CAREER ACTION PLAN

Keep track of your progress with this tracker at the top

ABOUT THIS PLAN:

Before you begin your Career Action Plan, it's important to understand why this is a critical process within your journey at Ashford. While you might know exactly what you want to do with your degree, there typically are still required planning elements. Imagine you are going on a road trip and you know that you want to go to a specific place, like New York City; would you just start driving without a GPS or some sort of navigational plan? More than likely, you would map out your route to save time and money. **Your career is the exact same way; you can't start mapping your route if you don't know the destination and you can't get to your destination if you don't know the route.**

To get a realistic handle on what it's going to take to achieve your career aspirations, it helps to create a "roadmap" that outlines the steps you need to take to reach your goals.

To help with your planning, we have created this Career Action Plan. We have aligned our recommendations with 30, 60, and 90 credits to help keep you on track. It is important you start preparing for your future career while in school to ensure you are ready to begin your new career upon graduation. Much like a real road trip, where you would pack luggage and plan your trip, there are required action items along the way. Let's begin!

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30-60 CREDITS

01

KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING

Between 30 and 60 credits, it's critical that you establish where you are going and the route you must take. Often times, we know where we want to go, but the path isn't always as clear.

To complete this section, you will conduct research and create clear, measurable career goals. We know this process can feel overwhelming, so we have created guides and worksheets to help you.

After you complete this plan, make sure to save it and revisit it often. Additionally, your Student Advisor will discuss it with you during your 60 credit call.

30-60 OUTLINE

1. RESEARCHING THE JOB YOU WANT

☐ Job Market Research

☐ Career Conversation

2. SETTING GOALS

☐ Short-term Goals

☐ Long-term Goals

3. CREATING A PLAN

☐ Your Individual Development Plan

JOB MARKET RESEARCH

Explore job boards to discover what types of candidates employers are looking to attract. Indeed.com and CareerBuilder.com are great places to start, but don't forget to look at niche job boards as well. Carefully fill in the table below by looking through 15 job postings of similar roles. By looking at 15+ job postings, you can identify some common themes and discover first-hand what employers want. Document those things here!

DESIRED POSITION:

NEEDED OR DESIRED SKILLS:

EDUCATION NEEDED (or PREFERRED):

CERTIFICATIONS NEEDED (or PREFERRED):

CAREER CONVERSATIONS/INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Sometimes, the most helpful and relevant career information can't be found online. The best information typically comes from those who are working in the field and because of this, scheduling a career conversation (also known as an informational interview), serves as a critical research tactic. Someone in the field can give you helpful tips for getting your foot in the door and discuss what the field is actually like.

Remember, a career conversation is not a job interview and the purpose is not to find out about job openings. Treat these conversations as a professional meeting, with professional attire, and come prepared with a list of questions. This person is giving up time from their day so be sure to be respectful during correspondences and thank them for their time. For more information, view the Information Interview resource.

PEOPLE I KNOW IN THE FIELD:
*Consider your current organization, peers, faculty members, friends of friends, and begin to brainstorm here.

DATE/TIME/LOCATION of
CAREER CONVERSATION:

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

HELPFUL TIPS:

1. Reach out to more than just one person. If you don't know this person, make sure to let them know how you received their information.
2. Be professional in all correspondence (check for typos and grammatical errors).
3. Do not waste the other person's time. Schedule a 30-minute meeting and make sure to arrive on time (or before) and keep an eye on the clock during the meeting.
4. Bring a notepad with your questions prepared and take notes during the interaction.
5. Be grateful. Send a thank you follow-up card or email.

SHORT-TERM & LONG-TERM GOAL SETTING

Goal setting is a critical part of the career planning process. Ultimately, your goals allow you to create a roadmap to succeed in your career.

