

EY Center for Careers

Key Factors and Steps for Career Planning Success

CSUN is located in a large metropolitan area where there are numerous students enrolled in your major amongst many colleges/universities, creating a large pool of candidates from which employers can select to fill internship and full-time positions. Therefore, you have a lot of competition, and this guide will help you better prepare and position yourself to improve your recruiting process and career opportunities. It usually takes much more than a good resume to get hired at the firm and position of your choice.

** The better your decision as to what you do and where you start your career, the more likely you will perform well, grow and develop with your employer, and advance in the organization, on the path to achieving your goals, gaining more responsibility, more challenge, more contribution, more opportunity, and more income.

[Use this guide in tandem with the Career Planning Guide on the EY Center website (<http://csun.edu/acctis/ey-center>)]

Key Factors:

1. **GPA** - Your overall and your major GPA are extremely important. Many employers target a minimum GPA of 3.2 or 3.0, and may only consider candidates who are below the minimum under special circumstances. If your CSUN GPA is higher than your overall GPA, it is beneficial to note it on the resume, include it in your cover letter, and share it while networking. A higher CSUN GPA shows a positive trend, especially if you had previously pursued a different major, had challenges in your life, or did not take school seriously.

** With all else that you have to do for networking and recruiting, a focus on school and grades should be your first priority.

2. **Resume** - a well-prepared, accurate and properly formatted resume is a key to success. This is the document that employers, especially recruiters, will use to make an initial assessment of you. Include your Education, Experience (work experience does not have to be in your profession), Professional/Student Involvement and Volunteer Activities (include leadership roles and contributions you have made), and Skills (technical and language skills only). Do not list soft skills (e.g., communication, detail oriented, leadership, team player, organization, multi-tasking, etc.) - instead demonstrate them in the descriptions of your responsibilities and accomplishments in the Experience and Professional Involvement/Volunteer Activities section. Include Interests (i.e., hiking, travel, music, swimming, art, piano, etc.) if you are applying with a Big 4 and/or mid-tier public accounting firm.

In the Education section, IS and CIT students should include courses in their major (it is not necessary for accounting students as they take the same core courses). IS and CIT students can create a Technical Skills section (operating systems, hardware, security, applications, programming languages, databases, etc.) and place it between the Education and Experience sections.

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There are accounting and IS/IT Resume templates (in Word doc form) on the EY Center website (<http://csun.edu/acctis/ey-center>). You can make an appointment with the EY Center Director for a resume review, meet with one of the EY Center student assistants, and/or attend an EY Center Resume workshop.

- 3. Cover Letter** - Most employers require a cover letter with your application. Your cover letter should be tailored for the specific position and employer. The purpose of the cover letter is to express your genuine interest in the position/career path and employer, and provide examples of your relevant experience and/or skills. A generic cover letter is ineffective, shows lack of initiative, and may remove you from serious consideration for an interview. There is a Cover Letter template for the large public accounting firms on the EY Center website (<http://csun.edu/acctis/ey-center>). If you are applying for full-time, internship, or part-time positions outside of the on-campus interview (OCI) process, there is another Cover Letter template that also allows you to tailor your relevant education, experience and technical skills to the requirements of the position. You can meet with the EY Center Director one-on-one and/or get guidance from one of the EY Center student assistants for cover letter review. The EY Center's Resume & Cover Letter workshop provides additional guidance on best to prepare your cover letter.
- 4. Interview** - you have invested in preparing a professional resume and customized cover letters, done your research including networking, and now you have been invited for an interview. Prepare for your interview! The purpose of the interview is for you and the employer to determine if there is a mutual fit based on what you and the employer are each looking for. The interview should be a two-way discussion. To prepare for an interview, you can anticipate certain questions ("Tell me about yourself", "What are your strengths and weaknesses", "Why are you interested in [firm/practice are]..."), and the dreaded behavioral questions. Prepare and practice, but do not memorize any responses. The better prepared you are, the more relaxed (less nervous) you are likely to be. The EY Center conducts Interview workshops each semester to help prepare you for questions you can anticipate, including behavioral questions; a streamlined and effective approach is provided to help you prepare your examples so that you are ready for the majority of anticipated behavioral questions.

During the Interview workshop, you will also learn the importance of and how to ask meaningful questions to the professionals. Asking questions increases your learning, helping you to evaluate and compare each firm, and asking questions makes the interview two-way and demonstrates your genuine interest in the firm. There is an Interview Guide and Behavioral Question Template on the EY Center website (<http://csun.edu/acctis/ey-center>).

- 5. Professional Etiquette** - Throughout the networking and interview process, professional etiquette is essential. You are being observed and "judged" on your behavior in every encounter with professionals. Etiquette includes how you communicate, how you dress, and how you behave. Remember that you represent both yourself and CSUN.

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With all communications, express yourself appropriately - do not use abbreviations, do not be too informal, and do not be rude or demanding. With written communications, always check your content, spelling, grammar and punctuation. You are all pursuing careers that require an attention to detail, so demonstrate the attention to detail with your communications, especially those that are written.

Dress appropriately for each activity, event or interview. Dress code for interviews is typically business professional. The dress code varies with other activities/events - ask the firm (or student organization) in advance about the expected dress code.

If you apply for a position, respond to all interview invitations (either accept or decline). When you schedule an interview, show up. If you are feeling ill or running late, definitely call in advance. Never blow off an interview - it reflects poorly on you and on CSUN, and you will probably burn your bridge with that firm.

Send thank you emails within 24 - 48 hours after coffee chats, Meet the Firms, interviews and other significant conversations with professionals. It is proper etiquette, displays your genuine appreciation for their efforts, and it might make the difference between an offer or rejection.

