; the unique focus of the Career Readiness Initiative is helping you recognize the Core Career Competencies you gain as a CLA student and then articulate them in other settings.

One aspect of career readiness that is not a standard component of a liberal arts education is Career Management. So the second part of this guide offers an in-depth discussion of Career Management activities and concepts. Here you'll find very practical, nuts-and-bolts advice on everything from exploring majors and pursuing significant experiences to searching for a job or applying for graduate school.

All along the way you'll be guided by the *CLA Career Management Model*, a tool you can use to navigate your career path both now and throughout your life. The CLA Career Management Model is made up of three interdependent phases, which you cycle through continuously as both you and the world around you change:

EXPLORE » EXPERIENCE » EXCEL

Whatever you do, wherever you go, however you plan to get there, we want you to be **READY**. Prepared for a dynamic environment where both you and the conditions around you are constantly evolving. Well-rounded and thoroughly equipped for success and satisfaction. Poised for a positive, productive life after college.

THE MORE YOU PUT IN, THE MORE YOU'LL GET OUT

This guide isn't meant to be read straight through in one sitting. We recognize that you will jump around various sections as you need them. That's fine; use the guide the way that makes the most sense to you. Just make sure you use it! It's like the rest of your liberal arts education: The more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it.

So read the guide, but don't stop there. Do the reflection and decision-making exercises. Visit the people or offices or websites we suggest. Apply what you're learning.

Becoming career ready is challenging; it's hard work that involves serious thinking and reflection, serious planning, and serious action.

Career readiness is also exciting and rewarding, especially if you are willing and able to take it on as your challenge and embrace it as yet another reason to study in the liberal arts.

Please know that this guide is not your sole career readiness resource. Within CLA you will find programs, systems, and knowledgeable people—including academic and departmental advisors, career counselors, faculty members, and others—in place to help you become career ready. This book can help you identify and connect with them so that you have the guidance you need when you need it.

IT'S TIME TO START DOWN YOUR PATH TO CAREER READINESS;
WE'LL BE WITH YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.

“ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS”

Give Yourself “the Time, the Space, and the Effort” to Become Career Ready

“Deciding on your career is (obviously) an enormous decision, and one that requires a lot of careful thought and reflection. But college is so oppressively busy, with so many different demands and obligations cluttering up your mind, that—at least in my experience—it's very difficult to find the time and mental space to consider anything deeply.

It can be easy, therefore, to get swept up in a particular track or a particular career path by inertia: because that's the path you started on, and because you've never really taken the time to consider getting off of it. That doesn't mean, of course, that there's anything wrong with staying on the path you started on. Just make sure you give yourself the time, the space, and the effort to really consider what you want to do.”

— English major

All Sorts of Career Readiness Help Is Available to You—Right on Campus

“Take advantage of the many resources offered at the U of M. Talk to professors. (Even in large classes, they will almost certainly be happy—even excited—to talk with you.) Go to CLA Career Services. Watch your email for opportunities sent out by your academic department. Get involved with alumni mentors. Go to special events and network.”

— Spanish studies major

THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS:

OUR COMMITMENT TO CAREER READINESS

- What Is Career Readiness? And Why Does It Matter?
- CLA's Resources
- The CLA Career Management Model—Your Career Readiness Navigational Tool

WHAT IS CAREER READINESS?

AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

There are many ways to define and acknowledge the value of a liberal arts degree. Your liberal arts education is preparing you to be an active citizen, a smart consumer, an innovator, a problem solver, an analytical and critical thinker in all you do and in your many life roles. It is also giving you the sheer joy of studying, in depth, something you care deeply about. All of these outcomes matter. All of them are worth the time, energy, and money you invest.

But if you're like most students, one of the reasons you're here in college is to prepare for a future career, whatever that may look like for you. And you want to be **READY**—career ready—when you leave here.

Let's break down this concept of *career readiness*, starting with the word “career.”

In the College of Liberal Arts, we recognize and support the idea that “career” means different things to different people at different times. For most college students, it means pursuing *employment* after graduation, usually in the form of a private-sector job but sometimes in nonprofit organizations, public service (government) agencies, the military, or related opportunities like AmeriCorps or the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program. For some college students, “career” means pursuing additional *education* (i.e., graduate or professional school). For a small but growing few it means pursuing some sort of independent journey, like starting a small business or doing freelance work.

Your “career” could be any one of these unique paths for you, and it can and undoubtedly will change, multiple times, over the course of your lifetime as you and the world around you evolve.

We define “career readiness” as developing—and then being able to convincingly demonstrate and articulate—ten *Core Career Competencies* that reflect the very essence of your liberal arts education. We have identified these competencies through

exhaustive discussions with employers, graduate and professional schools, faculty members, U of M alumni, government agencies, and national career development organizations.

The Core Career Competencies are:

- » Analytical & Critical Thinking
- » Applied Problem Solving
- » Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making
- » Innovation & Creativity
- » Oral & Written Communication
- » Teamwork & Leadership
- » Engaging Diversity
- » Active Citizenship & Community Engagement
- » Digital Literacy
- » Career Management

THE CORE CAREER COMPETENCIES THAT DEFINE CAREER READINESS



THE CORE CAREER COMPETENCIES

The Core Career Competencies not only define career readiness, they give you a practical framework to **show your career readiness**—to prove it—to prospective employers or to graduate school admissions committees. They also help you and your family see the liberal arts advantage, spelled out in tangible terms.

If you are intentional and plan your education carefully, you will develop these Core Career Competencies in your classes and through outside engagement activities you can pursue as a student in CLA. This will give you an indisputable competitive edge in today's changing, complex world.

YOU ARE MORE THAN YOUR MAJOR

Notice that the Core Career Competencies are independent of your major. When the Association of American Colleges and Universities asked employers what they most value in both their recently hired and their more experienced employees, 93 percent of the respondents said they want employees with liberal arts backgrounds—and that fundamental liberal arts competencies such as thinking critically, communicating clearly, and solving complex problems are more important to them than a specific undergraduate major.

Employers are telling us again and again that you are much more than your major. They are concerned far less about what you major in and far more about what you can do: about your competencies. That's why you need to complement your major with a transferable skills mindset and ensure that you develop the Core Career Competencies during your undergraduate years. Developing the Core Career Competencies—and being able to show it—**is career readiness**.

All of that being said, it makes sense to spend some time and energy choosing a major that is a good fit for you. Your major should reflect your interests and values because it dictates what you will be studying in many of your college classes. In some ways it should reflect what you're most interested in studying. Your major might end up leading you toward a career area where you may spend much of your professional life. It will be part of your identity, and the gym where you give your mind its most in-depth workout. So choose your major wisely, but do not let career paralysis drive your choice.

CAREER TIPS

What Is Engagement?

Engagement activities, sometimes referred to as co-curricular or experiential activities, are activities outside the classroom that complement your academic pursuits—and therefore play their own essential role in your journey toward career readiness.

At the U of M, we break engagement activities down into seven broad categories:

- Student Groups
- Campus Leadership & Involvement
- Volunteering
- Learning Abroad & Away
- Research
- Student Employment
- Internships

To learn more, visit the Office for Student Engagement website at engage.umn.edu.

HOW DO COMPETENCIES FIT?

The University uses many lists. There is a list of Liberal Education core and theme requirements; there is a list of student learning outcomes; there is a list of student development outcomes; and now we have a list of Core Career Competencies.

If you examine these lists, you will see that certain ideas appear in multiple places. This is not simple redundancy, because each of these lists is framing the idea in a different way and for a different purpose. The fact that some ideas, such as critical thinking and communication, show up on multiple lists merely indicates the importance of the idea in multiple contexts.

All of the academic and engagement activities you pursue as a CLA student contribute to your development of the Core Career Competencies, your knowledge and skills associated with your major, and your broader liberal arts education. You must not only plan your undergraduate years to complete your major(s), minor(s), certificate(s), and other requirements in a timely fashion; you should also plan carefully to develop your Core Career Competencies. This alone does not make you career ready, but it is the first step: Learn it, and then show it. That's what you need to do in a competitive world.

WHAT IS RATE?

RATE (Reflect, Articulate, Translate, Evaluate) is a framework CLA is beginning to use to help you move from career competence to career readiness. RATE is a reflective learning and self-assessment approach that steps you through the process of Reflecting, Articulating, Translating, and Evaluating your experiences as they relate to the Core Career Competencies. Ultimately, RATE will help you understand:

- How you have developed the Core Career Competencies during your liberal arts education.
- How your Core Career Competencies translate to non-academic contexts.
- Your level of development on each of the Core Career Competencies.
- How the Core Career Competencies prepare you for your future life and career.

RATE also helps you plan your education in light of competency development, so that you will not only become career ready but also be able to articulate your career readiness to yourself, your family, and future employers or graduate school programs.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Based on what you know right now—about yourself and the Core Career Competencies—which of the competencies do you think you still need to develop the most, and why?

What are some ways you could develop these competencies in your classes and through engagement activities? (If you don't know, how could you find out?)

CLA'S RESOURCES

You are not alone on your journey toward career readiness. In fact, expert help is all around you, right here in CLA. There are four key career readiness resources you can access as a CLA student:

- CLA's career-related curriculum
- Academic Advising
- Career Services
- Academic departments

These resources are integrated into CLA's academic and engagement offerings, and behind them are people who care about your future and want to help you navigate the complexities of your unique career readiness journey.

CLA'S CAREER-RELATED CURRICULUM

CLA provides a career curriculum that is designed to meet your career readiness needs, from the beginning of your college experience to its completion.

The First-Year Experience (FYE) program is required for most first-year students in CLA. FYE is an online, two-credit program that you complete over the course of your initial fall and spring semesters on campus:

- CLA 1001, *First-Year Experience I*, is a course in the fall that briefly introduces you to the concept of career readiness and features an assignment to visit the Career Services office to a) become aware of its existence!, and b) become familiar with the many ways it can help you while you're here ... and beyond.

Note: If you are a President's Emerging Scholars (PES) student in CLA, you take CLA 1005, *Introduction to Liberal Arts Learning*, which gives you a space and a process to examine your academic and career interests and goals as they relate to your experiences, identity, personality, strengths, competencies, ethics, and values.

- CLA 1002, *First-Year Experience II*, is a course in the spring that focuses on academic planning and engagement involvement, all with career readiness in mind. It is here where you'll truly begin to dig into the Core Career Competencies as your developmental roadmap to career readiness. You'll have a more extensive chance to learn about yourself (e.g., your interests, values) as well as major and career possibilities. You'll also focus on

exploring these possibilities thoroughly and then making choices—academic and experiential—to start developing the Core Career Competencies that will ultimately signify your career readiness. All of it with the goal of teaching you how to think intentionally and practically about how your liberal arts education connects with your career choices, whatever they may be.

Beyond FYE, you may also choose to enroll in one of CLA's career courses:

- ID 1201, *Major and Career Exploration*, is geared toward students who are undecided about their major or what careers are an option for the major they have chosen. The course begins with self-assessment, then helps you explore a wide variety of major and career options based on your skills and interests. You also learn how internships, community service, work experience, and learning abroad can impact your future career success.
- ID 2201, *Career Readiness for CLA Students*, is a course designed specifically for sophomores. It helps you explore possible careers, develop plans for building experience related to those careers, and develop the skills that will help you secure a job or implement other plans after you've graduated with your liberal arts degree. Throughout the semester, you learn about the Core Career Competencies that employers expect successful college graduates to have, and you create plans for developing your own competencies.

- ID 3201, *Career Planning*, is a course for juniors and seniors or any student ready to research job options for after graduation. This course gives you tools to incorporate your skills, Core Career Competencies, strengths, values, interests, and experience into your career exploration and decision making. You learn sophisticated job search strategies like marketplace research, strategic resume writing, networking, and interviewing.
- ID 3208, *Internship Reflection: Making Meaning of Your Experience*, is a class that allows you to examine, reflect upon, and construct meaning from your internship experiences. You use your own self-analysis as well as feedback from others to evaluate your internship performance and accomplishments. You also develop a strong resume that incorporates your internship experiences while demonstrating your knowledge and skills.
- ID 3205, *Law School Exploration*, is a course for those interested in law school. It offers an overview of applying to and attending law school, as well as information on careers and specialties within the field of law. You also investigate which undergraduate activities and experiences might help you get into law school. Assignments include informational interviews and off-campus site visits that allow you to examine the reality of attending law school and becoming a lawyer.

Some individual academic departments in CLA offer their own courses related to internships or research activities, allowing you to reflect on and earn credit for experiences you have outside the classroom that help you explore potential career paths.

ACADEMIC ADVISING

As a CLA student, you have several advisors at your disposal, all of whom will help guide you—purposefully—on the career readiness path.

Your **CLA academic advisor** offers you the resources and information you need to start identifying your strengths and interests; choose a combination of major(s), minor(s), and certificate(s) that aligns with your academic and career goals; and graduate on time. Your CLA academic advisor is one of your key educational partners for your entire undergraduate experience, from orientation to graduation and beyond. In collaboration with your advisor, you will develop plans for academic achievement, engagement, and career readiness.

Specifically, your CLA academic advisor can support your liberal arts education by helping you:

- Choose courses that align with your values and priorities.
- Explore majors and minors that relate to your individual values, abilities, and interests.
- Assess your academic performance and identify strengths and improvement strategies.
- Seek out and participate in meaningful experiences outside the classroom.
- Identify and utilize campus resources necessary for achieving your goals.
- Appreciate and articulate the value of your liberal arts education.
- Develop your Core Career Competencies.
- Achieve a timely graduation.
- Navigate the University of Minnesota.

CAREER TIPS

International Students and Credit for CPT

If you're an international student and you need to earn academic credit for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) purposes, ID 3208, *Internship Reflection: Making Meaning of Your Experience*, may be a great option for you.

Once you declare a major or minor, you'll also work closely with a **departmental advisor** who will help you choose courses in that program, connect you to related student organizations (which are often their own career readiness outlet!), and answer questions related to the discipline in such areas as career options, graduate school, and learning abroad.

CAREER SERVICES

CLA's Career Services office helps you with the entire range of career-related concerns you might have—throughout your undergraduate experience (not just senior year, as some students mistakenly believe!) and up to one year after graduation. Indeed, you can begin working with a **CLA career counselor** freshman year and develop a career planning partnership that you can utilize throughout your time as a CLA student.

CLA Career Services can help you:

- Learn more about yourself—your interests, your skills, what matters to you, your personality traits—and how it all relates to your choices about majors, careers, and the specific ways you'll develop the Core Career Competencies.
- Explore majors or minors and get help choosing one.
- Research potential career paths.
- Discover internship opportunities.
- Learn job search techniques like writing a solid résumé and preparing effectively for interviews.

- Get information on other post-graduation possibilities—like going to graduate or professional school, for example, or participating in a volunteer experience.

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS

The various academic departments in CLA offer their own wide assortment of career readiness resources and activities. Among them:

- Student organizations connected to the department (e.g., Anthropology Club).
- Department-specific alumni associations.
- Periodic career readiness-related events—presentations by professional speakers, panel discussions with people working in a particular industry, and site visits to related companies and organizations.
- Research practica.
- Mentoring programs.
- Internship opportunities.

To see what career readiness resources a specific department has, just ask them!

CAREER TIPS

Meeting with Your Advisor Regularly Matters - Once Per Semester Is Ideal

1. You'll be able to reflect upon and celebrate what you've done.
2. You'll have time to talk about your progress and what you hope to accomplish in the next semester or year.
3. You can get some feedback about the engagement activities you have planned.
4. You can connect your academics to your post-graduation plans.
5. You'll get to know your advisor and have a personal connection with them—so that when you need help solving a problem, you'll know where to turn.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1="I have almost no idea" and 10="I'm an expert"), how would you rate your awareness of the various career readiness resources available to you in CLA?

Based on what you've read here, what are three CLA career readiness resources you can see yourself taking advantage of in the next few months? Why did you choose these particular resources?

CLA'S RESOURCES

CLA ADVISING

cla.umn.edu/advising

To schedule an appointment with your advisor: z.umn.edu/claappt

612-625-2020

CLA CAREER SERVICES

cla.umn.edu/career

612-624-7577

CLA DEPARTMENTS

cla.umn.edu/departments

THE CLA CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL

YOUR CAREER READINESS NAVIGATIONAL TOOL

You may have noticed that nine of the Core Career Competencies reflect the very essence of liberal arts education and the competitive advantage it offers in today's dynamic economy. Career Management, the tenth competency, gives you the tools to seek and obtain the career you desire.

In CLA, we believe that you need to actively engage in planning for life after college—by taking the necessary steps to **explore** possible careers, gain meaningful **experience**, and build skills that help you **excel** after college and lead to employment or other successful post-graduation outcomes.

But where do you begin? What do you actually do, practically speaking? How do you know when you're done? To help you answer these questions, we've created the *CLA Career Management Model*, a navigational tool you can use to progress toward your goals, even if you are unsure of your path.

The CLA Career Management Model isn't a set of linear steps. It's actually three interdependent phases that overlap at times. Indeed, you'll find yourself partially revisiting a previous phase on occasion—especially later in life, as you and the world around you both change, but even as you discover more about yourself and future career possibilities while you're still an undergraduate.

Here are the three phases of the CLA Career Management Model, which you will cycle through continuously:

EXPLORE Learning more about yourself as well as how you can proactively and purposefully develop your Core Career Competencies through various academic, engagement, and career activities. Examples of exploration include:

- Meeting with your CLA academic advisor or a CLA career counselor.
- Taking a career assessment or a career exploration course.
- Arranging a meeting, or *informational interview*, with a professional in a career of interest.
- Enrolling in courses that interest you.

EXPERIENCE Engaging in experiential opportunities to apply what you are learning in the classroom, further explore your options, and continue developing the Core Career Competencies. Examples of experience include:

- Getting involved in a student organization or club related to your unique combination of major(s), minor(s), and certificate(s).
- Participating in internships, research programs, or volunteer activities.
- Meeting with your CLA academic advisor and/or a CLA career counselor to get support pursuing other experiential opportunities, such as part-time work, learning abroad, or off-campus study.

EXCEL Preparing for your post-graduation life, whether that means pursuing employment, going to graduate or professional school, or something else. And knowing that, to achieve your career goals, you'll need to convincingly demonstrate and articulate your development of the Core Career Competencies: to show that you are career ready, not simply say it. Examples of excelling include:

- Working with a CLA career counselor to develop a solid résumé.
- Participating in practice interviews with a CLA career counselor and/or a volunteer employer.
- Attending career fairs to meet with prospective employers and learn about job opportunities.

The **reflection** you do all along the way, and the resulting **decisions** you make, will determine your specific path through the CLA Career Management Model. Just know that you will continue cycling through the phases—not only now, while you're still in college, but throughout your life as you



refine your interests and goals and respond to your changing needs.

Ideally, by the time you graduate, you will be able to say:

- I can describe my values, interests, identity, personality, skills, and strengths.
- I can articulate how my academic and engagement experiences in the liberal arts have helped me develop my Core Career Competencies, and how they make me a strong fit for professional opportunities. I can do this on my resume, in cover letters, in interviews, in networking activities, and on my LinkedIn profile.
- I have academic and career plans that integrate self-assessment and occupational information.
- I understand that networking is essential, and I can identify at least five connections within my career interest area.
- I can demonstrate completion of at least two experiences, such as internships,

research, part-time jobs, volunteering, service-learning, leadership roles, student groups, or learning abroad.

