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Recession Readyng Your Job Search

BY BRANDY KIGER

Those of you nearing graduation may be concerned about your future prospects as the economy continues to slow. This is acceptable; being concerned means you are aware. Yes, the job market right now is competitive, but it is still possible for many graduates to find a job. It may just take a little longer and a more concerted effort on your part to find and obtain the job you want. With some careful planning, you can be at the top of your game when you go out into the job market. The key is to know what you want, and to work toward that goal.

Jobs are going to be highly competitive, but they are not nonexistent. It is unrealistic to expect a job to fall out of the sky; you are actually going to have to search deeper for jobs in this market. That means going past the classifieds or just a simple keyword search on [Google](#). A good way to

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Are You Considering Graduate School?

BY BRANDY KIGER

Are you considering going to graduate school? Having a master's degree affords many benefits, such as a credential and expertise in your field or discipline, but be cautious about doing it just for the sake of doing it. Graduate school is an investment, both in time and money, and you want to make sure that you are doing what is best for your future. We've consulted with Dr. Scott Higgins, Dean of the [WCU Graduate School](#), as well as Dr. Chris Cooper of the [WCU Political Science and Public Policy Department](#) to get some advice on when and why you should pursue a master's degree, or higher.

Making the switch from an undergraduate program to a graduate program is a big transition. Cooper says that going to graduate school is "not just an extension of your undergraduate [study], but requires a change in the student's mindset," and a willingness to pursue opportunities outside of class. "Graduate school gives you the chance to work with experts on campus and in the community," Higgins adds, and that is something that you want to take advantage of as you plan for your career.

There is no one path to graduate school. Some students jump right in after their undergraduate degree, building on the momentum they already have. "[Performing well in] graduate school is a skill like any other," Cooper says, "You continue to learn how to write papers and take tests." Taking this direct route makes sense for people who know what they want to do, such as be a professor or a doctor or work in healthcare. Other people come in from different routes; they get experience in the real world, and start to form an idea of what they want to focus on in their careers. "It depends

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CAREER SERVICES PROGRAMS FOR SUCCESS

Students and Alumni: Take advantage the many services we offer!

JobCat, MonsterTRAK, and Localjobs.com

Internet-based recruiting systems on our website that include jobs as well as opportunities to post a resume and sign up for interviews.

Career Counseling

If you have a career concern that you would like to discuss, call for an appointment with a career counselor.

Career Testing

If you are having difficulty making a decision about a major or a career, we offer career testing and interpretation.

Cooperative Education

Co-op is a program that allows you to work in your career or major field and receive directly related experience and credit WHILE you are still in school.

Resume Critiquing Service

Email your resume (cover letter, too!) to mdespeaux@email.wcu.edu or mashe@email.wcu.edu and make an appointment to discuss it!

Career Services INFORMATION

828-227-7133 | <http://careers.wcu.edu>

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Student Employment

Need some cash? The [student employment office](#) can help you find a part-time job. We offer listings for on-campus as well as off-campus employment. Visit them at <http://careers.wcu.edu>.

Career Services Website

Our website offers links, articles, event calendars, job search tools, directories, videos and DISCOVER, a computer-aided guidance program to help you in your career decision. Available at <http://careers.wcu.edu>.

Interviewing Skills Assistance

You can participate in a mock interview and improve your skills through our online [Perfect Interview program](#)

Career Days and Recruitment Events

Career Services offers 18-20 [recruitment events](#) every year, including the Career and Graduate School Expo, the Allied Health and Nurses' Career Day, Spring Job Fest, Summer Job Fair, Engineering, Math, and CS Fair, Construction Management Fair, Education Recruitment Day and multiple etiquette-development events.

Want to get on the career path?

Use JobCat.

1. [Log into JobCat at careers.wcu.edu](#)
2. Complete a personal profile
3. Upload a resume
4. Submit your online application by the deadline.

JobCat is updated with new jobs almost every day, so check for updates regularly!

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start your job search is to look at websites like [JobCat](#) (made available to you at <http://careers.wcu.edu>) and [CareerBuilder.com](#) and find a job similar to what you are looking for. What are the terms they use to describe the job? Use those specific terms to do a broader search for similar positions in other companies. But this is just a start. An article on [careerbuilder.msn.com](#), entitled “5 Ways to Get the Job You Want – in Any Economy,” says that “most of the jobs available are not advertised. They are hidden and waiting for you to discover them.” This means it is going to take effort on your part, and you are going to have to work to find work.

Research the options you find or think that you would like to explore. Be aware of what the economy looks like, and which companies and industries are still hiring even in the recession. Target your search to include those jobs in areas of the economy that have potential for hiring and growth in the near future. Right now, according to [CareerBuilder.com](#), the areas of education, health care, government, information, technology, and food service are still growing in the job market. These fields are very broad and potentially hire everyone from English majors to graduates with more specific degrees.