Goals can be divided into two categories: short and long-term. Short-term goals are typically smaller goals that feed into the larger long-term goals. For example, if your ultimate goal was to secure a director position in a new field, you would first need to gain experience and finish your degree (these would be the short-term goals that feed into the long-term). **Goals should be realistic, specific, and include a time frame.**

SHORT-TERM GOALS

+ time frames

LONG-TERM GOALS

+ time frames

YOUR INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

An Individual Development Plan is a planning tool to assist you in taking charge of your career by identifying action steps towards achieving your short and long-term goals. Once you have identified your development areas, you can begin your development plan. Your plan should include the competency/skill you wish to develop, any activities that may help you develop the identified competency/skill, the learning resources needed, and the time frame required to reach completion.

KEY DEVELOPMENT AREAS			
Development Goal	**Development Activity**	**Support Required**	**Target Completion Date**
Example: Training experience	*Locate & complete a training certification* *Find an area of expertise to design & deliver a training*	*Time/money* *Manager suggestions/support*	*December 2019*

LET'S RECAP!

Upon completion of this section, you should have a clear outline of what it will take to reach career success. Be sure to revisit your Individual Development Plan and your goals frequently to make sure you are on track.

Additionally, continue to have conversations around your goals with your friends, family, co-workers, peers, etc. Having these conversations potentially could help expand your network and create natural places for introductions, but this also will hold you accountable.

Pit stop with Career Services here if you are stuck. Email Career Services at careerservices@ashford.edu *.*

Before you move on, make sure you have completed the following tasks…

☐ Job Market Research

☐ Career Conversation

☐ Short-term Goals

☐ Long-term Goals

☐ Your Individual Development Plan

60-90 CREDITS

02

PREPARING FOR THE TRIP

Now that you have reached the 60-credit mark, it's time to begin preparing for your new career. While there are standard elements that we recommend, there may be additional elements that you found in your research (such as skill building).

We have included a checklist of preparation items that we recommend, but make sure to stay on track with your Individual Development Plan.

After you complete this section, we encourage you to connect with Career Services to review your resume, LinkedIn profile, and cover letter. Additionally, your Student Advisor will discuss these with you during your 90-credit call.

60-90 OUTLINE

1. GAINING IN-FIELD EXPERIENCE

2. CRAFTING A RESUME

3. CREATING A LINKEDIN PROFILE

4. WRITING A COVER LETTER

GAINING IN-FIELD EXPERIENCE

Often times, in-field experience can make a significant difference during your job search. A degree will open the door to many more opportunities, but experience within the field can set you apart from other candidates and sometimes is actually a requirement. Luckily, there are many ways to gain experience in the field (especially if you are willing to volunteer your time). Volunteering or finding an internship are both great ways to gain valuable skills!

WAYS TO GAIN EXPERIENCE:

- Professional organization in your field
- Projects outside of your role at work
- Certification
- Internship
- Volunteer
- Freelancing
- Temp Agency
- Join a student club
- Become a CHAMPS Peer Mentor

HOW TO FIND OPPORTUNITIES:

- Ask people in your personal network
- Create a target list of companies in your area and begin to send them emails or walk into the facility to introduce yourself
- Utilize LinkedIn to network
- Join career-related professional organizations
- Offer to help at an organization you regularly attend

Experience needed based off job board research:

Ideas to gain the needed experience:

CRAFTING A RESUME

A resume is a personal marketing tool used to show interest in a job, internship, honor society, or graduate school. Your resume should speak directly to the role or industry are you are seeking. In many cases, it is appropriate to create multiple resumes to target different career outcomes.

As you build your resume, be sure to utilize the tools available on the Resume, CV, and Cover Letter Development page. Here you will find sample resumes, templates, and a wide range of resume resources. Be sure to utilize your research from job postings as you carefully craft resumes that showcase your abilities to meet the needs of employers.

Before submitting your resume for review by a Career Services Specialist, utilize the checklist below to make sure your resume is ready for feedback.