- I can recognize appropriate professional etiquette relative to my field.
- I can explain how my own domains of diversity—my race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, class, gender, age, etc.—will be an asset to a future organization.
- I can utilize at least three search strategies, including networking, to pursue employment, internship, or graduate or professional school goals.

The CLA Career Management Model is a realistic, practical way to navigate the complex process of becoming career ready, inside the classroom and out. It's a basic roadmap: It helps you see where you are on your career readiness journey and where you still need to go. And it will always keep you moving forward overall.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Where do you currently identify yourself within the CLA Career Management Model, knowing that it's perfectly normal and okay to be in multiple places at once?

What do you already know about yourself as a result of your prior life experiences?

THE CLA CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL:

EXPLORE, EXPERIENCE, EXCEL

- Self-Exploration
- Exploring Your Options
- Making Your Education Work for You



THE CLA CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL: **EXPLORE**

The journey toward career readiness begins with the **Explore** phase of the CLA Career Management Model, which breaks down into three key substeps:

- **Self-Exploration**—pinpointing your interests, skills, personality, values, strengths, identity, and needs.
- **Exploring Your Options**—understanding the academic, engagement, and career possibilities that exist, or that you could create.
- **Making Your Education Work for You**—tailoring your educational program to your own interests and goals:
 - Exploring Individualized Degree programs
 - Pursuing prerequisites for graduate or professional school
 - Studying another language

SELF-EXPLORATION

You already know a lot about yourself. Take some reflective time to get it out of your head and onto paper. Capture it, organize it, and look for patterns that will offer clues about potential academic and career paths for you to pursue—keeping in mind, of course, that both you and your academic and career paths will likely change over time.

How can you more specifically pinpoint who you are, what you want, and what you have to offer in the context of a future career? You have four strategies you can use, in any combination you'd like:

- Perform a “brain download.”
- Ask for feedback from people who know you well.
- Take career assessments.
- Have an in-depth discussion with a CLA career counselor.

Perform a “Brain Download”

A “brain download” is just what it sounds like: downloading what you already know about yourself out of your brain and connecting it to your academic and career decisions; writing down everything you can think of about:

- Your top **interests**: What captures your attention? What are you curious about? What types of things are you drawn to (e.g., people, data, ideas, things, numbers/finances) at this stage in your life?
- Your top **skills**: What skills have you built—or could you build—that are transferable from one area to another? And where do you currently stand on each of the Core Career Competencies?
- Your **personality**: Where do you get your energy? How do you take in information? What types of information

“ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS”

There Are Far More Career Options Than You're Probably Aware of

“Explore the different options out there—there are a lot of occupations you have never even dreamed of. Think about who you are and what you enjoy doing and then consider what jobs incorporate those same things.”

— individualized studies major

do you trust? How do you tend to make decisions—with logic, with your “gut,” or some combination of both? How do you organize your time?

- Your top **values**: What’s most important to you? What grounds you? What will you fight for? Which of your values align with the career path you’re thinking about?
- Your **strengths**: Where do you naturally excel? What are you good at almost inherently, especially when it comes to the Core Career Competencies?
- Your **personal identity** or **culture**: How has your identity or culture (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, age, religion, family position, etc.) influenced your ideas about a major, a career path, or the type of organization you will work for in the future?
- Your **needs** and **other influences**: What are some needs and influences (e.g., expectations about pay, location, abilities, family or cultural expectations, education/training needed, life experiences, special circumstances) that may impact your career-related decisions?

Ask for Feedback from People Who Know You Well

If you’re like most people, you’re much too close to yourself to rely on a brain download alone as a self-exploration exercise. You will inevitably overlook—or, worse, ignore—key characteristics about yourself that will be critical in your academic and career planning decisions.

So ask other people in your life—people who know you well and care about you—to do this same brain download exercise, but with **you** in mind.

For example: What insights does your best friend have about **your** interests, **your** skills, **your** personality, **your** values, **your** strengths? How does it all look from your mom’s angle, or your favorite high school teacher’s point of view? You will be surprised, often pleasantly, by the things others see in you—plain as day—that you simply cannot see in yourself. Competencies you take for granted, for example, may be competencies others don’t have and can easily spot in you.

Take Career Assessments

CLA’s Career Services office offers formal and informal assessments (for very low or no cost) in five key self-exploration categories: interests, skills, personality, values, and strengths.

If you want to learn about yourself in great depth, set up an appointment with a CLA career counselor or visit the Career Services office to learn more about the following assessment options, and to determine what might be helpful for you in your exploration process:

- Interests—Strong Interest Inventory.
- Skills—CLA career counselors offer a variety of informal skills assessments.
- Personality—Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.
- Values—CLA career counselors offer a variety of informal values assessments.
- Strengths—StrengthsQuest.

To learn more, visit the CLA Career Services website (“Personality & Interest Inventories” page) at cla.umn.edu/assessments.

Have an In-Depth Discussion with a CLA Career Counselor

A CLA career counselor can get you started on the self-exploration process or, if you’ve already begun on your own, help you process the complexities of what you’re learning about yourself.

CAREER TIPS

Interests Are Learned

You’re not born with a set of interests; you learn what you’re interested in as you go through life. So there may be things you’re actually very interested in that you simply haven’t been exposed to yet.

Part of the beauty of a liberal arts education is that you will cultivate new interests along the way. For now, just know that your current set of interests will evolve over time.

The in-depth, one-on-one conversations you have with a CLA career counselor can give you the targeted guidance you need, especially as you begin to see the breadth and depth of the information you're trying to analyze and understand—and, eventually, act upon. It can be a lot to manage. A CLA career counselor can help.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

What connections or themes do you see among your interests, skills, personality, values, and strengths, based on all you've done so far?

Which self-exploration strategies do you see yourself using, and why?

EXPLORING YOUR OPTIONS

Exploring your options involves addressing three critical questions: What are my academic options? What are my engagement options? What are my career options?

What Are My Academic Options?

CLA offers more than 65 majors and more than 70 minors in diverse disciplines, with thousands of courses to choose from as you chart your path. Chances are you're familiar with only a few of the many academic possibilities available to you.

How can you learn more? You can begin with some initial research using these key websites:

CLA Departments & Centers: cla.umn.edu/departments

CLA Majors & Minors: cla.umn.edu/majors

You'll also want to work closely with your CLA academic advisor, one on one, to get a solid sense of what's available to you from an academics standpoint here in CLA. To make an advising appointment, go to cla.umn.edu/advising. Exploring your academic options (e.g., majors, minors,

CAREER TIPS

The SuperStrong: Where Interests Meet Career Options

The SuperStrong is an interest-based assessment that helps you see where your interests intersect with career options. You'll take the SuperStrong in class if you're enrolled in CLA 1002, *First-Year Experience II*, but you can also take it on your own (you'll find instructions on the CLA Career Services website at cla.umn.edu/career) or by asking your academic advisor for an access code.

After completing this assessment, you'll understand how your interests intersect with specific major and career possibilities. You'll also have easy access to additional information that will help you explore further.

The SuperStrong measures interests, not skills or abilities, and the results can help you discover rewarding careers, work activities, education programs, and leisure activities—all based on your interests.

courses, certificates, learning abroad opportunities) with a knowledgeable expert is invaluable. Your CLA academic advisor is an expert, and they are with you during your entire undergraduate experience to be your partner in your academic exploration, decision making, and planning. There's also a lot you can do on your own to explore your academic options. Here are some ideas:

OTHER WAYS TO EXPLORE ACADEMIC OPTIONS

- ☐ Use CLA's "What Can I Do with a Major in ...?" (WCIDWAMI—pronounced "wicked-whammy") tool to get a sense of the types of careers various CLA majors can lead to, along with the key skills you'll learn in each program. Visit the website at cla.umn.edu/wcidwami.
- ☐ Take an introductory class in a major or topic of interest. Use Schedule Builder (schedulebuilder.umn.edu) to look for introductory courses.
- ☐ If you've taken the Strong Interest Inventory and/or the SuperStrong assessment, talk to a CLA career counselor or your CLA academic advisor about how you can use the results to explore your academic options with precision, based on your strongest interests.
- ☐ Talk with an advisor from an academic department that interests you.
- ☐ Enroll in ID 1201, *Major and Career Exploration*, or ID 2201, *Career Readiness for CLA Students*, courses where you'll get a chance to earn credit while learning more about yourself and what academic paths might be a good fit for you.
- ☐ Engage in an activity relevant to an academic area of interest to help confirm that you understand and enjoy the nature of the subject and its environment in real-world situations. Among the activities you could try: volunteering, shadowing a professional, completing an internship, or conducting research with a faculty member.
- ☐ Go to the bookstore or look online at the textbooks used by students in various academic programs. Could you imagine yourself being excited about reading these books? Would you want to study these types of materials for a semester or multiple semesters?
- ☐ Talk to students who are in an academic area of interest and see what they like and don't like about it. The U of M's Center for Academic Planning and Exploration (CAPE) offers a "Major Network" program to help you do this. The program connects exploring students with upper-level students who have been identified as excellent peer resources in various areas of study. Learn more at cape.umn.edu/services/network.
- ☐ Attend open houses, information sessions, and other events sponsored by academic departments, advising offices, and CLA's Career Services office.
- ☐ Access the PDF version of the Undergraduate Catalog online (catalogs.umn.edu/ug) and highlight interesting classes. Compare your choices with the various major requirements.

What Are My Engagement Options?

There are literally hundreds of engagement opportunities awaiting you as a student at the U of M—almost endless possibilities to supplement your academic experience with out-of-the-classroom experiences of all kinds, both on and off campus. You can even explore opportunities nationally or internationally.

You can get involved in CLA student organizations (cla.umn.edu/student-orgs). You can pursue an internship in a field of interest or in an organization that intrigues you. You can volunteer or conduct research. The U of M's Office for Student Engagement (engage.umn.edu) can help you uncover even more possibilities.

Your CLA academic advisor (as well as your departmental advisor) also knows what engagement options exist and, just as importantly, can help you explore them and eventually pursue them. So can a career counselor at CLA Career Services, or staff in the First-Year Experience (FYE) program and academic departments.

What Are My Career Options?

The career possibilities for liberal arts majors are almost endless. Having lots of

possibilities can be liberating, of course. But it can be overwhelming, too.

Many students ask the question, “What can I do with a major in _____?” On the one hand, we prefer a different question: “What **can’t** I do with a major in _____?” But the truth is that you are more than your major! While it’s important to choose a major you enjoy and that you will be successful in, employers care more about what you’ve done both inside and outside the classroom to build experience and competencies that will be relevant in the workplace.

CLA’s Career Services office has data on the types of things CLA students in various majors have gone on to do. The same is true for each of the academic departments in CLA. All you have to do is seek out the information—by visiting departmental websites, for example, or by going to Career Services and paging through its extensive collection of “What Can I Do with a Major in _____?” binders. You can also use Career Services’ “What Can I Do with a Major in ...” (WCIDWAMI—pronounced “wicked-whammy”) website at cla.umn.edu/wcidwami.

CAREER TIPS

CAPE Supports Academic Exploration for All U of M Students

The U of M's Center for Academic Planning and Exploration (CAPE) offers personalized services to help undergraduates explore academic possibilities as they relate to major and career decision making.

CAPE's services are available to currently enrolled undergraduate students from any college on the Twin Cities campus who, typically, are:

- Between 30 and 60 credits,
- Strongly undecided on their major,
- Exploring majors across multiple U of M colleges, or
- Planning to apply to a competitive major and who want to create a parallel plan.

If you are undecided but have some ideas about your major options, and they are all within CLA, you should visit CLA Career Services for major exploration support.

To learn more about CAPE, visit cape.umn.edu or stop by the CAPE office: 511 Bruininks Hall.

A CLA career counselor and/or your CLA academic advisor can be helpful here too, as can:

- Conducting informational interviews with liberal arts grads, particularly CLA alums.
- Reading books about careers in various disciplines and/or careers connected to specific majors.
- Visiting the websites of professional organizations in various fields of potential interest; these sites frequently feature sections devoted to career options in the field in question.
- Using state and federal government career exploration resources to investigate possibilities (a CLA career counselor can teach you how).

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

What is one action step you could take to gain a better understanding of a career field or occupation of interest?

Who might you be able to talk to about your academic, engagement, and career options to get some feedback?

Find Out Where Various Majors Might Lead You

“What can I do with a major in ____?”

So many students ask us this question that we’ve developed our own acronym for it: WCIDWAMI (pronounced “wicked-whammy”).

If you do some planning, your major can lead you to a career in almost any field. Find out for yourself by visiting the CLA WCIDWAMI website. There you’ll find:

- Typical job titles for various majors, or of alumni from those majors.
- Related links.
- Ways to plug various majors into public service while you’re at the U of M.
- The skills you’ll gain through various majors.

To learn more, visit the WCIDWAMI website at cla.umn.edu/wcidwami.

MAKING YOUR EDUCATION WORK FOR YOU

Once you have a more solid sense of who you are, what you're interested in, and what you want to do—both in college and beyond—you can start to take advantage of the breadth of opportunity in CLA. With thousands of classes and more than 20 languages other than English, there are probably as many combinations as there are students. And that's a lot, as we have over 13,000 students in CLA.

Most majors account for about 30% of your total degree. So one question you'll have to answer is: What else can you do in addition to your major coursework? You need 120 credits to graduate, after all.

What major(s) makes the most sense for you? Is there a minor(s) that will nicely complement this major(s), in terms of both the subject matter and the Core Career Competencies it will help you develop? What courses will help you get where you want to go, whether that's a job immediately after graduation, graduate/professional school, or something else? Might an engagement option like volunteering or student leadership or learning abroad be a good idea for you and, if so, how can you actually make it happen—and when? Perhaps you're interested in pursuing an internship at some point, to explore a potential field of interest or to begin showing the commitment you already have to one. In either case, how does the whole internship process work, anyway?

Working with your CLA academic advisor, you will develop a comprehensive plan you can follow to not only develop the Core Career Competencies (and therefore become career ready), but also, on a broader scale, to achieve your goals and turn your dreams into reality—through careful research, informed decision making, and proactive, purposeful action. The liberal arts way.

Explore Individualized Degree Programs

CLA has two different degree programs for you to consider if you want to tailor your educational program to your own interests and goals. You can talk with your CLA academic advisor about pursuing one of these educational programs.

The Bachelor of Individualized Studies

(BIS) is a degree program in which you combine three areas of concentration rather than having a major. One concentration may be from another University of Minnesota college (non-CLA), and the concentrations may be unrelated to each other.

An Individually Designed

Interdepartmental Major (IDIM) (for a bachelor of arts degree) enables you to focus on a unifying theme by combining courses from three or more CLA departments.

Complete Required Courses for Graduate or Professional School Admission

If you're thinking about going to graduate or professional school, many programs have a

66 ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS 99

Tailor Your Academic Path with the Future in Mind

"BAs can be very useful for a variety of fields that are not necessarily directly related to your major, but you should use your elective credits to show future academic programs or future employers that you've tailored your degree to fit the industry you're interested in."

— anthropology major

Develop Your "Other Plan A"

"Look at three options because your first choice might not happen right away."

— studies in cinema & media culture major

set of prerequisite courses that are required for admission. Planning ahead may allow you to take these courses as part of your undergraduate degree program without delaying your graduation.

The important task is to research and know in advance the specific prerequisites you need to apply for the graduate or professional school of your choice. Then work with your CLA academic advisor to make sure this plan is appropriate.

Develop Your Skills in Another Language
Knowledge of another language makes you more competitive when you're looking for jobs or applying to graduate/professional schools. And with 1 in 6 U.S. jobs being tied to international trade, the demand for language skills and international expertise in the arts, social services, the sciences, business, education, the military, law, and government is increasing.

Studying another language develops your competencies in Oral & Written Communication as well as Engaging Diversity—how you are able to work effectively with people of different cultures.

Contact with other languages and cultures lets you participate in a global conversation, step outside your familiar scope of existence, and view your culture's customs, traditions, and norms as well as your own value system through the eyes of others.

Studying another language allows you to:

- Connect with family history, traditions, and cultural heritage.
- Understand your first language more deeply.
- Improve your writing/communication.
- Develop new perspectives on your studies.
- Appreciate what it takes to learn a language with attuned cultural sensitivity.
- Pave the path to learning new languages.
- Open up doors to learning abroad or traveling overseas.

Your CLA academic advisor will help you make your education work for you, knowing that your individual wants and needs are just that: your individual wants and needs—and therefore realistically addressed only through working closely with you.

Of course, if you're like many students, your plans may change along the way, either by choice or by necessity. That's why your CLA academic advisor will also lead you through a process of parallel planning—so that you have the “other Plan A” to fall back on if your first Plan A falls apart for some reason.

Once you have a better idea of who you are, what academic and career options are available to you, and how you can make your education work for you in the best possible way, it's time to focus on gaining **Experience**—keeping in mind that exploration never really ends!

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

What steps do you need to take to actively and purposefully plan your education so that it works for you—so that it helps you achieve your interests and goals?

Which Core Career Competencies might you want to focus on the most, and how might you tailor your academic and engagement experiences to help you develop these competencies?

THE CLA CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL:

EXPLORE, **EXPERIENCE**, EXCEL

- Internships
- Research
- Volunteering
- Part-Time Jobs, On- or Off-Campus
- Learning Abroad
- Student Groups and Leadership



THE CLA CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL: **EXPERIENCE**

Why does **Experience** matter so much? For starters, engagement activities help you further explore potential academic and career options (see how the Explore-Experience-Excel phases overlap at certain times and in certain ways?). It's one thing to read about a particular academic discipline, or visit a website that describes a particular job. But what if you were to participate in a research experience with a professor who has been studying one of the nuances within an academic discipline for years or decades? What if you were to complete a three-month summer internship at a nonprofit agency where a job like the one you read about on that website is actually available? Books and websites just can't compete with this type of learning (though they are still valuable in and of themselves).

The engagement activities you pursue might also lead you to stumble upon brand new academic and/or career options you'd like to explore—possibilities you've never considered, in great part because you've never even heard of them! There's a name for this phenomenon: *planned happenstance*. It means that the more you try different things in the world of work—purposefully and proactively—the more likely you'll be to discover academic and career options you might never have discovered otherwise. The number of people who say they “fell into” their careers is staggering. But chances are they didn't really “fall into” them. It wasn't really complete luck. It was their own experiential actions that led to planned happenstance, which in turn led to possibility. You don't have to know your end goal to make progress toward it.

Experience has a confirming/disconfirming element to it as well. Maybe you (think you) already know what major(s) you want to pursue, or what career path you want to work toward. Experiential activities related to that major and/or career might help you confirm your prior assumptions: “My internship is only helping me solidify my decision to major in _____ and become a _____ after I graduate.”

On the other hand, engagement activities related to a particular major and/or career could convince you that you need to seek a different path: “This volunteer work is showing me that I don't want to major in _____ after all, nor do I want to become a _____ after I graduate.” Admittedly, this can be a painful realization in the short term. But better to know sooner vs. later. And better to come to this understanding not through guesswork but through actual, hands-on experience. Chances are these experiences will still be valuable to you, as you can include them on your resume or share them as examples in interviews.

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Experience Is Another Way to Explore

“Get experience in many different fields to figure out what you like. Within a certain field, like health-care, do a lot of volunteering in your areas of interest to narrow down your search for what you enjoy.”