Once you’ve narrowed your focus, start thinking about what you can offer to a company that other candidates can’t. How

has your education prepared you for this position? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Identify your skills and then sharpen them, building on them as necessary. If you think your communications skills or your computer skills need some improvement, don’t be afraid to take that extra class to gain an edge in your field.

This economy is competitive, so you have to know your field and use your resources to your advantage. Your resources include professors, past employers, internships, your family, friends, and people at your church, amid a myriad of other possibilities. Utilize these networking contacts, and if you don’t have them, start building them. Knowing someone inside the market you are trying to break into is a valuable asset to your job search. Start meeting people early; go to career fairs and career events, and get to know what qualities employers expect in their employees. Look for intern and co-op opportunities in your field; it’s a great way to get your foot in the door and make a real impression on potential employers. Volunteering is another good way to make connections and gain valuable experience in your field. These experiences look great on your resume, and they also allow you that added bonus of forming key relationships and connections with people who can help.

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on what your needs are,” Higgins adds, “Different kinds of students are attending graduate school. Some have been laid off, while others have employers who require additional skills beyond the bachelor’s degree. They go back to learn or enhance skills, to make themselves more marketable.”

Whatever the reason, students entering now are more focused and more selective in their pursuit of higher education. “Students are pursuing programs where there are known jobs or potential for job growth,” Higgins says. It’s important to take a good look at the job market and research where it is growing, and whether or not it will benefit you to continue your education in your field. “The unknown is there,” Higgins continues,

“Will it be worth my time and money to continue my education?”

So, what are the benefits of graduate school? Cooper says that the biggest difference between undergraduate work and graduate work is that you move from being a consumer of information to a producer of it. “As an undergraduate, you know a little about a lot, but when you are a graduate student, you become more focused and know a lot about one subject. You’re doing a lot more in graduate school, learning how to apply what you’ve learned to real world situations.” Higgins agrees, “Graduate level work causes you to focus on a specific discipline; you’re becoming an expert in your field.”

Plus, you learn to think critically and analytically, something employers value. “Graduate school teaches you to make better decisions,” Higgins elaborates, “You read more, and get a broader perspective ... you develop problem solving skills, and the ability to communicate solutions to problems both verbally and in writing. It’s a higher order of thinking.”

“When the economy is bad, there is a way to use it to your advantage. Graduate school is a great example of how you can do that,” Cooper explains. “It [Graduate school] allows you to take on things, to be more deliberate about building your [resume](#). But it’s not enough anymore just to do the work to get the grade – it’s about making yourself better and more marketable.”

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It can take some time to find a job in a recession, so be flexible. Take on a part-time job in a company where you want to work; it can open doors later on. It can also allow you to “try on a job for size” to see if it is really a good fit for you. It will also give you the chance to network more effectively if you are already working within your field. In some fields, it is possible to freelance. This will get your name and your talents or skills on the radar of future employers, as well as build your portfolio and resume.

Keep an upbeat attitude, sharpen your skills, and stay flexible. It will take some time, but with effort on your part, you can land a job that can become the next step of a career.

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Pursuing a graduate degree outside your bachelor’s field is an option as well. It may require that you take prerequisites to be on the same level as your peers, but Higgins says that if you have good grades, good test scores, and interview well, you have a good chance at being successful. “Dedication is much more important than intelligence [in a graduate program],” Cooper says, “It’s all about your willingness to succeed.”

Choosing which graduate school to apply to and attend is a big decision. When picking graduate schools, you need to give yourself plenty of time to compile application materials, write essays, put together portfolios, and request letters of recommendation, transcripts and test scores. Many programs have fixed deadlines for when application materials are due, so be aware of these and plan accordingly.

The other thing to consider in your graduate school search is location. Do you want to attend the same school where you completed your undergraduate? Or do you want to try something different? Both options are viable. “If you have a choice, you should get two different perspectives from two different institutions,” Higgins continues; “Having said that, there are good programs at Western that would serve our students well.” Cooper affirms this, saying that the stigma associated with attending the same institution for multiple degrees no longer exists. If you want to stay in the region, then consider WCU as an option. “It will allow you to make professional contacts in the region.”

Higgins says that it is important to talk to students who attend a program you are considering, and to visit the campus and meet with faculty. “You can tell really quickly what is a good fit for you after talking to faculty. Size and fit are critical, and it depends upon the student. The size of the school does not necessarily equal the quality of the experience you will receive.” Cooper also adds that you should make sure look at the outcome of programs to which you are applying, because

What College Graduates Can Expect Out of the Job Market

CNBC.COM

The job outlook for 2009 graduates is low, but “[What College Graduates Can Expect Out of the Job Market](#),” as published on CNBC.com, gives some great insight on how students can begin preparing themselves to be competitive in the current economy. (See also, “Recession Readyng Your Job Search,” in this publication.)