- ☐ Contains a heading with clear contact information (one phone number and a professional email address)
- ☐ Includes a strong summary section (no objective statement)
- ☐ Check for spelling and grammar errors
- ☐ Utilize bullets instead of paragraphs
- ☐ Begin bullet points with action verbs, in the correct verb tense (past tense for past roles and present tense for current roles)
- ☐ List your education in reverse chronological order (most recent first and working backwards). Don't forget to include Ashford University and list the date you completed (or plan to complete) your degree.
- ☐ Omit your high school diploma from your education section
- ☐ Utilize consistent, conservative fonts. Don't use smaller than an 11 pt. font and be sure that your font size is consistent.
- ☐ Create a resume free of tables, lines across the page, graphics, and photos
- ☐ Remove periods at the end of your bullet points, as these are not complete sentences
- ☐ Avoid using "I" statements
- ☐ Spell out or abbreviate the months, rather than using the numbers (i.e. March 1999 – Present), for a more professional look

If you are planning to apply for a federal job, please see our Military, Veteran, and Federal Employment page to learn more about tailoring your resume to a federal position.

CREATING A LINKEDIN PROFILE

LinkedIn is the world's largest professional networking tool. LinkedIn can strengthen and extend your existing network of contacts. By having a complete profile, users are 40 times more likely to receive opportunities through LinkedIn.

Before you begin, review this quick video to see how LinkedIn can work for you as a student and professional. Once you have viewed this video, we encourage you to utilize a wide range of resources available to you before you create or begin to modify your LinkedIn profile. To view more resources, check out the LinkedIn for students site!

Similar to a Resume Review, we have Career Services Specialists available to review your LinkedIn profile. Before requesting a review, utilize the LinkedIn Checklist below to make sure your LinkedIn is in tip-top shape!

MUST HAVES
☐ **Professional Looking Photo:**   • Does not need to be professionally taken, but needs to represent student in a professional manner (professional dress, clear headshot, not a selfie, etc.)
☐ **First and Last Name:**   • Name should be professional, complete, and not a nickname. This would be the name employers/recruiters should be able to search by
☐ **Headline:**   • A professional headline might include what you're excited about, your industry, or things you would like to do in the future
☐ **Summary:**   • Describes what motivates you, what you're skilled at, shows your qualifications and strengths
☐ **Experience:**   • Includes title of organizations, job title, employment dates, and a description of functions/skills/accomplishments
☐ **Education:**   • Includes college attended, degree completed, and dates (or anticipated dates) of completion
☐ **Correct Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling:**   • Ensure that spelling looks good, titles of companies/positions and schools should be capitalized

NICE TO HAVES
☐ **Custom URL:**   • Instead of the generic URL, create a unique URL that is professional and custom
☐ **Courses:**   • List courses that give an employer insight to the types of knowledge learned during your program
☐ **Projects:**   • Projects would include things such as leading a group, building an app, creating a training or class, giving a presentation, research, etc.
☐ **Volunteer Experience:**   • Provide a description of the volunteer experience, especially if the duties or experience aligns with career goals
☐ **Relevant Skills:**   • List at least 5 key skills that connections can endorse and that are relevant to the job you are pursuing
☐ **Honors and Awards:**   • Dean's list, honors societies, and recognition/awards should be found here
☐ **Optimization of Keywords:**   • Optimize the chances of your LinkedIn account being found by using keywords that employers might search for

WRITING A COVER LETTER:

The purpose of a cover letter is to communicate to a potential employer why you are the best candidate for the position based on your **skills, education, and experience.**

Cover letters are generally **three to four paragraphs** long and should be tailored to the position you are seeking. Some employers use cover letters to determine your ability to write.

Before you begin, follow these 4 simple steps to outline your Cover Letter.

1	2	3	4
Review the job description and highlight important skills/ qualifications the employer is seeking. Write what you found below.	Write down the skills you possess that match the skills they are seeking.	Pick 3 to 4 skills you possess that the employer is seeking and write them below in order of importance.	Write a specific example of where you used or obtained your 3 to 4 skills (one specific example per skill).