— biology, society, & environment major

You Learn Your Interests Through Trial and Error

“Try everything! You never know what you may end up liking without trying it first. So say YES to everything you can in your career path, whether it is a project or an event. Say YES!”

— journalism major

Finally, engagement activities are the way for you to gain new skills and competencies and, later, to demonstrate them to prospective employers or graduate or professional school admissions committees. (Here again, the phases of the CLA Career Management Model [Explore-Experience-Excel] run together a bit.) If you become the activities coordinator for a student organization, for instance, you quickly begin honing your Oral & Written Communication competency, your Teamwork & Leadership competency, and more. If you participate in learning abroad, you can tell future employers that you not only think you can adapt well in another country, you know you can—because you’ve already done it.

There are far more ways to gain experience than you might be aware of. But you’ll find lots of experiential paths you can pursue as a CLA student. Here are some common ways students gain experience:

- Internships
- Research
- Volunteering
- Part-time jobs, on- or off-campus
- Learning abroad
- Student groups and leadership

Don't Be Afraid to Pursue Experience Independently

“Make connections through the University, but also try new experiences independently. Researching internships, jobs, and experiences is something that all college students should know how to do with little assistance. Take your future into your own hands and do what you want to do, even if it might be different from what your peers are currently doing.”

— child psychology major

Education and Experience Pave the Way Toward a Career

“Career paths are based not only on your field of study, but also on the experiences you gain during your time in college.”

— Asian languages & literatures major

INTERNSHIPS

What Is an Internship?

An internship is a paid or unpaid experience that is connected to your learning and career goals as well as your professional growth and your development of the Core Career Competencies that signify career readiness.

An internship helps you:

- Test out potential career choices and organizations.
- Explore the types of job tasks you enjoy—and don't enjoy.
- Develop professional skills and build a network of contacts that will help you when you're looking for a job, applying for graduate school, or pursuing another post-graduation path.
- Connect what you're learning in the classroom and through your engagement activities with the world of work.

Internships can also lead directly to full-time, permanent jobs. If you think about it from the perspective of the employer, this makes sense. If you were the boss and you wanted to hire someone, who would you hire? A relative stranger—for example, someone who applies for your open position

because they saw a listing for it on the Internet or in the newspaper? Or would you hire the fantastic summer intern that was already trained in and working for you?

The choice is clear. Employers want to hire people they trust, which is more likely if the candidate can demonstrate competencies from prior experience.

Perhaps it's no wonder, then, that according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 73% of employers look for relevant work experience on the résumés of new college graduates—and 60% prefer that such experience comes from internships or co-ops. Once again: It only makes sense.

How Do I Find an Internship?

GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu) is the University of Minnesota's free job and internship search database, so start your search there. You'll find thousands of possibilities, all of them just for U of M students.

You can also:

- Get help from a CLA career counselor, who can work with you one-on-one to uncover internship possibilities and prepare to land one of them.

66 ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS 99

It's Never Too Soon to Intern

"Start doing internships as early into your college career as possible."

— art history major

You Never Know Which Internship Experience(s) Will Be Valuable

"Obviously look for internships related to your career aspirations, but do not hesitate to also apply for internships that may not be totally related if you are struggling to line up a position. This experience may be more valuable than you think, and the skills you develop may still be applicable to a position more in line with your ideal career path."

— statistics major

Internship Experience Is Worth the Sacrifice

"Don't give up opportunities just because of your current job. Take risks. If you want to do an unpaid internship but you currently have a paid job, do the unpaid internship. It helps build your network and experiences."

— sociology of law, criminology, & deviance major

- Contact organizations of interest directly—by visiting their websites or contacting internship coordinators there—to learn about opportunities.
- Talk to professors and staff members in your major (or a major you're interested in), many of whom a) have connections at various organizations, and b) will know where previous students have interned.
- Talk to your fellow students—particularly juniors and seniors—to see where they (or people they know) have interned.
- Talk to your parents and other family members, as well as neighbors, teaching assistants ... anyone you can think of! Here's what you can say:

"I'm hoping to get an internship soon so that I can explore career options and develop my skills and Core Career Competencies before I graduate. My major is _____, and I hope to get an internship doing _____. Do you know anyone who works in this field, or who works somewhere that might have internships in this field? Or can you think of any other ways I might find an internship? If not and you hear of something later, I'd appreciate you keeping me in mind."

- Attend the CLA Internship & Career Fair, an annual fall event where you can explore internship opportunities with a wide variety of organizations that are hiring CLA students for internships. (This event is also a great opportunity for you to develop your networking skills and get advice about internships as well as full-time professional work.)
- Visit other career fairs, such as the University of Minnesota Job and Internship Fair, which is held each spring.
- Intern abroad—the University of Minnesota's Learning Abroad Center (umabroad.umn.edu) can help you.
- Tap into CLA's alumni network, particularly through the CLA LinkedIn group ([linkedin.com/groups/2997319](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2997319)).

- Use internship directories and internship websites to uncover leads.

How Do I Know If a Particular Internship Is Right for Me?

First, consider your academic and personal goals. Also factor in your strengths and values. Do you want to work for a nonprofit? Then focus your search there. Do you want to pursue advertising, whatever the setting? Then search by category, concentrating on internship opportunities related to that field (e.g., advertising, marketing, public relations).

Write a brief goal statement for yourself.

"I would like an internship that will give me an opportunity to..." This type of statement, if you take the time and energy to develop it, will guide your internship search better than almost anything else can.

Do an informational interview. Talk to someone in an organization or field that interests you. If it seems like a good fit, ask this person about internship possibilities in the organization. (Note: CLA Career Services provides books, handouts, and personal tips about conducting informational interviews. You'll also find extensive advice in this guide.)

If you have trouble finding the right internship, try creating your own.

Wondering how to create a meaningful internship? Visit CLA Career Services for advice and guidance.

How Do I Get the Most Out of an Internship?

Create a learning contract with your site supervisor. This agreement clarifies your expectations and those of your supervisor and maps out a plan for you as you work through your internship. Some experiences are centered around a specific project (a campaign, for example), so your agreement should be written with this project in mind.

Outline what you intend to learn and accomplish. Both you and your supervisor can use this document to manage the position. If your internship focuses on a

specific project, write the learning contract with that in mind. If it doesn't, chart out various activities and projects, mutual expectations, and goals.

As you begin, consider your goals in these areas:

Academics: What ideas and concepts in your field of study would you like to learn about, practice, or test?

Skills/Competencies: What practical skills do you want to develop, particularly when it comes to the Core Career Competencies that will ultimately signify your career readiness?

Note: If you do pursue an internship, you might be interested in taking a class that will help you make the most of the experience. During the semester you have the internship, consider taking the online class ID 3208, *Internship Reflection: Making Meaning of Your Experience*. It will help you pinpoint what you're getting out of your internship, especially as it relates to the Core Career Competencies.

Internship FAQs

When should I do an internship? Getting career-related experience early in college is a smart thing to do. Some employers have a preference for sophomores or juniors, but it is quite possible to get an internship as a first-year student.

Is an internship required? An internship may be required for some majors and not others, so you'll want to check with your department or major advisor once you have one. Either way, internships are strongly recommended for all CLA students. You will be more competitive if you have internship experience, and you will likely be more confident as well.

What can I do now to get ready to be a competitive internship applicant? Gain experience in other ways (all of which are described in more detail in the next sections of this guide): through research, volunteering, part-time jobs, learning abroad, and student groups and leadership roles. Work hard in the classroom as well; your grades matter, of course, but so do the applied projects you do, particularly within your major.

Are internships paid? Yes and no. Some internships offer compensation and some don't. Some organizations also offer perks such as paid training, attendance at conferences, or parking reimbursement.

What resources exist for unpaid internships? Are you thinking of taking an unpaid internship? Check out the CLA Internship Scholarship (cla.umn.edu/internship-scholarship), which provides \$2,000 in funding. The scholarship has

CAREER TIPS

International Students and Internships

If you are an international student and you would like to pursue an internship, you will need Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization. This authorization allows you to work in a position directly related to your major area of study before you have completed your degree.

In order to activate your CPT authorization, you will need to watch the CPT module at z.umn.edu/cpt, meet with an International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) advisor, and register for an eligible credit-bearing internship course.

Many departments have internship courses that fulfill CPT requirements. Another course option to consider is CLA's ID 3208, *Internship Reflection: Making Meaning of Your Experience*, which will allow you to obtain credit for your internship (a requirement of CPT).

To learn more, visit the International Student and Scholar Services website at iss.umn.edu/fstudent/fwork.html.

summer, fall, and spring deadlines. You can also look into the CLA Mulhollem Cravens Leadership Scholarship (cla.umn.edu/leadership-scholarship), which combines the hands-on experience of a summer internship with an internship reflection course, enhanced career coaching, and alumni mentoring opportunities.

Visit the CLA Career Services website (cla.umn.edu/career) for more information on these scholarship opportunities.

How do I get academic credit for doing an internship? To earn credit for your internship, you need to have an academic component to your experience. Among your options:

- **Enroll in ID 3208, *Internship Reflection: Making Meaning of Your Experience*.** This one-credit, online course is open to all CLA students who are pursuing an internship. You'll earn credit as you consider how your internship fits in with your future career plans.
- **Pursue departmental internship or field work courses.** Check with your academic advisor to see if there are courses that match your needs.

- **Pursue directed study with a CLA faculty member.** You'll work independently with an instructor for credit, or add credits to a class you are taking the same semester as your internship. You'll be responsible for finding your own directed study faculty advisor, but for information and application forms, stop by CLA Career Services for guidance.
- **Do an internship through a HECUA program.** These are 16-credit, semester-long programs that include social justice-oriented classroom studies, field work, and an internship. There are four HECUA (Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs) programs in the Twin Cities: City Arts, Environmental Sustainability, Metro Urban Studies Term, and Writing for Social Change. Visit offcampusstudy.umn.edu/hecua for details.

Can I do an internship abroad? Yes! To learn how, visit the website of the U of M's Learning Abroad Center (umabroad.umn.edu) and watch the "Work, Intern, and Volunteer Abroad—First Step Online Module."

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Even if you can't name a specific company/organization right now, can you think in general terms of the **type** of place where you might want to pursue an internship?

What makes you choose this type of setting?

What do you want to learn from an internship experience?

Do you want to explore a career possibility? Build experience for your resume?

Develop specific Core Career Competencies?

CAREER TIPS

Research Experience Grabs Attention

If you're interested in graduate school, research experiences will strengthen your application. Oftentimes, research experience is required for admission to graduate/professional programs.

RESEARCH

Why Do Research?

Research experiences offer all kinds of opportunities for you to develop the Core Career Competencies that will signify your career readiness—particularly skills like Analytical & Critical Thinking, Applied Problem Solving, and Oral & Written Communication. Through research, you study difficult problems without any guarantee that you will eventually find “the answer.” You’ll need patience, persistence, and perseverance.

Research experiences also help you:

- Build relationships with faculty and graduate students who are studying topics of strong interest to you.
- Explore research itself as a possible career path.
- Develop expertise on a subject that fascinates you.
- Make money and/or earn academic credit for your efforts.

Research FAQs

How can I participate in research at the U of M? Start by visiting the Office of Undergraduate Research website at ugresearch.umn.edu, where you’ll learn about the many opportunities available.

You can apply for funding through the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP). UROP provides a scholarship of up to \$1,500 for approximately 120 hours of research, as well as funding of up to \$300 for project-related expenses. Applications for the program are accepted twice a year—so you’ll need to plan ahead, as there are specific requirements to meet.

Many CLA departments also offer other opportunities to engage with faculty members through research practica, directed study, directed research, or independent study courses. You can also volunteer, or find a paid on-campus job that involves research.

What is the first step to getting started with research? Consider what subject you’re interested in studying, and then find a faculty member who is an expert in that area. You can reach out to a faculty member you’ve had for a class, ask your academic department for recommendations, read faculty profiles on department websites, search experts.umn.edu, and contact urop@umn.edu.

Remember: Faculty members are doing research all the time, and they often need help. So you don’t need to have a completely formulated research plan or even an idea. All you need is an interest that matches the interests of the faculty member, along with a willingness to ask how you can get involved. Here’s an example of a brief email you could send to a faculty member:

Hello Dr. Maxwell,

My name is Heidi Angen, and I am contacting you because I took a course with you last semester and really learned a lot from you. I particularly enjoyed when you discussed your research on women in politics.

I was wondering if we could meet to discuss your research further, and also to discuss if you have any opportunities for an undergraduate like myself to get involved and contribute to a future project.

Thank you for considering!

*Sincerely,
Heidi Angen*

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Which of the courses you’ve taken so far have fascinated you the most? What potential research options are connected to those courses and the professors who teach them?
(If you don’t know, what are some ways you could find out?)

What types of research activities interest you? What benefits might result from being involved in conducting experiments? analyzing data? writing up results?

VOLUNTEERING

Why Volunteer?

Volunteering offers many of the same potential benefits as other experiential activities, like interning, for example, or participating in research projects. It is yet another way that you can continue developing the Core Career Competencies as you work toward career readiness—particularly the Active Citizenship & Community Engagement competency. You can also explore various organizations, career paths, and work settings.

But there's more: Volunteering gives you the chance to create positive change in your community, too, whatever that community may look like. Perhaps it's a city. Perhaps it's a center where children gather to play after school. Perhaps it's a nursing home where senior citizens live out their remaining years.

Whatever the case, your volunteer work matters—and the impact likely goes well beyond your own personal and professional development.

Employers agree. In a recent Deloitte survey, 92% of the more than 2,500 employers questioned said they believe volunteering expands an employee's professional skill set.

And 82% said they are more likely to hire job candidates who have volunteer experience.

Volunteering FAQs

How do I find volunteer opportunities? At the U of M's Center for Community-Engaged Learning (servicelearning.umn.edu), staff members will ask you about your interests and then connect you with one or more of the 300 nonprofit community partners they work with. Additionally, you can often find volunteer positions posted on GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu).

Are there any structured volunteer programs offered through the U? Yes. The Community Engagement Scholars Program (servicelearning.umn.edu/cesp) has an application process and requires 400 hours of community service, along with a final project. Your completion of the program will be noted on your transcript, and you'll also receive recognition at commencement. Another option you can look into is the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA) initiative, which offers semester-long programs that incorporate classroom studies, an internship, and field work with a nonprofit organization. Learn more at offcampusstudy.umn.edu/hecu.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Even if you can't name a specific organization to volunteer for/with right now, what type of work would you like to do in a volunteer role (e.g., work directly with people, work on projects, work on certain issues/topics)? Why?

How might volunteer work help you develop other Core Career Competencies besides the Active Citizenship & Community Engagement competency?

66 ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS 99

Volunteering Can Confirm What You Want to Pursue

"Volunteer at places or in areas where you think you want to work. I often doubted what I wanted to do until I did service-learning in schools assisting teachers. Through service-learning, I realized that I had made the right decision for my future career. You can never know until you try!"

— English major

PART-TIME JOBS, ON- OR OFF- CAMPUS

Why Do a Part-Time Job?

A part-time job, whether you pursue one on- or off-campus, offers yet another chance for you to continue developing the Core Career Competencies. It is especially valuable when it relates somehow to a career you're either exploring or that you've already committed to. Working as a camp counselor, for instance, builds competencies and knowledge that will be essential to your success if you want to become a teacher. Similarly, working as a social media assistant for an office on campus allows you to hone your expertise for a future marketing career.

Part-time jobs also offer the more obvious benefit of financial support that you can put toward your educational and living expenses.

On-campus employment can be particularly helpful. For starters, it often comes with flexibility: You don't need to travel (or at least travel far!), and you can plan your work schedule around your course schedule.

An on-campus job can also be especially useful to you if you're an international student. Both F-1 and J-1 students are eligible to work on campus, and the work does not need to be related to your field of study.

Part-Time Job FAQs

How do I find a part-time job, on- or off-campus? You can search for positions through humanresources.umn.edu/jobs and GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu), as well as outside websites. You can also talk to friends, family members, your advisor(s), and others in your network to ask about specific job leads. On campus, you could even stop by the offices that interest you to inquire about the possibilities.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

If you've already worked in a part-time job—in high school, perhaps, or during the summer before your college career began—which of the Core Career Competencies did it help you develop? Can you offer specific examples of how certain tasks or responsibilities built certain competencies?

Are there any part-time jobs, on- or off-campus, that you're interested in pursuing right now (or very soon)? What can you do to get started pursuing them, and how might they help you develop your Core Career Competencies?

66 ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS 99

All Work Experience Matters

"Work as much as you can while you're in school. No matter what it is, it will give you workplace experience. Workplace experience will help you truly develop your work ethic, and help you develop self-awareness so that you know how to change and how to be better at whatever it is you try to do."

— linguistics major

LEARNING ABROAD

Why Go Abroad?

It's almost impossible to fully articulate the many benefits of going abroad. Trips abroad are full of opportunities for you to not only develop the Core Career Competencies, but also gather experiences that will help you demonstrate those competencies later—to prospective employers, for example, or graduate school admissions committees.

By going somewhere brand new, and perhaps even speaking a different language while you're there, you have no choice but to sharpen competencies like Applied Problem Solving, Innovation & Creativity, and Engaging Diversity, to name just a few. The (seemingly) simplest things become more challenging when you're out of your element and in a new culture whose norms and expectations might be quite different from those of your home culture.

If—when—you successfully navigate these challenges, your confidence will soar. And for good reason: You will know that you can succeed in situations where you are, at least initially, lost and uncomfortable. You'll see that you can handle whatever is thrown at you—then adapt and succeed anyway.

Learning Abroad FAQs

How do I get started with exploring learning abroad options? Go to the website of the U of M's Learning Abroad Center (umabroad.umn.edu) to explore resources and complete the FirstStep module. Then meet with an advisor to discuss program options that may be a good fit for you.

What programs exist? There are opportunities to study, work, intern, volunteer, teach English, or research abroad. Experiences can vary from lasting a few weeks during winter break, May session, or summer to going on for as long as a year. There are all kinds of programs, depending on your interests and goals, with opportunities available in an array of countries.

How do I pay for learning abroad experiences? Abroad experiences vary from program to program, but there are options that cost the same (or even less) than attending the U. Moreover, there are many scholarships, grants, and fee reductions available.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Picture yourself participating in a learning abroad experience. Where would you want to go, and why? What potential barriers do you foresee in making it happen? What people and resources might you utilize to determine if this is a good option for you?

What would a learning abroad experience do for you in terms of your academic, engagement, and career planning? in terms of helping you develop the Core Career Competencies?

Learning Abroad Broadened My Worldview

"Through my study abroad experience I met professionals and scholars and saw how businesses and education worked in another country. What was even more impactful was the insight I got into the lives of regular people and how strongly culture shapes people's lives. I learned to genuinely appreciate and embrace differences and to be open to new change and new ideas."

— journalism major

STUDENT GROUPS AND LEADERSHIP

Why Get Involved with Student Groups and Leadership?

If you want to develop your Teamwork & Leadership Core Career Competency in particular, getting involved with student groups and leadership is a fantastic way to go.

Whether you join a well-established student organization or help lead the successful launch of a new one, you'll be working with some of your fellow students to get things done. Some of that work is already precisely defined; some you'll define as you go. Along the way you'll be developing other core career competencies as well: Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making, for example, as well as Innovation & Creativity and even Digital Literacy. (You'll use all of these in something as apparently straightforward as developing compelling, informative copy for your student group's website.)