If you receive offers for both a winter and a summer internship, or a winter internship and a full-time position, you need to discuss the offers openly and honestly with both firms. In most cases, a Big 4 or mid-tier accounting firm hires you for an internship with the anticipation of extending you a full-time offer upon successful completion of the internship.

*** Do not think that you will fool employers by not communicating with them openly and honestly - people talk, employers will find out, and then your offers are at risk. Ethical (professional) behavior is expected.*

Key Steps:

1. **Know Yourself** - who you are includes your personality type, your work values, the work activities that you will enjoy doing, the skills you have (or will improve), and the skills you will enjoy using in a work setting. Identify the most important factors with which you will evaluate career options and employers (use the *Career Planning Guide* on the EY Center website - <http://csun.edu/acctis/ey-center> - for a list of factors to consider). The better you know yourself, the more effective will be your research and the more likely you will make an informed decision.
2. **Start the Research and Recruiting Process ASAP** - start learning now about your selected profession in accounting, IS or IT, potential career paths, companies/firms, the recruiting process, etc. Do not put it off until next semester or next year! Just attending classes, achieving a good GPA, and having a good resume are typically not enough to land a good career position, and especially doing what you want to do with the firm with whom you want to work.

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It is not in your best interest to “try out” a position or firm - you are less likely to perform well or stay. Then, you risk jumping to another position and employer that does not work out either. An unstable career history becomes more and more of an obstacle.

It takes time, a lot of time, to learn about yourself, the profession, career paths and employers. It requires more than just reviewing a website, attending a couple of meetings, and/or only attending Meet the Firms. There are numerous opportunities to learn including Office Hours, special events, firm tours, and lots of networking (e.g., “Coffee Chats” - (see #3 below). Like anything else, the greater your effort, the more you will learn, the better prepared you will be, and the better the outcome.

In addition to your need to know who you are and what you are looking for, employers also need to know you and see that you are a good fit - their interest is based on who you are, what you are looking for, who they are and what they offer.

Why do employers want to hire students (employees) who know what they want and are genuinely interested? Hiring is a business decision. Employers invest a lot of time and \$\$ in recruiting, hiring and training. Employers make business decisions based on their anticipated “Return on Investment” (ROI). If you know what you want, and you are genuinely interested in an employer and career path, you are more likely to perform well, stay longer and grow with the employer, thereby increasing their ROI. On the other hand, if you do not know what you want to do, or you know little or nothing about an employer and how well it fits with you and your goals, you are more likely to be dissatisfied, and leave quickly, costing the employer, and netting a poor ROI.

What is the Benefit for you? As already mentioned above, the better informed you are about yourself and your opportunities, the better decision(s) you will make, and the more likely you will be successful, not only in your initial role, but throughout your career.

- 3. Network, Network, Network!** What is Networking? Networking is the process of conducting research with professionals and building professional relationships. It is much more than saying “hello” and having a brief chat (which is often the experience after a club meeting/event or at Meet the Firms). It is learning about the professional, their experiences and decisions, and their employer. Then, it is matching what you learn with what is important to you (who you are and what you are looking for). The most effective networking is meeting one-on-one with a professional for a longer period of time for a “Coffee Chat”. A “Coffee Chat” can be over the phone or in person; it is less important about when or where, and more important as to the nature and content of the discussion. Please read the “Coffee Chat” guide on the EY Center website (<http://csun.edu/acctis/ey-center>).
- 4. Identify Potential Career Paths | Set Goals** - determine what you want to do, both initially and longer term. Connect your starting place with your future destination (goals) - it is similar to finding directions using a map program or app - you need both the starting point and the destination. There may be multiple paths to get you to that destination. Identify the differences between each path (What steps do you need to

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take? What education, experience and skills are required? How long will it take to get there? - and - What is the feasibility for each?).

Evaluate and match potential career paths and employers with your “wish list” (based on your values, interests, skills), and other factors that are important to you. Focus on learning as much as you can about your top choices. Balance what you want ideally, with what is feasible; weigh your options based on your level of risk tolerance. Then, select a career path to pursue, and set your goals. Use the Career Planning Guide on the EY Center website (<http://csun.edu/acctis/ey-center>) to support this process.

- 5. Get Involved!** Join student organizations (e.g., Accounting Association, Beta Alpha Psi, MISA and ALPFA), attend meetings, activities, events, and firm tours, and volunteer with the organization. You will learn about your profession, meet and network with professionals, and meet, make friends with and learn from other students. You will learn about the recruiting process as well. Try to increase your participation by applying for a Directorship (it involves an interview and selection process with the Board). Taking on a leadership role helps you develop skills that are not taught in the classroom (e.g., leadership, teamwork, communication, problem solving, initiative, handling stress, organization / time management, etc.); these skills are essential to your career success, and therefore, they are highly desired by employers.

Do not get involved just to strengthen your resume. Your involvement is a commitment to the organization and the students participating. You will learn and derive satisfaction by giving back, especially after you land an internship or full-time offer, and can share your success with others.

If you have questions about professional etiquette (or any other recruiting needs), please come to the EY Center for Careers - BB 2224.

Summary

- Start your process as soon as possible, and get prepared.
- Know yourself, and learn what you want to do.
- Research the profession/career paths and employers and evaluate each based on who you are and what you want.
- Utilize the resources available to you at the EY Center, the student organizations, Meet the Firms, and other networking events.
- Do not expect that having a good resume and GPA will automatically land you in the role and firm that you most want.
- *The more effort you invest, the more likely you will achieve a successful outcome.*