It discusses the “ideal candidate,” and how students can begin shaping their college career to fit the criteria employers are looking for, as well who’s hiring, salary outlook for new hires, and how to set yourself apart in a shrinking economy.

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results are important. “Where do their students get jobs? What are they doing with their degrees?” These are just some of the questions you should ask when exploring graduate programs.

“Your choice should revolve around the academic reputation of a university or institution,” Higgins says, “Look at the available money or support that the program offers, and the focus of what you are going to study, their curriculum or program. You want to match your strengths and weaknesses with that of the graduate program.”

Western currently has 2,000 students enrolled in its [graduate school](#), in [30 programs with 55 different options](#). Many of our programs in the Arts & Sciences are considered to be at the top of the game.

“We’re about creating the best (most meaningful) graduate experience for each student who comes here. We’re interested in recruiting top graduate students from diverse populations with diverse interests. Scholarship is a hallmark of the Graduate School & Research, especially scholarship that is focused on improving the communities in our region,” Higgins says.

Western has programs that focus on real, marketable skills, and they are available to you. Admissions requirements for Western’s graduate school can be found at <http://www.wcu.edu/244.asp>. Make sure to check departmental sites for additional requirements. Deadlines for admission are four weeks prior to the start of your first term. International students have different requirements, and those can be found in the Dates & Deadlines section of the Graduate School webpage.

Any student or alum considering graduate school is welcome to take advantage of our [career counseling services](#). We’ll be happy to help you see where graduate school fits into your career plan and decide if it’s the right choice for you.

Spring 2009 Calendar of Events

February

3rd [Etiquette Dinner](#)
6:00 pm – 8pm, UC Grandroom
This event is intended to teach students the rules of proper dining and conversation in a formal setting. Attire is business casual. The event is \$15.00 per person; cash, check, or student meal ticket/Cat-Card will be accepted. Tickets can be purchased at Career Services in 205 Killian Annex.

11th [Construction Management Career Fair*](#)
9:00 am – 12:00 pm, UC Grandroom

17th [Physical Therapy & SLP Career Fair*](#)
4:00 pm – 6:00 pm, UC Grandroom

March

10th [Summer Jobs and Internships Fair](#)
11:00 am – 2:00 pm, UC Grandroom

[Etiquette Reception*](#)
5:30 pm – 7:00 pm, UC Multipurpose A&B
This event is intended to teach students proper networking at its best. Attire is business casual. The event is \$5.00 per person; cash, check, or student meal ticket will be accepted. If you are interested in participating, please visit Career Services or call 828.227.7133.

11th [Corporate, Non-Profit & Government Career Expo*](#)
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm, UC Grandroom

[Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math \(STEM\) Career Fair*](#)
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm, UC Grandroom

[“Ask the Experts” Panel Discussion Series- “Life After Art & Design School: Artists, Arts Professionals and Non-Profit Organizations”](#)
4:00 - 6:00 p.m., UC Theater

12th [Panel Discussion: Career Planning in Tough Economic Times](#)
3:30 - 5:00 p.m., UC Theater

18th & 19th [Teaching Opportunities for Non-Teaching Majors](#)
3:30 pm – 4:30 pm, UC Catamount Room

24th [Education Recruitment Day*](#)
9:00 am – 12:00 pm, UC Grandroom

****For all Expos and Career Days***

Business casual to professional attire is required. Students and alumni are encouraged to bring several copies of your latest resume. We also suggest uploading a resume into JobCat. If you need assistance with developing a resume, please visit Career Services (205 Killian Annex) or schedule an appointment with a career counselor 828.227.7133.

Lists of attending organizations and details about career events will be available at <http://careers.wcu.edu> and on JobCat. Lists will be updated as registrations are received.

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The article highlights key skills that college students need to acquire to make themselves marketable, drawing from data gathered by [NACE, the National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).

“Hiring prospects are down across the board,” but “there are some bright spots driven by supply and demand.” The article stresses networking as a way to find those bright spots in the economy. In this economy, “cultivating your personal network” is essential.

But, the key to finding a job is flexibility. Amanda Koncz, spokeswoman for NACE, says students need to be willing to look outside the box for jobs. “It may not be your ideal offer, but at least its an offer,” and just having a job will garner experience you will need for your career.

Read the full article, “What College Graduates Can Expect Out of the Job Market,” by [CNBC.com](#) [here](#).

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