Your work with student groups and leadership will also help you build friendships with other students who share your interests—its own lifelong benefit. And it will frequently connect you with U of M alums, prospective employers, and other potentially helpful people, since many student organizations bring in guest speakers and/or host community events.

Student Groups and Leadership FAQs

How do I find student groups of potential interest? Start by visiting the CLA Organizations, Clubs, & Communities website at cla.umn.edu/student-orgs. You can also visit the website of Student Unions and Activities (sua.umn.edu) and search the group directory to find organizations that fit your interests. The many possibilities include: health and wellness, fraternity and sorority, academic and educational, and cultural and diversity-related groups.

How do I get connected to leadership opportunities? Go to leadup.umn.edu to get information about the leadership minor as well as engagement programs that will help you develop your personal leadership approach. You might also want to consider applying for student leader and peer positions on campus, such as:

- Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence (MCAE) ambassador.
- Orientation or Welcome Week leader.
- Section leader for CLA 1001 (the fall-semester First-Year Experience course).
- Peer advisor for Academic Advising or Career Services.
- Boynton health peer educator.
- International Buddy program.
- Peer tutor for SMART Learning Commons (a one-stop resource for students needing research, technology, or writing help).
- Advocate with the Aurora Center (which helps people in the areas of sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking).

66 ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS 99

Student Groups Build Common Connections

"Joining student groups is a good way to explore your interests and to connect with people who have common interests."

— psychology major

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Even if you can't identify a specific student organization by name right now, can you think of the type of student organization you might want to get involved with? What makes you pick this type of group?

Which of the Core Career Competencies could you develop by joining a student organization and becoming heavily involved in it?

The more experience you gain, whatever the method(s)—and the sooner you gain it—the better you'll be able to continue shaping your academic and engagement path toward career readiness. Purposefully. Proactively. Planfully.

You'll then be poised for the next phase of the CLA Career Management Model: ***Excel***, which focuses on how to articulate the value of your liberal arts education and engagement experiences to employers, graduate school admissions staff, and others.

THE CLA CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL:

EXPLORE, EXPERIENCE, **EXCEL**

EMPLOYMENT

JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES—HOW TO UNCOVER JOB OPPORTUNITIES YOU WANT TO PURSUE

- Networking
- Informational Interviews—Networking with a Learning Focus
- Job/Career Fairs
- On-Campus Recruiting
- GoldPASS
- Job/Internship Websites
- Staffing Agencies

JOB SEARCH COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

- Résumés
- Cover Letters
- Recommendation Letters
- Thank-You Notes
- Your Personal Brand

INTERVIEWS

- Before the Interview
- During the Interview
- After the Interview
- Offers

EDUCATION

PLANNING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

- First Things First: To Go or Not to Go? Deciding If Grad School Is Right for You
- Researching and Evaluating Graduate Programs
- Application Materials
- Making a Decision



THE CLA CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL: **EXCEL**

The **Excel** phase of the CLA Career Management Model is the one where you focus on the tools, activities, and strategies you'll need to demonstrate your career readiness and then actually apply it as you work toward whatever practical career outcome you're seeking.

For many undergraduates, this desired outcome is **Employment**, typically in the form of a private-sector job but sometimes in nonprofit organizations, public service (government) agencies, the military, or related opportunities like AmeriCorps or the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program. So we devote most of this section of the guide to the basics of the job search: uncovering job opportunities, writing solid résumés and cover letters, performing well in interviews, and the like.

For other undergraduates, **Education**—in the form of graduate or professional school—is the next stage on the career development journey. So we cover the graduate/professional school research, application, and decision-making process in considerable depth too.

One special note bears mentioning here: You may be one of the relatively small but growing number of students who want to pursue a career path with a degree of independence. Perhaps you'd like to start your own small business, for example, or pursue freelance work, or run for political office, or launch a nonprofit organization.

The individual nature of these types of career paths makes them difficult to comprehensively cover in a guide like this one. But we want to acknowledge them as valid, worthy, realistic pursuits—and let you know that we can help you pursue them on an individual basis, through CLA's career counseling and advising channels as well as through other campus resources.

Know, too, that many CLA alumni have gone on to do similar enterprising things. We can help you connect with them so that you can learn from their experiences.

For now, though, we begin with the most common post-graduation pursuit for CLA undergraduates: Employment.

Remember as you engage in the process of articulating to others the experiences you have had, the core career competencies are what employers tell us they value.

THE CORE CAREER COMPETENCIES THAT DEFINE CAREER READINESS



“ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS”

Use All Your Resources to Discover the Path That's Best for You

“Always ask questions, and always seek information and answers to help guide you through your education and career path.”

— French studies major

JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES—HOW TO UNCOVER JOB OPPORTUNITIES YOU WANT TO PURSUE

Actually landing a job is hard enough. How do you even begin to uncover job opportunities to pursue in the first place? You know the openings are out there. Somewhere. How do you find them, especially when so many of them aren't even advertised?

Fortunately, in addition to CLA Career Services, you have many job search tools and strategies at your disposal:

- Networking
- Informational interviews—networking with a learning focus
- Job/career fairs
- On-campus recruiting
- GoldPASS
- Job/internship websites
- Staffing agencies

CAREER TIPS

Subscribe to the CLA Career Services E-mail Newsletter

CLA Career Services publishes a monthly e-mail newsletter that will keep you up to date on career-related events and other opportunities to network.

To sign up for the e-mail, visit cla.umn.edu/career and fill out the “Subscribe to Our Newsletter” box.

International Students and the U.S. Job Search

If you are an international student and you would like to obtain work in the U.S. after graduation, you will need Optional Practical Training (OPT) authorization. This authorization allows you to work in a job directly related to your major area of study after you have completed your degree, for 12 to 36 months, depending on your major.

In order to activate your OPT authorization, you will need to watch the OPT module at z.umn.edu/opt and meet with an International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) advisor.

OPT processing takes two to four months, so be sure to apply for OPT as soon as possible, even before securing employment. You can file for OPT as early as three months before graduation.

To learn more, visit the International Student and Scholar Services website at iss.umn.edu/fstudent/fwork.html.

NETWORKING

Networking—which is, quite simply, talking to people—is by far the most effective way to uncover job opportunities to pursue. Why? Because, given the choice, employers would prefer to hire people they already know, or people who come highly recommended by people they already know. It's less risky, it's faster, and it's cheaper.

If **you** were an employer, how would **you** try to find someone to fill a key position? You would undoubtedly turn first to your own personal network of contacts, hoping that someone you already know and trust would either a) apply for the position themselves, or b) recommend someone good for the job.

Networking is a way to build a community of support around you for your job search, which includes connections with professionals. It might sound daunting, but it doesn't have to be. Most of us network all the time without realizing it. When you talk to someone about interests you both share, for example, you're already networking.

What Is Networking?

Networking means building professional relationships. You can plan your networking activities out in advance if you'd like, or simply take advantage of networking opportunities spontaneously as they come to you (or you to them). Either networking approach works well.

When you plan your networking activities, you often contact someone to find out if you have mutual interests; you then have a conversation about those interests. When you meet new people by chance, on the other hand, and you end up discussing mutual interests or goals, you're networking spontaneously.

You've actually been networking for years without even realizing it. You're networking when you:

- Talk to friends or friends of friends.
- Chat with your neighbors.
- Volunteer somewhere.
- Talk to the person sitting next to you on the bus.

- Stay in contact with your professors, instructors, advisors, and counselors.

Don't Be Intimidated by Networking

Many people cringe at the thought of networking, thinking they have to show up in a space full of people they don't know and begin small talk. People often assume that networking means you have to be “schmoozing” or disingenuous in your conversation. But true networking is actually relationship building.

Networking becomes relatively easy after you've put in a little effort and time. If you're shy, or if you're uncomfortable contacting people you don't know, that's understandable. But keep this in mind: The worst response you're likely to get is someone saying they're too busy to talk. Or you may get no response at all, which still isn't a negative.

Most of the time, though, you will find that people are remarkably happy to share information about their work, company, or profession. Especially since many of them have been in your shoes themselves—and know they likely will be again. Someday.

Ways to Get Help with Networking Activities

As a student—a CLA student as well as a U of M student—you have several resources at your disposal that will make your networking activities more fruitful and less intimidating. You can:

- Join the CLA Student/Alumni LinkedIn group ([linkedin.com/groups/2997319](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2997319)), as well as the LinkedIn groups of student organizations at the U.
- Attend career events (refer to the CLA career events website at cla.umn.edu/careerevents). Often these gatherings feature employers and/or U of M alums you can meet.
- Attend gatherings of professional associations in disciplines that interest you.
- Use the professional networking function in GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu) to connect with alumni and professionals in the Twin Cities who have already volunteered to be a

resource to students. You can also use the career events function in GoldPASS to learn more about upcoming employer events, career fairs, and workshops.

How to Contact People and What to Say

In addition to networking with people you already know, you can also network with complete strangers. It's actually very common in the world of working professionals, and there are many ways to find people to contact.

The easiest way to begin is to start with someone you do know, or someone that a friend, relative, or professor knows. Think about who is currently in your network, and how each of these people could support you in finding names for networking purposes.



You can also find people through:

- GoldPASS's (goldpass.umn.edu) professional networking function.
- Conferences and workshops.
- Company/organization websites.
- Student groups.
- Professional associations.
- Industry directories.
- Service organizations.
- CLA Career Services.
- Your CLA academic advisor.
- Alumni groups.
- Social media sites, particularly LinkedIn and Facebook.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS—NETWORKING WITH A LEARNING FOCUS

An *informational interview* is a special type of networking activity. It is a brief, typically face-to-face meeting with a person who is working in a position or field you want to explore or pursue. It gives you the chance to:

- Learn in depth about a specific industry, field, organization, and/or position, and then assess whether it's a good fit for your skills, personality, and career goals.
- Observe and get a feel for different work environments.
- Connect with professionals who may have tips about future job or internship opportunities.
- Develop the social skills you'll need in professional interactions.

You don't use an informational interview as a way to apply for a specific job or internship opening. Instead, you ask about **overall** opportunities in an organization or profession. (Or, more broadly, you use an informational interview to simply explore potential occupations or career possibilities.)

If you aren't able to have a face-to-face meeting at your interviewee's workplace, you can do an informational interview by phone or by email. Or you can meet at a coffee shop or another public place. You won't get to experience the interviewee's work environment firsthand, but you'll still learn a lot.

How to Request an Informational Interview

After you've found someone you'd like to talk to, contact that person to request a brief interview. You can call or send an email, whichever you prefer. Usually you'll ask to meet for 20 to 30 minutes.

Include the following information in your initial contact:

- Your first and last name.
- How you got the contact person's name.
- A brief summary about yourself (two or three sentences is plenty).
- The fact that you're contacting the person for an informational interview.
- Your phone number and email address. (Note: If you leave a voicemail message, be sure to say your name and phone number slowly and clearly.)

66 ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS 99

Build Relationships with Your Professors

"Create strong relationships with your professors. They are the best resource, and they are willing to help you. They want you to succeed."

— philosophy major

Networking Is a Critical Skill

"Networking can be intimidating, but it is one of the most important skills to pick up in college. I've quickly learned that the saying 'It's not about what you know, it's about who you know' is 100 percent accurate."

— political science major

Talking to People Leads to Opportunity

"Talk to your professors! Talk to your advisors! Talk to their peers and colleagues. I ended up getting my job because I contacted someone in the honors department and they pointed me in another direction. Just keep asking. Don't give up. And don't settle."

— communication studies major

SAMPLE SCRIPTS FOR REQUESTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

If the interview is for career exploration:

Hello, Ms. Olmos.

My name is Lee Douglas, and I'm a student at the University of Minnesota majoring in _____. I received your name from Professor Chris Jones.

I'm doing some career research in the field of advertising, which I'm thinking about pursuing after school. I'm hoping you could meet with me for 20 or 30 minutes for an informational interview to discuss the field.

If that would be possible, please let me know when that might be convenient for you.

Again, my name is Lee Douglas, and I can be reached at 612-123-4567 or ldouglas@gmail.com.

Thank you.

If the interview is to uncover actual job opportunities:

Hello, Ms. Olmos.

My name is Lee Douglas, and I'm a senior at the University of Minnesota majoring in _____.

I am beginning my job search, and I'm hoping to conduct informational interviews with professionals in the field of advertising. My goal in meeting with you would be to gain your perspectives about the field, and perhaps referrals to others in your network to learn more.

If you could meet with me for 20 to 30 minutes, please let me know when that might be convenient for you.

Again, my name is Lee Douglas, and I can be reached at 612-123-4567 or ldouglas@gmail.com.

Thank you.

Tips for the Informational Interview

Here are a few tips for making your informational interviewing activities successful, both for you and the person you're meeting with:

- Be flexible. Work around your contact's busy schedule when arranging a date and time to get together.
- Research the person's occupation/organization ahead of time so that you can go in with thoughtful questions.
- Dress professionally. Formal clothes (i.e., suit and tie, dress) aren't necessary, but avoid casual clothes such as jeans, shorts, and tennis shoes.
- Arrive five to 10 minutes early so that you're respectful of the interviewee's schedule.
- Bring a list of questions you want to ask, along with a notebook where you can take notes.
- Ask for the names of additional people you can contact, and ask if you can use your interviewee's name as a referral.
- Before you leave, ask for the person's business card so that you have accurate name, title, and address information.
- After the interview, send a thank-you note promptly—within 48 hours.

It may be appropriate to bring your résumé to the informational interview—not to apply for a job but, rather, to request some feedback on it. You could also ask the person you're interviewing to pass it along to others if appropriate.

Alternatively, you could send your résumé along with your thank-you note after the interview. You can say something like: "I've included my résumé in case opportunities come up in the future." Tailor your résumé to the specific company/organization as much as possible.

What to Ask in an Informational Interview

Here are a few sample questions you can ask in an informational interview. You'll likely have lots of your own questions too.

Be sure to think your questions through in advance so that you'll know how to proceed efficiently, being ever mindful and respectful of your interviewee's time.

Bring your list of questions with you, but don't feel tied to it. Having some questions prepared ahead of time will simply help you feel more confident, and will allow the conversation to flow more naturally once you get under way.

Personal information

- How did you become interested in this field?
- What are the most and least satisfying aspects of your work? What would you change?
- What experiences in your background have contributed to your success in this career? What would you have done differently?
- If this job or field were to become obsolete, in what other kinds of jobs could you apply your skills?

Questions about the organization/company

- How would you summarize what your organization does? How is it unique from your competitors?
- How would you characterize the culture of this organization and/or your department? For example, would you describe your position as closely supervised? Is this a high-pressure organization?
- What does your company look for when recruiting people?
- What other types of internships and jobs are available in your company/organization?
- How has the company grown, and what are its strategies for future growth?
- What is the dress code here?
- What is turnover like in this organization? Why do you think people stay or leave?

Questions about the field or position

- What background is necessary or helpful for this position? For example, are there any particular educational or training programs required or recommended for this position?
- What are the best ways to enter this field? What are the best ways to learn about specific job openings?
- What are the five most important competencies or traits for a person going into this field?
- What are some of the most current trends or changes in this field? What about challenges or controversies?
- Can you suggest professional publications and associations related to your field?
- What are your job responsibilities? What do you do in a typical day or week?
- What is the employment outlook for this field, nationally and locally? Is demand increasing or decreasing?
- What is a typical salary range for this position? How does this vary by setting/industry/size of company/geography?
- Does this position go by any different titles in other organizations?
- What are typical career paths for people in this field?
- Does this type of position typically involve a lot of team projects, or do people work independently?

Additional contacts

- Can you suggest other companies where I might want to contact people?
- Can you suggest other people I might meet with to gain additional perspectives about this career, or about future job or internship opportunities?
- Would you be willing to provide an email introduction to any contacts you have?

What Now? How to Maintain the Relationship

Your informational interviewing activities don't end with the interview itself, nor

should they. You'll want to stay connected with the people you meet.

You can start by sending a thank-you note after each informational interview. A handwritten thank-you card or formal email is appropriate. Your message should include something specific you learned during the meeting; it needs to be more than merely a generic note. If you have agreed to forward your résumé to the contact, now would be the time to do so.

While it may not be possible to re-engage with all of your informational interviewing contacts regularly, it is important to keep in touch genuinely. This is one of the most difficult aspects of networking in general: keeping up with your network! Reaching out to your contacts on a regular basis—every three to six months, perhaps—helps you maintain these key relationships. You can reconnect with people to:

- Say you followed their advice and share the results.
- Send them articles of potential interest.
- Update them on your résumé, experience, or personal situation.
- Tell them you read or heard something about them or their company/industry.
- Offer them something—like volunteer help on a project, for example, or a college student's perspective on their market or their mission.
- Simply tell them you'd like to touch base and meet again.

One final, critical tip: Be sure to ask your informational interviewee and other networking contacts to connect with you on LinkedIn; it's an easy way to keep in touch with professional colleagues, current and potential. You can do this immediately after meeting someone by using LinkedIn to send them a personalized invitation request.

Once you're connected with someone on LinkedIn, you will be updated if that person gets promoted, for example, or changes organizations. This type of informational nugget can be the perfect prompt for you to follow up.

CAREER FACT: LinkedIn Offers Critical Career Connections

LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network, with more than 250,000 U of M alums you can connect with—as well as more than 425 million other LinkedIn members in 200 countries and territories around the globe. Use the site for free at [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com). Be sure to check out the CLA LinkedIn group ([linkedin.com/groups/2997319](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2997319)) while you're there.

JOB/CAREER FAIRS

It isn't all that often that employers come to you, but a career fair offers you that very opportunity.

A career fair is simply an event where multiple employers gather in one place to meet with prospective job and/or internship seekers. The typical career fair lasts for a few hours and gives you a chance to talk to many employers in a very short period of time. You might even end up leaving your resume with some of the participating recruiters, and perhaps take part in informal mini-interviews as well. The connections you make can lead to all sorts of positive results!

In fact, in one survey of employers that recruit regularly at the University of

Minnesota, 69% of the respondents said they typically hire 1 to 20 students for full-time positions, and 68% said they typically hire 1 to 20 students for internships.

So be sure to mark your calendar for these regularly scheduled career fairs:

- CLA Internship & Career Fair—September
- Government & Nonprofit Career Fair—October
- U of M Job & Internship Fair—February
- Now Hiring—April or May

You'll also have the chance to participate in additional career fairs (and other career-related events). Be sure to stay on top of what's happening by using the career events function in GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu).

Tips for Career Fair Success

Here are a few key tips to help you succeed at career fairs and related events:

- Create or update your résumé.
- Research the organizations that are attending the event.
- Practice introducing yourself.

CAREER TIPS**Personalize Your LinkedIn Connection Invitations to Make Yourself Stand Out**

When you want to connect with someone on LinkedIn, simply look up their name using the “Search for people, jobs, companies, and more...” box at the top of the LinkedIn page.

Once you've found the person you're looking for, click on the “Connect” button near their name and photograph. On the resulting screen, a box will appear asking how you know the person and then giving you the following generic text: *I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn.*

Take a few minutes to personalize this invitation instead of simply leaving it as is. In doing so, you will stand out as someone who is thoughtful and purposeful—and therefore worth connecting with!

Employers Go Beyond Career Fairs to Engage with CLA Students on Campus

Employers come to campus frequently, and throughout the year, to engage with CLA students. And that involvement goes well beyond career fairs. Employers host information sessions, participate in networking events, conduct on-campus interviews, and more—all to build relationships with you and other CLA students.

Use the career events function in GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu) to watch for opportunities.

- Prepare questions to ask organization representatives.
- Dress professionally (see the “UMN Job Fair” Pinterest page for culturally relevant and gender-inclusive examples—go to pinterest.com/umnjobfair and click on the “Professional Attire” link).
- Request business cards.
- Send thank-you notes immediately after the event to reiterate your interest and qualifications.

ON-CAMPUS RECRUITING

Many local and national employers come to campus each semester to recruit and interview CLA students for full-time job and internship opportunities. For-profit, nonprofit, and government employers from a variety of industries are represented in CLA’s on-campus recruiting program.

One of the key ways employers recruit on campus for internships and entry-level positions is through on-campus interviews. Employers post a position, qualified students apply for it, and organization representatives select which applicants they want to interview. The representatives then come to campus to conduct the interviews in one of the interview centers on campus. CLA’s interview center is located in Bruininks Hall.

Employers also connect with students on campus in other ways, including information sessions, networking events, career fairs, résumé critiques, and panel presentations.

GOLDPASS

GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu) is the U of M’s free resource for internship and job postings, career events, employer contacts, on-campus interviews, and more.

As a student or graduate of the U, you have access to GoldPASS for life! Which is quite a benefit—because on a typical day, you’ll find approximately 3,500 postings for jobs, internships, and volunteer positions on GoldPASS, making it the destination to identify your next opportunity.

JOB/INTERNSHIP WEBSITES

Here are some additional job/internship websites you can investigate:

- LinkedIn (linkedin.com)—Combine your job/internship search with networking and find out who you’re connected with at an organization of interest, whether local, national, or global.
- Minnesota Council of Nonprofits (minnesotanonprofits.org)—This site offers a thorough listing of job and internship possibilities at nonprofits throughout the state.
- Idealist (idealist.org)—This site features local, national, and international nonprofits and NGOs (non-governmental organizations) hiring for full-time employment, internships, and volunteer roles.
- USAJOBS (usajobs.gov)—This is the official job search website of the United States government.

CAREER TIPS

Use GoinGlobal to Search Beyond the Twin Cities

If you’re planning on moving away from the Twin Cities, GoinGlobal—on the left side of GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu)—is a subscription service that is free to U of M students and alums. The site offers both country and city guides to assist in your job search, along with local resources for each geographic location.

CLA Career Services Can Help You with the Complexities of the Federal Job Search

If you’re interested in pursuing a career with the U.S. federal government, be sure to check out the “Federal Employment Search Tips” guide on the CLA Career Services website: cla.umn.edu/career-guides. You can also stop by CLA Career Services and pick up printed copies of our “Federal Employment Search Tips” handout.

NAVIGATING YOUR IDENTITY IN THE JOB SEARCH

Job Search Resources for Diverse Populations

Visit cla.umn.edu/career for job search tips geared to specific populations: women, veterans, international students, multicultural students, LGBT students, and students with disabilities. You'll find similar guidance at career.dl.umn.edu/diversity-career-resources.

Navigating the Complexities of Identity in Your Job Search

Aspects of your identity and culture (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, age, religion, family position, etc.) are assets that you will bring to your future employer. However, there may be cases during the job search where you're concerned about when and how to share or disclose certain aspects of your identity.

Here are some frequently asked questions and common issues that you might want to consider and prepare for:

- How do I disclose my identities in my job search?
- I'm worried that my appearance (e.g., hair color/style, piercings, tattoos, religious attire, gender expression) may raise concerns to prospective employers. How do I decide whether to change my appearance for an upcoming interview?
- Should I list a certain organization (e.g., religious group, political affiliation, LGBTQ organization) on my resume that may "out" me?
- What should I do if I'm asked an illegal question during an interview? (Should I avoid, redirect by asking them to clarify the question and how it relates to the position, or notify them that they've asked an illegal question?)
- I do not shake hands for cultural reasons. What should I do at my interview?
- How do I identify whether a company or organization will be a good fit for me?
- I know I will need accommodations for my interview or on the job. How do I address this?
- I'm worried that my background check may raise concerns. What should I do?
- How do I address citizenship status if I am unable to legally work in this country?
- What are the legal protections for transgender people in the workplace in Minnesota?
- How can I research what health coverage benefits are available to me through a prospective employer?
- Where can I get help understanding how to best highlight my military service as being relevant to a position? (See career.umn.edu/veteran-students for additional guidance.)
- I received a job offer and have heard that women often make less than men in the U.S. How do I make sure I am paid fairly?

All of these questions are valid, and a CLA career counselor can help you address them and direct you to additional helpful resources.

- GoinGlobal—Access this resource through GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu) to find geographically relevant job/internship sites as well as other location-specific materials.
- Professional Organizations—Professional organizations often devote a portion of their websites to job and internship postings. College students can frequently join professional organizations—or student branches of professional organizations—at a fraction of what working professionals have to pay.

You can also use other job search websites that have helpful information and listings geared toward entry-level job seekers. Most companies, for example, post job opportunities on their own websites and/or on larger job-posting websites. There are also many independent websites that focus partially or exclusively on job and internship listings geared toward college students and recent graduates.

Just be cautious, and remember the key pros and cons of using Internet job search websites:

PROS

- They offer an easy way to see who's hiring and explore various roles in an organization.
- They may allow you to post your resume for prospective employers to review.
- Many of the sites also offer job search agents that notify you by email or text when a position is posted that meets your criteria.

CONS

- You may not get a response from the employers who use these sites.
- The information you see about open positions may not be complete.
- You may find yourself putting so much time into using these sites that you neglect more effective, productive job search strategies such as networking.

“ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS”

Get Feedback and Update Your Resume Continuously

“Create your resume as soon as possible and revise it constantly, getting input from professors and employers. They want to help, but you have to ask.”

— history major

STAFFING AGENCIES

Staffing agencies hire for temporary and permanent positions on behalf of other organizations. Many companies/organizations use these agencies—rather than their own internal recruiters—to fill open positions.

Staffing agencies typically offer temporary, contract, and direct-hire positions. And they generally fill professional positions as well as administrative jobs (although the offerings of various agencies do vary considerably, depending on their niche).

If you choose to work with an agency, do your research and ask questions to find the one that best fits your needs. **Be sure as well to work only with those agencies that do not charge you, the job seeker.** Staffing agency fees are typically paid by the **employers** who work with the agencies.

Working with a staffing agency has its own pros and cons. Among them:

PROS

- Most agencies offer an extremely personal approach and will help you with your resume, interview preparation, and job fit.
- You can gain short-term professional experience, perhaps with a variety of organizations.
- An agency can help you secure a position quickly if you're moving to a new city without a job.

CONS

- Many temporary agency contracts offer no benefits.
- Immediate job openings may require you to start work right away.
- Though temporary positions may lead to full-time employment, there are no guarantees.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Of all the different strategies you can use to uncover potential job opportunities to pursue, which one(s) are you most likely to try, and why?

How will your Core Career Competencies—particularly competencies like Oral & Written Communication, Applied Problem Solving, and Digital Literacy—play a part in your job search activities?

JOB SEARCH COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

Once you've developed a healthy list of job opportunities you'd like to pursue, you have to actually go ahead and pursue them! To do that in a way that maximizes your chances for success, you need compelling, convincing job search communication tools:

- Résumés
- Cover letters
- Recommendation letters
- Thank-you notes
- Your personal brand

You'll use all of these critical tools, as well as opportunities like interviews, to cultivate and communicate your personal brand: the image you convey to the world.

RÉSUMÉS

The Purpose of Your Résumé

The purpose of your résumé is to help you quickly explain your skills and competencies, qualifications, and fit for a position. It serves as your introduction to prospective employers and can be used both as a marketing tool for landing interviews and to help you reflect on your experience and plan for future skill and competency development.

Your résumé is one of the primary tools you can use to showcase your career readiness in a tangible, compelling way. Remember: We define career readiness as developing—and then being able to convincingly demonstrate and articulate—the following Core Career Competencies:

- Analytical & Critical Thinking
- Applied Problem Solving
- Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making
- Innovation & Creativity
- Oral & Written Communication
- Teamwork & Leadership
- Engaging Diversity
- Active Citizenship & Community Engagement
- Digital Literacy
- Career Management

Keep these competencies at the forefront of your mind as you develop your résumé. What experiences—academic, engagement, and career—can you highlight on your résumé to **show** prospective employers that you have developed these competencies?

CAREER TIPS

Your Additional Language Skills Set You Apart

Be sure to stress your additional language skills in your interactions with prospective employers (and others), not only on your résumé but also in your interviews.

Only 9% of U.S. citizens speak both their native language and another language fluently—compared with 50% of Europeans and a large percentage of Latin Americans who are fully bilingual.

RÉSUMÉ CONTENT CHECKLIST

Heading

- ☐ Use a larger font for your name than for the rest of the text.
- ☐ Include all of your contact information: full name, mailing address, phone number, and email address.
- ☐ Spell out all abbreviated words (e.g., “Avenue” instead of “Ave.”).
- ☐ Include both a local and a permanent address if you’ll be moving during the application process.
- ☐ Use a professional email address (e.g., jdoe@gmail.com).
- ☐ Optional: Add your LinkedIn profile address or online portfolio address.

Summary (optional section, typically at the top of the document before the “Education” section)

- ☐ Use three to five bullet points to highlight the specific qualifications you have that match the ones emphasized in the job listing. Focus in particular on the Core Career Competencies.
- ☐ Provide concise, unique descriptions of your experiences.

Education

- ☐ Include all colleges/universities you’ve attended for more than one year.
- ☐ Include the college/university name, degree, major, graduation date, and GPA (if it’s above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale).
- ☐ Spell out abbreviations (e.g., “Bachelor of Arts” vs. “B.A.”).
- ☐ Include learning abroad and any other educational experiences.
- ☐ Consider “Relevant Coursework” as a subheading, if appropriate.
- ☐ List honors and awards (e.g., Dean’s List) as well as scholarships you’ve received.

Experience

- ☐ Document all the experiences you have that relate directly to the job you’re pursuing. Include paid and unpaid work, internships, research, volunteer activities, and leadership activities (for example, in student organizations). Use separate headings (e.g., “Work Experience,” “Internships,” “Research Experience”) for each of these if you’d like, or simply put all of the information under the Experience heading.
- ☐ Include organization name, city and state, position title, and dates of employment.
- ☐ Quantify your experiences wherever possible.
- ☐ State your skills compellingly using the following formula: Action Verb + Details + Outcome/Result.
- ☐ List your experiences in reverse chronological order.
- ☐ Right-align dates. Use the same format throughout your résumé (months/year or seasons/year).

Skills

- ☐ List any language, computer, or technical skills you have. It’s best to describe your skills in the context of your work experience. Consider including your level of proficiency. Examples:

Programs: Proficient in Excel, Matlab, Mathematica, Adobe Photoshop.

Languages: German (first language); French (basic).

Honors/Achievements

- ☐ List honors and awards you’ve received through experiences or leadership roles.
- ☐ Note: List academic honors and awards (including Dean’s List and scholarships) in the Education section.

Activities/Involvement

- ☐ List engagement activities you’ve been involved in that haven’t necessarily given you the chance to take on a leadership role. This includes student organizations and intramural sports. Note: You can list leadership activities in the Experience section.

CAREER FACT: Your Resume Will Get a Very Quick First Look

Employers spend as little as six seconds looking at your résumé. It's essential to write it well.

A Few Things to Do Before Writing Your Résumé

- Research the specific organization you're targeting, as well as the specific position you're applying for, to find out what key skills, competencies, and experiences the employer is seeking.
- Brainstorm a list of experiences you've had that demonstrate you have the skills and competencies for the position you're pursuing. Be sure to include any unpaid/volunteer positions.
- Make a list of three or four of your strongest characteristics that make you a good candidate for the job. Make sure you think not only in terms of specific skills, but also in the context of the Core Career Competencies that employers consistently seek in college students and recent college graduates.
- Think of several accomplishments from your previous experiences that illustrate each key skill or competency.
- Outline the training and education you have that qualifies you for the job.

One other piece of critical advice: Do not use a résumé template. You can use one as a guide, but don't put your information into a pre-formatted template. Remember: Employers review hundreds if not thousands of résumés. So they've seen hundreds if not thousands of résumés that show up in the standard two or three template formats. They're not looking to see one more.

Résumé Formatting Tips

Visual Tips

- Balance text and whitespace on the page. Consider one-inch margins on the top, bottom, left, and right.
- Ensure that your résumé's headings stand out from the rest of the text, making items easy to find (through the modest use of **bold**, underline, indentation, ALL CAPS, • bullets, etc.).

- Keep the résumé to one page, and fill the entire page. Adjust the margins as needed to balance the page.
- Proofread! Proofread! Proofread! Ensure that your final document has absolutely no spelling or punctuation errors.
- Use 10- to 12-point body text in an easily read font (such as Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri).

Additional Tips

- Don't use personal pronouns, such as "I" or "my."
- Use the past tense to describe past experiences and the present tense to highlight current experiences.
- Consider leaving off "average" information, such as a not-so-great job experience or a GPA that is less than 3.0.
- Revise your résumé often, preferably for every position you pursue.
- Get a second opinion: Have your résumé reviewed by a staff member at CLA Career Services.

Develop Compelling Skills and Competencies Statements

The skills and competencies statements you write for your résumé need to:

- Effectively communicate your experiences.
- Demonstrate that you have what it takes to succeed, particularly when it comes to development of the Core Career Competencies that signify career readiness.
- Stand out from those of other applicants.

In short, they need to be compelling. You can make them compelling by consistently following this basic formula:

Compelling Résumé Statement =
Action Verb + Details + Outcome/Results

Action Verbs

- Identify the specific needs of the employer. Look at the job description and the information you've researched about the organization. Identify the skills and Core Career Competencies that you think are necessary for this position.
- Use action verbs that address these needs (e.g., "developed," "coordinated," "analyzed").
- Choose words that demonstrate responsibility (e.g., instead of "made up," say "created" or "designed").
- Vary your word choice. Doing so helps you make your skills and competencies sound more diverse and adds depth.

Details

- Ask yourself the following questions: Who/for whom? What? Where? When? Why? How?

- Find the balance between short and long. The majority of your bullet-point statements should be one line only.
- Most positions will have between two and five bullet points, with more emphasis on relevant positions.

Outcome/Results

- When possible, use numbers to quantify your skills and experiences. Think about these questions: How many? How much? How often?
- Expand your concept of "results" beyond a quantifiable figure. Numbers are not your only achievements.
- Ask what difference you've made: As a result of your action(s), what happened to you, your client/colleague/boss/customer, and/or others involved?

EXAMPLES OF COMPELLING SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES STATEMENTS

BEFORE**AFTER**

Responsible for supervising employees.	→	Organized the training and supervision of 10 employees by conducting annual reviews to guarantee quality service.
Answered phones.	→	Responded to an average of 200 calls per day to solicit donations for a new charter school.
Customer relations.	→	Provided technical support for customers by using problem solving skills to alleviate their concerns.
Waited on tables.	→	Managed 10 tables, using interpersonal skills to ensure customer satisfaction through prompt, cordial service.

Turn the page for a couple of solid sample résumés so that you can see how the energy you put into writing and designing your résumé pays off in an attractive, compelling final document.

MADELINE MILLER

6542 Thornberry Drive • Hastings, MN 55423

651-807-5564 • mill5932@umn.edu

SUMMARY

- Experience in exhibit design
- Ability to manage multiple large-scale projects at one time
- Strong leadership and communication skills

EDUCATION

University of Minnesota - Twin Cities

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Bachelor of Arts - Art History; Economics minor

Anticipated May 2017

GPA: 3.63; Dean's List: Spring 2014, Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Fall 2015

Architecture, Sculpture, & Painting in Florence & Tuscany

Study abroad program focusing on art during the Renaissance

May 2016 - June 2016

INTERNSHIP AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Curatorial Intern

July 2015 - Present

- Organize and catalog 8 to 10 new acquisitions each week for curatorial committee review
- Correspond with artists regarding proposals (by mail, phone, and e-mail), ensuring accuracy of details
- Design layout of new exhibits, focusing on visually appealing yet practical presentations

YMCA - University of Minnesota Chapter

Minneapolis, Minnesota

America Reads Volunteer Coordinator

September 2013 - May 2015

- Supervised 30 volunteers, ensuring active participation with designated elementary school
- Developed external communications marketing plan to inform community of outreach program
- Established workshops for further development of volunteer members, making them more effective in the community; received consistently high ratings from participants

University of Minnesota, Career and Community Learning Center

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Mentor Program Assistant

September 2013 - May 2015

- Scheduled and facilitated 6 Mentor Program orientations for groups of 25 students
- Coordinated registration process; assisted with mentor-student matching process for approximately 150 students
- Planned social events for program, including program Kickoff Dinner for 80 mentors and students

The Spotted Cow Café

Hastings, Minnesota

Wait Staff

May 2011 - December 2013

- Managed 6 to 8 tables at a time in restaurant while ensuring customer satisfaction
- Performed multiple tasks in stressful environment to meet needs of customers and other employees
- Served as primary trainer for new bussing staff and food runners; helped train 12 new servers

ACTIVITIES

Phi Beta Lambda, Chapter President

September 2015 - Present

College of Liberal Arts Student Board

October 2014 - Present

YMCA - America Reads Volunteer

November 2012 - Present

FATIMA ABDI

701 Fulton Street SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612-555-5555 | abdi0000@umn.edu

EDUCATION

University of Minnesota - Twin Cities
Bachelor of Arts, Physiology

Minneapolis, MN
Anticipated May 2020

VOLUNTEER AND WORK EXPERIENCE

University of Minnesota Medical Center

Hospital Volunteer

Minneapolis, MN
May 2015 – Present

- Collect case information from patients to improve patient care procedure
- Manage over 100 patient records and assist patients and families to complete forms
- Restock supplies to ensure nurses are able to provide effective and timely care

Sears

Customer Associate

Bloomington, MN
May 2014 – August 2016

- Interacted with up to 300 customers daily, providing excellent customer service to maintain customer base
- Kept sales floor clear of debris; organized garments for a positive aesthetic appearance
- Met daily sales goals by marketing and promoting sales, recommending add-on products, and maintaining a friendly attitude

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Student Council, President

September 2015 – June 2016

- Led group of 30 members to set goals for the academic year; created a plan to accomplish goals and formed small groups to carry out projects
- Organized a food drive that collected 3,000 donations for local food shelves

National Honor Society, Member

October 2012 – June 2016

- Volunteered 250 hours through the St. Paul Public Library literacy program
- Tutored small groups of children on reading, writing, and storytelling skills

ACTIVITIES

Muslim Student Association, Member

September 2016 – Present

Undergraduate Physiology Society, Member

September 2016 – Present

COVER LETTERS

Whenever you apply for a job or an internship, you **always** need to send a cover letter along with your résumé, whether it's required or not, unless a posting specifically tells you not to.

You'll want to write a different cover letter for each position you pursue. And you'll want to tailor your cover letter to the specific position you're seeking; don't use one generic cover letter for everything.

Why? Well, this is one of those occasions when your Analytical & Critical Thinking competency (as well as your Oral & Written Communication competency) goes beyond career readiness and plays a key role in your job/internship search as well.

Just for a moment, put yourself in the shoes of an employer. You're trying to fill an internship position or a job opening, and you are reading dozens of cover letters as you evaluate candidates. Which type of cover letter will truly grab your attention—one that is obviously generic, or one that is written specifically with **you** and **your** needs in mind?

The answer couldn't be more clear: The targeted, customized cover letter wins every time. So be sure to target and customize every cover letter you write and send.

Use your letter to succinctly present your qualifications, personality, and enthusiasm for the position. In most cases, your letter is the first extension of your personality that an employer will see. So it should not simply restate the information on your résumé. Instead, the two documents should work well together without being overtly repetitive.

CAREER FACT: Your Cover Letter Needs to Grab the Reader's Attention Quickly

On average, you'll have about 20 seconds to impress an employer with your cover letter. It's essential to write it well.

The Benefits of Cover Letters

Writing cover letters—especially targeted, customized letters that will actually grab an employer's interest—takes time and energy. Lots of it.

The investment is well worth it, though, because a compelling cover letter:

- Serves as a writing sample, as well as a true example of your overall communication competency in a situation that matters.
- Allows you to convey your motivation and your interest in the position and/or organization you're pursuing.
- Gives you the chance to describe aspects of your experience or identity more fully—you can elaborate on your values, for example, or demonstrate your personality.
- Helps you get started with interview preparation by developing relevant stories and examples to share.
- Lets you directly address any potential barriers you may be facing (e.g., gaps in employment, relocation, being unavailable during certain phases of the hiring process).

CAREER TIPS

Be Professional and Consistent

Use either a standard business letter format for your contact information or the same heading as your résumé so that your materials look consistent.

How to Structure Your Cover Letter

Here's a basic tutorial on what your cover letter should look like, in terms of both content and format:

Your Name
Your Address
Your City, State Zip Code

Current Date

Contact's Name
Contact's Job Title
Organization Name
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear [First Name and Last Name]:

If you don't know who to address your letter to, you can write: "Dear Hiring Manager." Otherwise, use gender-inclusive language (i.e., avoid assuming the recipient's gender and thus using "Mr." or "Ms."; instead, simply use the person's full name).

First paragraph

- Offer a brief, enthusiastic statement about your interest in the position and/or the organization, based on your research or on previous interactions with the recipient.
- If someone is referring you, mention that person's name here to share how you heard about the position and/or the organization.

CAREER FACT: Connections Gain Attention

Referrals are one of the top ways people get invited to interview. So it's good to share any connections you have with people your cover letter's recipient might know, provided those people are comfortable with you using their names. Referring to connections, or "name-dropping," is very common and is expected in U.S.-dominant business culture.

Middle paragraph(s)

- Explain how your experience is a match for what the letter's recipient is seeking. This is the place to "sell" your skills and

strengths, as well as your development of the Core Career Competencies that signify career readiness—though you won't be able to cover it all, obviously.

- Demonstrate evidence that you know a bit about the employer and his/her needs, based on the job description. Show that you know the industry through how you write your letter (i.e., in the degree of creativity or formality you show in your writing).
- Promote your top three skills/competencies, experiences, or qualities that make you a compelling candidate for the position, staying focused but possibly offering a bit more detail than your résumé shows.
- Describe how you would make an impact through the position and how you would contribute to the organization's mission or purpose.

Closing paragraph

- Be sure your letter ends on a positive, courteous note.
- Politely thank the reader for his/her time and consideration.
- Use a professional closing, and sign your name, possibly inserting an electronic version of your signature. If you're submitting a printed copy of your letter, sign it with a high-quality, black ink pen.

How to Submit Your Cover Letter

Save each cover letter file with your name and the document type—e.g., "Gopher,Goldy_CoverLetter.pdf."

When you're submitting your application materials via email:

- Save each document as a separate PDF file, attaching it to the email. (Note: Saving files as Word documents may be a better idea if you are uploading them to online recruiting sites.)
- In the body of the email, provide a brief, friendly, and somewhat formal and professional message, adhering to all the basics of good email communication (e.g., proper greeting, excellent grammar and spelling, proper salutation).

- Be sure to use a helpful subject line for your email message, such as:
 - “POSITION NAME application - FIRST AND LAST NAME”
 - “Public Policy Intern application – Goldy Gopher”

Avoid These Common Cover Letter Pitfalls

We’ve covered what to do when it comes to your cover letters. Here, conversely, are some of the more common mistakes college students and recent grads make where cover letters are concerned:

- **Not including a cover letter at all.** Unless a position description specifically states “no cover letters,” it’s always best to include a cover letter each time you apply for a job or an internship.
- **Ignoring directions from the employer.** Be sure that you carefully read the job description and follow the guidelines provided by the employer. Sometimes, for example, employers ask applicants to address specific things in the cover letter. Make sure you follow such directions when you see them.
- **Exceeding one page.** Your cover letter should demonstrate concise, polished writing and should not exceed one page.
- **Submitting a cover letter with errors.** Proofread your letter carefully, reading it aloud to uncover spelling and grammar errors. You’d be amazed how often you catch things when you hear them vs. seeing them.
- **Overuse of “I” statements.** Vary your sentence structure so that you’re not starting each sentence with “I” statements, like “I was in charge of a very important project.” Instead, you could say: “Through my leadership, our team achieved our project goals on time and with great results.”
- **Using language that undermines your confidence.** Instead of writing “I believe I would be a great asset...” or “I think I will make a great team member,” simply delete the less-confident language and instead say “I will be a great asset...” or “I will make a great team member...”
- **Making it all about you.** It’s great to be energized about how the position you’re pursuing will help you. But remember: The employer is the one who is in the hiring position, and they want to know what you will do for them.
- **Using clichés.** Stay away from phrases like “As you can see on my résumé” (e.g., “As you can see on my résumé, I have excellent communication skills.”). If something is already obvious on your résumé, there’s no need to waste cover letter space saying so. Instead, focus on your key point and rewrite to something like: “My experience as a student organization leader helped me build excellent communication skills.”

CAREER TIPS

Bullet Points Offer Visual Appeal

It’s OK to use bullet points to highlight your experiences in the main body of your cover letter. A combination of paragraph format along with several bulleted items can be a compelling, visually appealing way of making your case.

Let's look at a high-quality cover letter so that you can see how the energy you put into writing one pays off in an attractive, compelling final document.

Be sure to include your name and contact information at the top of your letter, either mirroring your résumé header information or using professional business letter format.

March 3, 2017

Rachelle Williams
FoodWise Nonprofit
220 West Some Street, Suite 500
Minneapolis, MN 55555

Dear Rachelle Williams:

I am writing to apply for the Community Outreach Internship with FoodWise Nonprofit, an organization I admire for its work to advocate for food justice in the community. I recently learned about this internship opportunity from Scott Draper, who I met when he was a panelist in one of my American studies classes last fall. Currently I am a sophomore, majoring in American studies and sociology with a minor in leadership. My academic and involvement experiences make me a strong candidate for this position.

A successful Community Outreach Intern must possess strong writing, critical thinking, and relationship-building skills. Through my liberal arts education and through my role as Marketing Manager for the Sustainability Advocates student organization, I am developing excellent writing skills, both in academic settings and in marketing and promotional contexts. My American studies coursework has taught me to use my critical thinking skills to analyze historical events and movements to better understand how to advocate effectively in current times. When Scott Draper described the way you situate your work in the context of the history of Minneapolis, he sparked my curiosity and interest in this internship.

Finally, I bring excellent relationship-building skills that will help me connect with people in the community during the internship. For example, during my sophomore year I served as a Community Advisor in a residence hall on campus. In this role I built relationships with new students, enforced policies, and provided prompt and friendly customer service. I have also taken courses on human behavior and communication, which will be an asset to me in this role.

As a Community Outreach Intern I would bring together my writing, critical thinking, and relationship-building skills to help FoodWise Nonprofit deliver on the mission to raise awareness about food justice issues and help advocate for solutions that will bring more equity and access to healthy foods in all communities in Minnesota.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my experiences and fit for this position. Thank you for your time and consideration. I can be reached at 555-555-5555 or via email at email@umn.edu. I will look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

NAME HERE

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Some prospective employers will ask you to provide recommendation letters along with your other job search communication documents (i.e., resumes, cover letters).

A letter of recommendation should describe—and give examples of—your strongest qualities, your best skills/competencies and abilities, your commitment to a particular field, and your potential to contribute to the company/organization you're pursuing.

Who should write letters of recommendation for you? Here are some tips for picking the right people:

- Approach potential writers who will give you a strong, positive recommendation. Ask them directly if they would be willing to write a letter that is reflective of who you are and the good work you do.
- Focus on people who know you well academically or professionally: faculty members, supervisors, coworkers, or advisors. Family members are usually not appropriate.

Remember, too, that your prospective letter writers have busy jobs, appointments, and possibly other students seeking recommendation letters as well. So do everything you can to make your request

simple for them. Give them everything you can from the following list:

- Relevant information about the position you're applying for and the company/organization offering it.
- Your thoughts on what you see as your strongest qualities and skills/competencies (especially in the context of the Core Career Competencies that signify your career readiness).
- A copy of your current résumé.
- A list noting which academic courses you've completed and how well you did in them.

A few other key tips:

- Be sure that all of your recommendation letters appear on letterhead.
- Give your letter writers an early deadline, occasionally check in with them, and offer them reminders as needed.
- Thank your letter writers; they're giving you a significant amount of their time and energy!
- Keep your letter writers informed about the application process.
- Stay organized by carefully tracking who your letter writers are, what application deadlines you're dealing with, and who you have followed up with or still need to follow up with.

CAREER TIPS

Give Letter Writers Plenty of Time

The recommendation letter process can take a while. So be sure to allow lots of time for it! Ask for letters of recommendation long before you need them.

Get to Know Your Professors

Make an effort to get to know your professors, especially if you see yourself asking them for a letter of recommendation someday. Attend office hours, ask questions in class, and/or conduct research with them. If you're asking your advisor for a letter of recommendation, set up multiple appointments with them to discuss your goals and skills.

When It Comes to Letters, Quality Beats Quantity

Three detailed, compelling letters of recommendation will beat five or six vague, weak letters every time. Employers notice the difference between strong praise and mediocre praise.

THANK YOU NOTES

At some point, you will land an interview for one of the jobs/internships you're pursuing with the solid résumé(s) and cover letter(s) you've developed. After that interview (note: we cover interviewing extensively later in this guide), you will need to send a thank-you note to your interviewer(s).

Why? Well, for starters, it's common courtesy. Your interviewer has spent time and energy with you and on you, and is spending additional time and energy evaluating you for the position. It only makes sense, then, to thank them for that consideration.

But a thank-you note benefits you, too, because it gives you the chance to reiterate your interest in the position you're pursuing, as well as your qualifications and fit for it. It's one last chance to make a compelling case for your candidacy—and to demonstrate your career readiness along the way.

Keep this little-known fact in mind, too: Most job/internship applicants **fail** to send a thank-you note after their interviews. So when you do, you'll instantly stand out from the crowd and improve your chances of landing the position.

Some Key Tips on Thank-You Notes

- Plan to send your thank-you note within two days after your interview.
- Ask for the hiring manager's business card at the interview so that you have correct spellings and contact information.
- You can send a handwritten note card, an email, or a typed letter (printed out and mailed). A typed letter is the most formal. Handwritten notecards are more personal and can be shorter. Email is a good choice if your interviewer prefers email contact, or if you know a hiring decision will be made immediately.
- Proofread. Then proofread again. Check for typos, grammatical errors, and awkward sentences. One error can move you to the bottom of the candidate pool (which is true for résumés and cover letters, too). Have someone else proofread your note; a second set of eyes and a second brain are invaluable.
- If you were interviewed by multiple people, send an individual thank-you note to each person who interviewed you. Change each thank-you message somewhat. At a minimum, send a thank-you to whoever seemed to be the leader in your interview.
- Keep track of who you send thank-you notes to and when. Keep a copy of emails and letters too.

Here's an example of a concise, but effective thank-you note:

Hello Elaine Blackstone,

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you about the Marketing Assistant position, and for the tour of your wonderful new store.

I would be excited to use my marketing and retail experience, and my creativity, to help develop effective marketing campaigns. I would look forward to helping Hipster Clothing become an industry leader. The fast-paced energy and collaborative environment is exactly the type of culture in which I thrive.

Please contact me at 123-456-7890 or mont123@umn.edu if you need any additional information.

Thank you again for your time.

Carlos Montgomery

YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

At its essence, your *personal brand* is what people think of you. It is the consistent image you convey to the world by the way you speak, write, dress, and act.

You are the only person who can manage your brand. So you need to be thoughtful and consistent about how you present yourself—both in person and online.

Your Brand in Person

Here are some key professional habits that U.S. employers tend to value in the workplace:

- Be early for meetings. Show that you value other people's time.
- Take notes in your meetings to show that you're paying attention to what's going on, and that you care about the conversation and its potential outcomes.
- Turn your phone off during meetings so that you can be fully present.
- Respond to emails within 24 hours of receiving them so that people know they can count on you to get back to them.
- Dress professionally. Research the workplace cultural norms (via observation or by asking questions) so that you can make an educated decision on how you want to best present yourself. Questions? Ask a CLA career counselor or check out the "UMN Job Fair" Pinterest page (visit pinterest.com/umnjobfair and click on the "Professional Attire" link) for more ideas!

- Follow through on your promises. People figure out quickly whether they can trust you ... or not.

Your Brand Online

Almost half of hiring managers say they research the social media profiles of job and internship candidates. What will a prospective employer find on **your** Instagram account ... or Facebook feed ... or Twitter feed ... or LinkedIn account ... or [tomorrow's social media sensation]?

Here are some key professional habits to practice to polish your brand online:

- Choose one consistent name to use online. Some combination of your first and last name is standard.
- Make sure your various profile pictures look professional, with only you in the photo. Don't include pets, friends, or other objects.
- Be professional about what you say in any "About Me" statements or bios.
- Keep your accounts clean and up to date, and delete or hide pages that are no longer active.
- Watch everything you say and portray, and assume it all can and will be viewed by people besides your close friends. Nothing is truly "private."

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

What type of help might you need developing various job search communication tools like your resume and cover letters? How do you plan to get that help?

What is the state of your personal brand at this point? Is it professional? What would prospective employers or graduate school admissions committees think, especially based on what they can discover about you online?

INTERVIEWS

You've made your case on paper—specifically, on your résumé and in your cover letter—for a job or an internship that intrigues you. (You've effectively applied many of the Core Career Competencies in the process, by the way.)

Now, you've landed an interview. Congratulations! It's time to make your case in **person**, by talking with one or more decision makers about the position and how you're the best candidate for it.

Let's walk through the path to success step by step: before the interview, during the interview, after the interview, and—keeping our eye on the ultimate goal—at the offer stage.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

What to Know, What to Bring, and What to Wear

Here are some tips to keep in mind before your interview, particularly with respect to what you should know, what you should bring, and what you should wear:

- Know the details of the interview: date, time, length, location, number of interviewers, and who the interviewers are. If the organization doesn't provide you with this information, ask.
- Update your résumé and bring several copies with you.
- Bring a padfolio or notepad, pens, and a portfolio (if you have one).
- Plan a professional outfit. Remember: It's better to be overdressed than underdressed! You don't need to spend a lot of money on an outfit; perhaps you have items in your wardrobe that are interview appropriate. If not, check

department stores for discounts or look in thrift stores. Here are some guidelines to follow regarding appearance:

Yes: Professional-looking pantsuit; suit or jacket; shirt and tie; knee-length tailored skirt; tights or nylons; comfortable dress shoes; clean shaven, well-groomed appearance. Make sure your clothes fit you well and that they are clean and ironed.

No: Jeans; T-shirts; tank tops or midriff shirts; shorts, short skirts; big earrings; excessive makeup; flip-flops or tennis shoes. Avoid perfume/cologne and smoking as well.

Know Yourself

Before going into an interview, it's critical for you to know how your experiences, skills, and competencies (namely, the Core Career Competencies) relate to the position you're applying for. While you will not likely be asked the specific questions that follow, knowledge about yourself and how you fit with the position will help showcase your enthusiasm and integrate your skills/competencies into your interview responses:

- Who are you? What are your interests, passions, values, talents, and skills/competencies?
- What is your educational background? What classes have you taken? What certifications are you pursuing, and what research have you conducted?
- What do you know how to do? (You should be able to articulate the experience you've gained through jobs, internships, volunteer positions, learning abroad, student group activities, and class projects.)

Remember too, once again, that you are more than your major. Don't forget that the

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The More You Interview, the Better You Get

"Take any interview experience you can get, even if you don't think you want the job, because it will prepare you for when you get an interview for something you do want."

— physiology major

list of the Core Career Competencies you've been developing came from extensive discussions with employers in particular. They are the ones looking for your Analytical & Critical Thinking, Innovation & Creativity, Oral & Written Communication, and Applied Problem Solving (among other Core Career Competencies) in real-world settings. Your liberal arts education is helping you develop these competencies. Now is the time to speak about them!

CAREER FACT: Skills and Competencies Matter Most

While the classes you've taken are important, 93% of employers report that they care more about your skills and competencies than your specific major (according to a study by the Association of American Colleges and Universities). So be sure to emphasize both in all your career-related interactions.

Know the Employer

The biggest mistake interviewees make, according to a survey of employers who hire U of M grads, is lacking knowledge about the organization they're interviewing with.

You can avoid this fate by doing your research to learn more about the employer before your interview. Figure out its culture, philosophy, and career paths, as well as its history and structure. The more you know, the better prepared you will be—and the more impressive you will be as well. Follow these steps to guide your efforts:

Gather information on the employer from:

- People you know who work in the industry. Use any connections you have through family, friends, professors, or classmates.
- The company's/organization's website.
- External websites such as Glassdoor (glassdoor.com), LinkedIn (linkedin.com), and The Business Journal (bizjournals.com) for the geographic area where the organization is headquartered.

Prepare questions to ask the interviewer(s):

- Don't ask questions that could easily be answered by visiting the employer's website. Instead, use the information you find in your research to create thoughtful questions that go a bit deeper.
- Don't ask about salary or benefits unless and until you have a formal job offer to consider. Sometimes employers will ask you about your salary requirements before they offer you a job. When they ask, be ready to give an answer based on the research you've done.
- Possible general questions that are appropriate to ask:
 - What is a typical day like for this position?
 - Who is your ideal candidate?
 - What is the supervision structure?
 - What are the next steps in the interview process?

Know Your Fit

After you've thought about your background and you've done extensive research on the organization, your fit for the position will start to emerge. While the interview is a place for the employer to find the best person for their open position, it is also an opportunity for you to figure out if you are a fit for that job and that organization. Throughout your interview, it's critical to be able to convey to the employer why you're a good fit.

So go through each line of the job description and think of an example from your academic, engagement, or work experience that demonstrates the associated skill/competency or quality the employer is seeking. This exercise will help you decide if you're a good fit for the position **and** help you prepare for the interview itself. You can even make yourself a quick chart:

THEIR SKILL/ COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS	MY EXPERIENCE
Team player	Elected to the position of secretary of the CLA Business Club; worked with other officers to plan the schedule and recruit new members
Ability to problem solve	During internship at publishing house, created a method of organizing book proposals by date to ensure we didn't miss a great new talent
Communication skills (oral and written)	As vice president of recruitment for a sorority, developed a plan for rush that involved all members; presented the ideas in an engaging manner that got the group excited to begin the rush process
Organizational skills and attention to detail	For final project in Psychology, conducted a literature review of _____, including working with faculty and reviewing more than 140 journal articles; kept notes and tracked progress

Practice Answering Interview Questions

It's impossible to know exactly what an employer will ask you in an interview. But the position description offers you a pretty good guide to what skills/competencies the employer is seeking.

So determine what those key skills/competencies are, always keeping in mind that the Core Career Competencies will certainly be among them. Then write down and practice describing examples of how you have developed these skills/competencies.

The more you practice, the more comfortable and natural you'll feel during the interview. You can even record yourself using InterviewStream (available via GoldPASS at goldpass.umn.edu) or a voice recorder on your phone. You can also do a practice interview with a CLA career counselor, or participate in Practice Interview Days (hosted in the CLA Career Services office each semester) with an employer.

CAREER TIPS

Practice Interviewing with InterviewStream

InterviewStream allows you to do practice interviews through your own computer, at your convenience! All you need is a webcam. Access this free resource via GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu).

Use Glassdoor to Learn About Interviewing at Different Companies

Glassdoor is a database featuring peer reviews of questions asked during interviews, as well as information on the overall application process at various companies—all from prospective and current employees of those companies. Visit glassdoor.com to learn more.

Here are a few of the most prevalent types of questions you should be ready for:

Tell me about yourself

- This is a very common way for an interview to begin. The key here is to keep your answer relevant to the position you're seeking. The interviewer doesn't need to know your entire life story; only the parts that make you a good fit for the position. So think about what brought you to this interview. Why did you apply for the position, and why are you qualified? You may want to talk about your educational background and the experiences you've had in college that are relevant, such as internships and student group involvement. This is also an excellent time to specifically mention your strongest of the Core Career Competencies that signify career readiness, perhaps doing so in terms of how others see you (e.g., "The people who know me best say I'm an excellent writer and a collaborative leader.")
- Bring up pre-college experiences only if they are particularly important to why you are applying for the position. Perhaps, for instance, you had early exposure to the organization through a family member, or you took a key class in high school that sparked your interest in the industry.
- Keep your response to this question concise. That's why preparation and practice are so important. Time yourself, making sure your response is no more than two minutes long.

What are your strengths? weaknesses?

- Think of three strengths you have (especially in the framework of the Core Career Competencies) that are relevant to the position, and come up with specific examples of when you've used these strengths to accomplish something that matters. For example, you might say that your top three strengths are:
 - Written communication, as evidenced by the concise memo you wrote for your internship supervisor, summarizing a recent book proposal.
 - Organization, as shown by your ability to maintain a 3.8 GPA in a busy semester of 18 credits, a 15-hours-per-week internship, and a leadership position in a student organization.
 - Problem solving, which was apparent when you led the development of a process for attracting and recruiting new students in collaboration with your fellow sorority members.
- When you're asked to give a weakness, the best way to respond is to focus on something you're trying to improve. Pick a skill versus a personality trait, and talk specifically about what you're doing to get better at it. For example:

While I'm confident in my ability to present to a group, I'm not as skilled in different presentation tools. I am currently challenging myself to not use PowerPoint for my next three presentations, and to instead use new tools such as Prezi, or rely on different visual aids.

One cautionary note: Make sure the skill you decide to talk about is not one that is essential to the position you're seeking! That said, employers know you're human, and that as humans, we make mistakes and have weaknesses. Showing self-awareness of the areas you need to improve is a great sign of maturity. Therefore, it's okay to be honest about those things, and then discuss how you have learned from your past experiences.

Behavioral-based questions

Employers are relying on behavioral-based questions more and more, thanks in large part to the underlying assumption behind them: "The past predicts the future." Specifically, the thinking goes,

how you've performed on something in the past will give the interviewer some pretty good insight into how you might respond to similar situations in the future.

Behavioral-based interview questions usually start with a phrase like "Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of when..." Because you won't know in advance the exact questions you'll be asked, you'll need to study the job description closely to see what specific skills the employer is seeking, particularly in the context of the Core Career Competencies that define career readiness. Then, simply think of examples of times when you demonstrated these skills/competencies, pulling from a variety of situations (not all from your classes, for instance, or an internship, or a student group activity).

Then practice—and practice some more—responding to each anticipated question using what we call the STAR format: Situation-Task-Action-Result:

Let's break this STAR concept down a bit further:

- **Situation:** Briefly set up the situation you were facing by describing the context of your example (the who, what, where, when, why, and how).
- **Task:** Explain the task you (not the group) had to complete, or the problem you had to solve.
- **Action:** Describe the actions you took to complete the task or solve the problem.
- **Result:** Close by explaining the result of your efforts. Quantify the outcome if possible.

Here's an example so you can see exactly how the STAR technique works:

Situation	Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?
Task	Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?
Action	Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?
Result	Explain the result: Accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc. Quantify.

Question: Describe a project for which you faced multiple deadlines, and talk about how you handled it.

Answer:

Situation: Last fall, I took the initiative to apply for grants to fund a professional speaker for a CLA event. It's often difficult to get grants for event funding, and it's important to meet various grant deadlines.

Task: I researched grant options and found several possibilities. Each had a different deadline and a different window of time for which the money could be used.

Action: The varying timelines required me to create a small database, which I organized by grant deadlines, purposes, and the windows of time they could be used. I used this database to help me apply for the appropriate grants at the appropriate times.

Result: The primary grant came through, but a smaller grant did not. So I quickly helped find a

last-minute event sponsor, then helped to update the PR materials and budget accordingly. In the end, the event was successful on multiple levels. We expected about 50 students to attend; 60 showed up. Also, we were able to provide honorariums to additional speakers. It was a fun project—one that required me to organize, problem solve, and make decisions.

As you get better at answering interview questions this way, you will find that the STAR approach is actually quite empowering. It gives you a specific method for responding, which boosts your confidence and improves your performance.

No, you may not know exactly what questions you will face in an interview. But you can make some pretty educated guesses, and the STAR technique offers you a proven way to prepare and deliver compelling responses.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Once the big day arrives and your interview begins, you are on the proverbial hot seat. It's a tough place to be: under inevitable pressure, in the spotlight, with only educated guesses about what you'll face. Here are some tips that will help you to not only survive, but thrive:

- Arrive 10 minutes before the start time of your interview. Why put even more pressure on yourself by forcing yourself to rush?
- Assume the interview starts the moment you arrive in the building, or even in the parking lot. Hiring decisions can be influenced by the people you interact with other than your interviewer(s)—for example, the front desk staff, or the parking lot attendant. So be polite to everyone.
- Follow the interviewer's lead, because every interview will vary based on the industry, the organization, and the person:
 - Some interviews are conversational in tone, while others are more structured. The key is to match the interviewer's style.
 - Typically in American business culture, making eye contact and shaking hands is expected. But perhaps this isn't the norm at the organization, or it might not be culturally appropriate. So be adaptable to the situation. Similarly, if shaking hands and making eye contact aren't culturally appropriate for you to do, you may want to let the interviewer know in advance or plan for how you'll approach this issue at the interview.
- Be yourself and show confidence. Don't worry about giving the "right" answer to each question, because there often isn't one. The interviewer simply wants to understand who you are and why you're a good fit for the position and the organization.
- Demonstrate how your experiences and skills (especially your development of the Core Career Competencies) make you a good fit. Tell detailed stories and provide lots of examples. Share your knowledge of the organization and your interest in the position. State how excited you are about the opportunity!
- If you're ever confused by what the interviewer is asking, simply ask for clarification; it's OK.
- If you're asked about something and you don't have an answer that comes immediately to mind, take time to pause and collect your thoughts. You can even say something like, "I need to think about that for a moment."
- Sometimes you'll be in front of a panel of interviewers. Be sure to address the whole panel during your responses, as opposed to focusing only on the person who asked you the question.
- Ask the thoughtful questions you've prepared for your interviewer, both to show that you've done your research and to determine whether this is a place you could see yourself working someday.
- As the interview is wrapping up, be sure to summarize your qualifications and interest once again, and thank the interviewer(s) for his/her/their time. Ask about the hiring timeline and

next steps. And if you don't already have contact information for your interviewer(s), ask for his/her/their business card(s) so you can follow up with a thank-you note.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Once your interview is over, well ... it isn't really over! Sure, you're out of the hot seat and back in your comfort zone. But you still have some interview-related work to do:

- Assess the interview and your interest in the position and organization. If you're no longer interested in the opportunity, contact the organization immediately to withdraw from the process.
- Send thank-you notes to everyone who interviewed you (see the section on thank-you notes elsewhere in this guide). In the note, restate your interest and qualifications, and be as specific as you can about what you enjoyed during the interview. It's appropriate and professional to send either handwritten or email thank-you notes. If the interviewer(s) indicates that the hiring process is moving quickly, then choose the email option so that your thank-you note arrives before any final decisions are made.
- If you haven't heard back from the employer within the designated timeframe, send a follow-up email to check on where things are in the hiring process—and to indicate that you're still interested in the opportunity. It can be as simple as something like this:

Dear Maria Blaise,

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the Volunteer Coordinator position at The Science Museum of Minnesota. I really enjoyed learning more about the Museum and how vital the volunteers are to the success of the organization.

After the interview, I am even more excited about the possibility of working for your organization, as my communication studies degree, experience volunteering at several nonprofits, and attention to detail make me a great fit for the position.

Thank you for considering me, and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Isabella Perez

OFFERS

If an interview goes well and you outperform the other candidates for the position, you will receive an offer. Congratulations!

Now what?

Just when you got the very result you've been looking for, you have another set of questions to answer. Here's how you can proceed, methodically and wisely:

- Don't accept a job/internship offer on the spot. Instead, thank the interviewer immediately to express your gratitude. Then ask what kind of timeline would be appropriate to get back to them with your response. Be sure to follow up with any questions you have about the offer before accepting it (or rejecting it, as the case may be).
- When you're reviewing an offer—particularly an offer for a full-time, permanent job—look at it holistically: your fit with the organization, your fit with the position, the salary, and the benefits (health insurance, 401(k), life insurance, vacation days, etc.). Here are a few tools

you can use to determine the cost of living and salary ranges based on location, industry, and position:

- Salary.com
- Payscale.com
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov)
- National Association of Colleges and Employers Salary Survey (available in the resource room at CLA Career Services, 411 Bruininks Hall).
- If you're still interviewing with other organizations you'd like to work for, contact them and let them know you've received an offer. Then inquire about their timelines so that you can make an informed decision.
- Once you accept a position, contact any organizations you've interviewed with to withdraw from their hiring processes. Don't ever accept a position and then go back later and decline it.
- A CLA career counselor can assist you in navigating the sometimes complicated process of deciding whether or not to accept a position.

Negotiating a Job Offer

Job offers are frequently negotiable, even at the entry level. So if you're unhappy about part of an offer you've received, ask the employer if the offer is in fact negotiable.

If the answer is yes, then prepare for how you're going to negotiate. Salary is the most commonly negotiated part of an offer, but other aspects may be negotiable too—for example, your starting date or the number of vacation days you receive.

Some key tips on salary negotiation:

- Remain professional, friendly, and open. Use language that demonstrates that you're simply having a conversation—and that you are asking, not assuming (or, worse, demanding).
- Cite specific reasons for why you're asking for something more, and have some research ready to back up your statements.
- Always give a salary range, not a firm number.

CAREER TIPS

It's OK to Negotiate

People from underrepresented populations, as well as women, are less likely to negotiate their salary. Although it can be intimidating for you to ask, employers are prepared for these conversations. In fact, they often expect it.

Remember: Once you receive an offer, the employer wants you! They've invested lots of time and energy to find the best candidate, and as long as you remain polite and professional, they are not going to revoke their offer just because you asked to negotiate the terms.

Keep in mind, too, that by not negotiating your starting salary, you could unintentionally lessen your earning potential over your working lifetime.

Here's an example of what your approach might sound like:

I'm so excited about this opportunity. Thank you for your offer, and for your willingness to discuss my salary and benefits. I did some research on the average salary for this role in the Twin Cities, and I was wondering if you would consider a salary in the range of \$38,000-\$41,000. I am very open to discussing this.

Declining a Job Offer

What if it turns out that you don't want the job/internship you've been offered? That's OK—you have your reasons. You just have to be professional and gracious in declining the offer.

Here's how:

- Let the organization know as soon as possible, because the people there are waiting for an answer from you before they can move forward.
- Be polite and sincere when you decline. Be sure to thank the people involved for considering you, and let them know your reason(s) for not accepting the offer.

One final, but critically important, note: Do not decline an offer after you have already accepted it. Employers/recruiters have a word for this aggravating practice—*reneging*—and it happens to them more than you might think. They make a job/internship offer to a college student, and the student accepts it. Then the student comes back a day or a week or even a month later and says, essentially: “I’ve changed my mind: Thanks, but no thanks.” Suddenly the employer’s hiring problem has returned, unexpectedly.

If you're the student who has reneged, don't expect to receive any more consideration from this organization. But it gets worse, potentially: Employers know each other, and word may spread that you are someone who will renege on a job/internship offer. Moreover, your fellow students—even the many who don't even know you—could be somewhat tainted as well. The employer might think: “I’m not going to hire any more students from _____” or “I’m not going to consider any more students from the _____ department at the U of M.”

So don't accept an offer unless you're really accepting it. Don't accept one and then continue looking for a better job/internship opportunity. If you're going to decline an offer, decline it outright.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

How prepared do you feel for the interviews you will eventually have? What aspects of interviewing do you see yourself really needing to work on, and why?

How do you plan to practice your interviewing skills? Will you work with a CLA career counselor? attend a career fair? participate in an on-campus event hosted by an employer?

PLANNING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

First things first: to go or not to go? Deciding if grad school is right for you.

Maybe you've been thinking about graduate school for years. Or maybe it's a brand new idea. Either way, you need to ask yourself one key question before you invest all the time, energy, and money involved, both in applying for graduate school and in succeeding once you get there:
Is graduate school right for me?

Before deciding if graduate school is right for you, you need to know that there are two types of graduate school programs. One type is professional and focused on giving you the skills and qualifications necessary to succeed in a profession; think of an MBA program or graduate degrees from medical or law schools. These programs are usually very structured and career focused. Other programs, typically those that end in a Ph.D., are more academically focused and aim mainly to prepare future professors and researchers. These programs are typically less structured and build around your own academic interests.

Here are a few questions that will help you make an informed decision about your potential graduate or professional school pursuits. You'll be able to answer some of them yourself, quite easily. For others, you'll need to do some research and perhaps even talk to graduate program staff members or faculty.

Start with this essential question: *Why am I interested in graduate school?*

Weak Answers

- I want to take a break from a tough job market.

- I want to figure out a new career path or find career direction. (There are cheaper ways to do that!)
- I don't know what else to do.

Strong Answers

- I'm genuinely interested in my field and passionate about pursuing new knowledge and expertise in a very specific area.
- My career goals require a graduate degree.
- I have the resources I need (time, academic record, money, energy) to be successful in a graduate program.

If you do ultimately decide that you'd like to go to graduate school, the next question to ask yourself is: *When is the right time?* You could go right away, or you could wait:

Reasons Why You Might Want to Go to Graduate School Right Away

- You have momentum and a desire to continue being a student.
- You may have more flexibility with fewer family, work, or financial commitments.
- The degree might be necessary to help you get the job you want, or it could help speed career advancement in your chosen field.
- You currently meet the requirements for admission (i.e., the program doesn't require extensive work experience before you apply, and your GPA/test scores fit within the program's criteria).
- You have the financial means to attend.

66 ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS 99

The More You Plan, the Less Stressed You Will Be

"During the fall semester of senior year, create a detailed plan of the steps you need to complete in the process of applying to graduate school so that you can maintain your stress levels."

— speech-language-hearing sciences major

Reasons Why You Might Want to Wait a Few Years to Go to Graduate School

- You need more time to be sure of your career goals.
- You currently do not meet the requirements for admission (i.e., the program you're targeting requires more work experience than you have, or higher GPA/test scores than you have).
- You don't yet have the financial resources to invest in another degree.
- You can save money by waiting, or you may find an employer who would help you pay for your program.
- The experience you gain doing something else may help strengthen your graduate school application.
- A break might boost your motivation for further study.

Graduate School Application Timeline

Once you've decided that you will in fact go to graduate school, keep in mind that you should begin the application process at least one year before you plan to start your chosen program.

Here's a planning chart with approximate timelines. Deadlines for specific programs can vary greatly, so be sure to look them up well in advance.

Spring of Junior Year, or 15 to 18 Months Prior to Enrollment

- Reflect on your personal and professional goals to determine if graduate school is right for you.

- Discuss your plans and options with trusted mentors, advisors, instructors, family members, alumni, etc.
- Identify the key considerations you'll be looking for in a graduate program (e.g., location, cost, program offerings, faculty, ranking, financial aid availability).
- Begin researching and evaluating graduate programs.

Summer Before Senior Year, or 12 to 15 Months Prior to Enrollment

- Contact admissions officers, faculty members, and students/alumni from your programs of interest to get more information, determine potential fit, and build relationships.
- Get organized! Learn about the admissions criteria and timelines of your applications, and keep track of your deadlines.
- Begin narrowing down your list of potential programs (select two to five that range in competitiveness).
- Study and register for entrance exams, if necessary.
- Write drafts of your personal statement and résumé/CV (curriculum vitae).

Fall of Senior Year, or 10 to 12 Months Prior to Enrollment

- Take required entrance exams, if necessary.
- Order your official transcripts from OneStop Student Services.

CAREER TIPS

Pursuing an Academic Career as a Professor or Researcher? Talk to Faculty for Help!

If you want to pursue an academic career as a professor or conduct research in an academic setting, talk directly to faculty here at the University who are in the field you want to go into! They are best positioned to help you understand which Ph.D. programs may fit your needs, and they can advise you on the process of pursuing your unique educational goals.

Research Various Funding Possibilities

Graduate assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, grants, and loans are excellent funding resources for graduate school. You can find more information about these opportunities by looking at the websites of the programs you're considering or talking with admissions.

- Start gathering necessary application materials, and get constructive feedback on your personal statement and CV (curriculum vitae)/résumé—early!
- Ask for letters of recommendation (from faculty members, instructors, advisors, and supervisors) at least four weeks before you need them.
- Learn about the funding/financial aid opportunities for the different graduate programs you're exploring.
- Submit your application(s) and supporting materials by the deadline(s)!

Winter/Spring of Senior Year, or 6 to 10 Months Prior to Enrollment

- Send thank-you notes to the people who wrote recommendations for you.
- Prepare for and complete interviews.
- Patiently await admissions decisions.
- Contact schools about the possibility of visiting. A personal visit can often improve your chances of being accepted. Departments/programs will sometimes help with travel expenses, so ask about that possibility.
- Consider multiple options and decide.

RESEARCHING AND EVALUATING GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Reflect

Before you select a graduate program, reflect on what you're really looking for in one. Common considerations might include location, class size, ranking, programs, faculty, research opportunities, financial support, access to professionals, internship possibilities, and licensure.

Talk with People!

You can usually contact a graduate school's admissions office for answers to your basic questions, and they will often give you contact information for graduate program faculty and/or students as well.

However, graduate programs vary considerably, and not all schools have admissions staff. Some graduate programs will instead offer a faculty member or a graduate coordinator as your primary contact. These key people can help you plan a visit to the campus. While you're there, you can arrange to sit in on classes and labs, if possible, and meet program faculty, staff, and students.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

What motivates you to apply for graduate or professional school? What factors have you considered when making this decision?

How will graduate or professional school help you continue developing the Core Career Competencies? Which ones will it help you develop the most, and why?

CAREER TIPS

Researching Graduate Programs? Be Thorough

Research your graduate school options by tapping resources like [Petersons.com](https://www.petersons.com), [GradSchools.com](https://gradschools.com), *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, professional organization websites, and graduate program admission pages. While rankings might be an important part of your decision, do not rely on rankings alone as you consider what school to apply to or attend; these rankings cannot and do not take into account your needs as an individual.

When you ask questions about grad schools and programs, be open to different viewpoints and listen for common themes that come up. Take notes. And if you arrange a program visit, prepare in advance the questions you'd like to ask while you're there.

Graduate School Programs: What Questions to Ask

Questions About Admissions

- What application deadlines should I be aware of?
- What is the undergraduate GPA range and preference for this program (sometimes referred to as the middle 50%)?
- If an entrance exam is required, what is the preferred test score (for standardized tests such as the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, or MCAT)?
- What percentage of students who applied last year were admitted?
- What additional factors have the most impact on acceptance into this program?
- What previous experience/knowledge (if any) is preferred for this program?

Questions About the Program

- Are there prerequisite courses I need to complete before I start this program?
- What are the degree requirements? How many required and elective classes are there?
- How long do students typically take to complete this program?
- What areas of concentration are available?

- How does the program's department evaluate student progress?
- What kind of thesis and examinations are required?
- What practical experience are students expected to complete?
- What professional development opportunities exist for students?
- What kind of licensure/certification will I be eligible for after completing the program?
- What support is provided to help students fulfill the experiential components of the program?
- What kind of job search support is provided by faculty members?
- What types of careers do alumni go into with this degree?
- Can I sit in on a class to observe the program in action?

Questions for Program Faculty

- What is most important to you in an advisee?
- When and how is an advisor selected? How difficult is it to switch advisors once you're into your program?
- How many full- and part-time faculty members teach in this department?
- What diversity exists within the faculty?
- What experiences have the faculty members had outside academia?
- What opportunities exist to work with faculty on their research or do research on my own?
- What are the research priorities of the faculty?

CLA Career Services Can Help You Explore Pre-Health and Pre-Law

If you're interested in pursuing a career in either the healthcare or law profession, be sure to check out the "Explore Pre-Health" and "Explore Pre-Law" guides on the CLA Career Services website at cla.umn.edu/career-guides.

You can also stop by CLA Career Services and pick up printed copies of our "Explore Pre-Health" and "Pre-Law Planning Guide" handouts.

Questions for Students Enrolled in the Program

- How available is your advisor?
- How would you characterize the departmental culture?
- What is the actual time commitment for a teaching assistant or research assistant position?
- Is the funding/stipend provided by the department enough to live on?
- How do students interact with each other inside and outside the classroom?
- What are some of the politics or current issues within the department?
- What diversity exists within the student body?
- How much support do students receive in developing their own approach to the field?
- How often do students present their work at professional conferences?
- What are the courses like?
- Are there opportunities to engage in research?

Questions About Finances and Resources

- How available are teaching assistantships, research assistantships, or fellowships?
- What other helpful resources are available for students (e.g., graduate student housing, medical insurance, child care, fitness facilities)?
- Are students guaranteed funding throughout their time in the program, or is it awarded on a yearly basis?

Narrow Your Options

Use the information you've gathered to narrow the list of programs you'd like to apply to. Often, students will end up applying to three to five programs, but your own number may be higher or lower. Whatever you decide, be sure you apply to a balanced list of programs that range in their competitiveness; target some programs that are well within your admission and financial reach, as well as alternative options that may be more competitive.

APPLICATION MATERIALS

When you're applying to graduate or professional school, be sure to contact each program directly to find out its specific application procedures. Visit each institution's website for detailed information about the application process.

Most schools and programs require applicants to complete multiple applications, forms, or essays. So be sure to thoroughly review all of the application instructions.

Among the items you'll commonly need to submit with your graduate school applications:

- Entrance exam results (often reported by an official service).
- Letters of recommendation.
- A personal statement.
- U of M official transcript (you can get one from OneStop Student Services).
- Résumé/CV (curriculum vitae).
- Completed application form.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Why are you considering the specific graduate or professional school programs you're investigating? What made you choose them?

How are you evaluating the specific graduate or professional programs you're considering? Who might you talk to about your choice, and what questions could you ask to determine which programs might be a good fit?

Entrance Exams

Many graduate and professional schools require applicants to take some type of entrance exam. So as you research graduate schools and programs, be sure to pay close attention to which test(s), if any, is required.

Testing centers often have wait times of two to four weeks for the popular exams, so plan accordingly. The Educational Testing Service website (ets.org) is an excellent resource for general information.

There are many ways you can prepare for entrance exams. First, consider your learning style, financial means, resources, and timeline. Then, of course, study! Here are some ways you can do so:

- **Review the actual exam.** Go over an old copy of the exam to familiarize yourself with the skills it assesses and the types of questions it asks. You can usually find old copies of the exam in the test's registration manual, on the test company's website, or in study guides. Once you're familiar with the actual exam, you'll be better prepared to choose your study techniques and priorities.
- **Form a study group.** Ask friends or classmates to study with you. Quizzing each other will help you learn from each other and make the process a little more fun.

- **Use study-guide books.** Any good bookstore will have study guides covering the major graduate/professional school admissions tests. CLA Career Services has some available for in-office use as well.
- **Enroll in a test preparation course.** Take a U of M "Graduate School Test Prep" class through the College of Continuing Education (cce.umn.edu). Alternatively, companies like The Princeton Review (princetonreview.com) and Kaplan (kaplan.com) offer prep classes for the most common entrance exams, such as the GRE. One cautionary note, though: These courses can be expensive. And while some students really like them and find them helpful, others think they're unnecessary. Before spending money (to say nothing of time and energy) on a test preparation course, thoroughly research it along with the outcomes you can expect from it.

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are a key part of the application process for graduate and professional school programs. These letters should describe—and give examples of—your strongest qualities, your best skills/competencies and abilities, your commitment to a particular field, and your potential to contribute to the target program's field of study and related careers.

CAREER TIPS

Give Letter Writers Plenty of Time

The recommendation letter process can take a while. So be sure to allow lots of time for it! Ask for letters of recommendation four to six weeks before you need them.

Get to Know Your Professors

Make an effort to get to know your professors, especially if you see yourself asking them for a letter of recommendation someday. Attend office hours, ask questions in class, and/or conduct research with them. If you're asking your advisor for a letter of recommendation, set up multiple appointments with them to discuss your goals and skills.

When It Comes to Letters, Quality Beats Quantity

Three detailed, compelling letters of recommendation will beat five or six vague, weak letters every time. Admissions committees notice the difference between strong praise and mediocre praise.

Who should write letters of recommendation for you? Here are some tips for picking the right people:

- Approach potential writers who will give you a solid recommendation. Ask them directly if they would be willing to write a letter that is reflective of who you are and the good work you do.
- Focus on people who know you well academically or professionally: faculty members, supervisors, coworkers, or advisors. Family members are usually not appropriate.

Remember, too, that your prospective letter writers have busy jobs, appointments, and possibly other students seeking recommendations as well. So do everything you can to make your request simple for them. Give them everything you can from the following list:

- Relevant information about the school(s) or graduate program(s) you're applying to.
- Your thoughts on what you see as your strongest qualities and skills/competencies (especially in the context of the Core Career Competencies that signify your career readiness).
- A copy of your current résumé, and/or a printed summary of your involvement in student organizations and groups.
- A list noting which academic courses you've completed and how well you did in them.
- A sample of your personal statement, if you wrote one for your graduate school applications.
- Pre-addressed envelopes for each school/program you're pursuing.

A few other key tips:

- Be sure that all of your recommendation letters appear on letterhead.
- Give your letter writers an early deadline, occasionally check in with them, and offer them reminders as needed.
- Thank your letter writers; they're giving you a significant amount of their time and energy!
- Keep your letter writers informed about the application process.
- Stay organized by carefully tracking who your letter writers are, what application deadlines you're dealing with, and who you have followed up with or still need to follow up with.

Personal Statements

For most graduate school applications, you'll be required to write a personal statement (also known as a statement of purpose). This is simply an essay in which you explain why you want to pursue a particular graduate program and why you'd be a good fit for it. (The piece also offers the program faculty a sample of your writing.)

As you prepare to write your personal statement, think carefully about questions like these:

- What are your motivations for pursuing graduate school?
- What are your interests, skills/competencies (particularly in the context of the Core Career Competencies), and goals? How do they relate to the graduate program(s) you're pursuing?

CAREER TIPS

Have Your Personal Statement Evaluated

Your personal statement can be a major factor in the admissions decision. It will be evaluated for quality of writing and clarity of professional goals. For help with it, connect with CLA Career Services or the U of M's Center for Writing (writing.umn.edu). You should also consider getting feedback from professors in your chosen field.

- How do your personal goals match with the institution(s) or program(s) you're considering?
- What makes you a strong candidate for the graduate program(s) you're targeting?
- What makes this particular kind of program a good fit for you? (For example, why law school instead of public policy?)
- How should you assess different graduate programs/schools? What are the criteria for acceptance? What are the values of each program and institution? What themes are expressed by students and staff from these programs/institutions?

Once you've answered these questions thoroughly, you can begin writing your statement. Use the information you've gathered through self-reflection and research, and thoughtfully explain how the program you're targeting fits you and your long-term goals. These tips will help:

Follow the Directions on Each Specific Application

- Read the instructions very carefully. Follow the required format, as well as the required word count or page limit.
- Read each question closely, and be sure to answer each one.
- If the school/program application offers no specific questions to address in your personal statement, focus on the experiences, motivations, and goals you have that relate to the program.
- If you're creating personal statements for multiple schools/programs, customize each one to reflect your research and interest in a particular program.
- Avoid writing vague or generic-sounding personal statements. They're ineffective.

Mention Your Research About the Program or School

- You view this program as a good match for you. Explain why.

- What opportunities does this program offer? What is it known for? Discuss why it matters to you.
- What faculty members do you hope to work with, and why?
- Use anecdotes from your life to tell the admissions committee who you are. Share stories about yourself, and relate them to the program and your long-term career plans.
- Emphasize what's unique about you—for example, classes you've taken, professors you've worked with, or events you've attended. You can also highlight projects, volunteer positions, jobs, or internships that relate to your goals.
- Demonstrate that you have a realistic sense of the field and the training required for it. Provide examples of how you've prepared yourself for this field (for example, how you did research, performed volunteer work, or pursued related experiences).
- Don't explain the field or program. The reader(s) of your personal statement will already be an expert.
- Use your statement to highlight information that isn't covered in other parts of your application.
- Draw the reader in with a strong opening statement and compelling first paragraph. Your application is one of many, and a solid start will help you stand out in the applicant pool.
- Discuss what the program will gain by accepting you.
- Keep your tone positive. This is not the place to make excuses for shortcomings in your background or application, or for poor grades. It **is** OK, though, to show how you've grown from your experiences. Doing so will showcase your self-awareness and maturity in overcoming any obstacles you may have faced.
- If there was a short period of time when you did poorly in school or withdrew from classes, and it was due to extenuating life circumstances (e.g., you were ill, there was a death in your

family), you can address the issue in an addendum. An addendum is a separate document from your personal statement and shouldn't be longer than one page. Make an appointment with a CLA career counselor for guidance on writing an addendum.

- Come across as genuine, realistic, unique, and excited.
- Avoid romanticizing your plans. Talk about realistic ways you expect to contribute to the field.
- Balance your enthusiasm, anecdotes, and self-marketing with practical information.
- Avoid clichés like “I’ve always wanted to...” or “I like to help people.” They’re meaningless.

Don't Stop Once You Have a Draft Ready

- Edit and proofread your statement as it stands so far. Are you communicating exactly what you want to say?
- Does the statement look professional, and is it well written? Look at grammar, font size, aesthetics, spelling, and format.
- Include your name as a header on each page.
- Take your statement to the U of M's Center for Writing (writing.umn.edu) for feedback and editing tips. (See “Student Writing Support” at writing.umn.edu to learn more.)

- Have a CLA career counselor review the statement. Just contact CLA Career Services and request a personal statement appointment. (Note: You'll need to send your document to Career Services at least 24 hours before your appointment.)
- Minnesota English Language Program (MELP) offers free, in-person English as a Second Language support to international undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota. Located in 20 Nicholson Hall. Questions? Call 612-624-1503, e-mail esl@umn.edu, or visit z.umn.edu/melp.

Done? Almost.

Before you submit your finalized personal statement with your other application materials, proofread it one last time! Have someone else proofread it too.

Then send it off—and congratulate yourself!

66 ADVICE FROM CLA GRADS 99

Use All Your Resources to Discover the Path That's Best for You

“Use your resources, start imagining your post-graduation career, how you can use your education and experience. Look at job postings, speak with current people who work in your field, discover what further education/experience is needed to pursue your career post-graduation. Get involved in internships or volunteer experiences that are related to your intended field.

Most of all, take your time in deciding what field is best for you. Experiment as needed in different interests. Don't let outside or internal pressure force you into a job that is less than what you hoped for.

You have time to discover what path is best for you. Good luck!”

— psychology major

MAKING A DECISION

You submitted all of your graduate/professional school application materials weeks or months ago, and now you've been notified about a decision by the admissions committee. Maybe you've received acceptance to your top choice, or an alternate choice. Perhaps you've been put on a waitlist. Or maybe you received a rejection letter.

Whatever the outcome, you still have your own decision to make. So reflect back on your reasons for applying to graduate school in the first place, as well as your needs and priorities:

- If you've received a rejection and you'd like to reapply in the future, speak with an admissions representative from your target school/program to learn how you can strengthen your application next time.
- If you've been put on a waitlist, consider how long you are willing to wait before pursuing other options.
- If you've received an acceptance, congratulations! Now, make sure to consider factors like cost, financial aid, location, opportunity, and personal fit to weigh the pros/cons of accepting the offer. If you decide to go ahead, pat yourself on the back for a job well done! You're on your way.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

What sort of help might you need in preparing your graduate/professional school entrance exam and application materials—particularly your personal statement?
How do you plan to get that help?

What will you do if your graduate or professional school pursuits don't turn out the way you want them to, at least at first? What if you aren't accepted into your chosen program at all? What if you're wait-listed?

If you've been accepted into a graduate or professional school program, what criteria will you use to decide whether to pursue it ... or not? What questions do you still have?

CAREER TIPS

Return Often to the “Reflection and Decision Making” Questions in This Guide

One of the many purposes of the “Reflection and Decision Making” questions in this guide is to help you understand yourself better, both now and as you continue exploring options, gaining experience, and preparing to excel after graduation.

So be sure to return often to these questions. They will help you solidify what you know about yourself, what you want, and what you can contribute—so that you can communicate it clearly and compellingly.

THE CORE CAREER COMPETENCIES THAT DEFINE CAREER READINESS

Analytical & Critical Thinking comprehensively explores issues, ideas, knowledge, evidence, and values before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion. Those competent in Analytical & Critical Thinking:

- Recognize there may be more than one valid point of view.
- Evaluate an issue or problem based on multiple perspectives, while accounting for personal biases.
- Identify when information is missing or if there is a problem, prior to coming to conclusions and making decisions.

Applied Problem Solving is the process of designing, evaluating, and implementing a workable strategy to achieve a goal. Those competent in Applied Problem Solving:

- Recognize constraints.
- Generate a set of alternative courses of action.
- Evaluate alternatives using a set of criteria.
- Select and implement the most effective solution.
- Monitor the actual outcomes of that solution.

Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making recognizes ethical issues arising in a variety of settings or social contexts, reflects on the ethical concerns that pertain to the issue, and chooses a course of action based on these reflections. Those competent in Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making:

- Assess their own personal and moral values and perspectives as well as those of other stakeholders.
- Integrate these values and perspectives into an ethical framework for decision making.
- Consider intentions and the short- and long-term consequences of actions and the ethical principles that apply in the situation before making decisions.

Innovation & Creativity generates new, varied, and unique ideas, and makes connections between previously unrelated ideas. Those competent in Innovation & Creativity:

- Challenge existing paradigms and propose alternatives without being constrained by established approaches or anticipated responses of others.
- Employ their knowledge, skills, abilities, and sense of originality.
- Have a willingness to take risks and overcome internal struggle to expose their creative self in order to bring forward new work or ideas.

Oral & Written Communication intentionally engages with an audience to inform, persuade, or entertain. Those competent in Oral & Written Communication:

- Consider relationships with the audience and the social and political context in which one communicates, as well as the needs, goals, and motivations of all involved.
- Have proficiency in, knowledge of, and competence with the means of communication (including relevant language and technical skills).
- Ensure that communication is functional and clear.

Teamwork & Leadership builds and maintains collaborative relationships based on the needs, abilities, and goals of each member of a group. Those competent in Teamwork & Leadership:

- Understand their own roles and responsibilities within a group, and how they may change in differing situations.
- Are able to influence others without necessarily holding a formal position of authority, and have the willingness to take action.

- Leverage the strengths of the group to achieve a shared vision or objective.
- Effectively acknowledge and manage conflict toward solutions.

Engaging Diversity builds awareness of one's own cultural background and that of others, as well as the surrounding social and historical contexts. Those competent in Engaging Diversity:

- Understand how culture affects perceptions, attitudes, values, and behaviors.
- Are able to appreciate and adopt multiple cultural perspectives or worldviews.
- Use multiple cultural perspectives to be effective in diverse environments and with diverse populations.
- Recognize how culture and power interact, creating structures that privilege and disadvantage.

Active Citizenship & Community Engagement develops a consciousness about one's potential contributions and roles in the many communities one inhabits, in person and online, and takes action accordingly. Those competent in Active Citizenship & Community Engagement:

- Actively engage with the communities in which they are involved.
- Build awareness of how communities impact individuals, and how, in turn, an individual impacts, serves, and shapes communities.
- Evolve their awareness of culture and power in community dynamics.

Digital Literacy leverages knowledge of information and communications technology and media literacies, and utilizes the interpersonal skills necessary to succeed in a digital space. Those competent in Digital Literacy:

- Assess sources of information.
- Use technologies responsibly.
- Adapt tools to new purposes.
- Keep up with the evolving technology landscape.

Career Management is the active engagement in the process of exploring possible careers, gaining meaningful experience, and building skills that help one excel after college and lead to employment or other successful post-graduation outcomes. Those competent in Career Management:

- Understand their values, interests, identity, personality, skills, strengths, and Core Career Competencies.
- Are able to articulate how those characteristics, combined with and shaped by a liberal arts education, lead to career success.





COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

CLA ADVISING

16 Johnston Hall
class@umn.edu
612-625-2020

 [@UMNCLA](https://www.instagram.com/UMNCLA)

 [@UMNCLAstudents](https://www.facebook.com/UMNCLAstudents)

CLA CAREER SERVICES

411 Bruininks Hall
clacareer@umn.edu
612-624-7577

 z.umn.edu/linkedincla

 [@UMNCLAstudents](https://twitter.com/UMNCLAstudents)

HELPFUL CAREER READINESS RESOURCES

For a complete list of the helpful career readiness resources you can use as a CLA student, visit: cla.umn.edu/career-resources