LET'S RECAP!

Upon completion of this section, you should have successfully prepared the elements you will need to market yourself to future employers.

Additionally, continue to expand your experience and revise your resume and LinkedIn profile. Today's job market is competitive market, and you will want to remain a strong candidate for employers.

Pit stop with Career Services here if you are stuck. Email Career Services at
careerservices@ashford.edu .

Before you move on, make sure you have completed the following tasks…

- [ ] In-field experience
- [ ] Resume
- [ ] LinkedIn profile
- [ ] Cover Letter

90-120 CREDITS

03

THE LAST LEG

Congratulations on reaching 90 credits! As you approach graduation, it's time to get ready for the actual job search.

We have included a checklist of preparation items that we recommend, but make sure to continue to stay on track with your Individual Development Plan.

90-120 OUTLINE

1. JOB SEARCH READY

2. MOCK INTERVIEW

3. NETWORKING PLAN

4. REVISIT RESUME

JOB SEARCH READY CHECKLIST:

Before you begin applying for jobs, you will want to make sure you are "job search ready" in the event an employer calls and wants to schedule an immediate interview. This checklist is designed to help you feel confident about beginning the job search.

☐ **MARKETING MATERIALS**
Update your resume, cover letter, and LinkedIn profile.

☐ **PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES**
These should be individuals who can speak to the type of professional you are. Typically, this means colleagues, co-workers, supervisors, or employees. Always be sure to select individuals who have agreed to serve as a reference for you and will speak positively on your behalf.

☐ **TRANSCRIPTS**
Often employers ask for official or unofficial transcripts during the interview process. Have a copy or know how to get a copy from Ashford University.

☐ **COPIES OF RESUME**
Have resumes printed out to bring to an interview. Make sure you always have your most recent resume.

☐ **RESEARCH SALARIES**
Research common salaries for the job in your location and decide how much you want/need to make. This will help you be prepared to negotiate salary and accept an offer.

☐ **CLEAN ONLINE PRESENCE**
"Google yourself" to see what pops up and make your social media accounts private.

☐ **PROFESSIONAL VOICEMAIL**
Make sure your voicemail has a professional outgoing message with your name and space for potential employers to leave voicemails.

☐ **PROFESSIONAL ATTIRE**
Have an interview outfit ready to go for any last-minute interviews. Conservative business attire, such as a neutral-colored suit and professional shoes, are best. (Jeans are never an acceptable interview outfit)

☐ **PREPARE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**
Have at least three questions ready to ask the hiring manager.

☐ **PRACTICE INTERVIEWING**
Make sure you're prepared to answer the typical open-ended interview questions like "tell me about yourself" and "where do you see yourself in 5 years?"

MOCK INTERVIEW:

A Mock Interview with a Career Services Specialist is a great way to practice for an interview and receive feedback surrounding what you did well and some areas of opportunities. Mock Interviews typically take about 60 minutes, including the feedback portion. Before you schedule your Mock Interview, review the commonly asked questions below to start brainstorming some responses. As you practice these answers, consider the roles you will be applying to and the skills/responses that the hiring manager may be looking for. Always remember to answer questions honestly during an interview.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:
1. Tell me about yourself
2. What are your strengths?
3. What are your weaknesses?
4. Why do you want this job?
5. Where do you plan to be in 5 years?
6. Why should we hire you?
7. Why are you leaving your current job?
8. What is your ideal company?
9. What interested you in this position?
10. Tell us about a time that you had to deal with conflict during the job. How did you handle it?
11. What are your future goals?
12. What salary are you seeking?
13. How do your skills align with this role?
14. What do you know about our company?
15. If your supervisor asked you to do something and you disagreed with it, what would you do?
16. Tell us about a time you recently led a project. What was the outcome?

NETWORKING PLAN:

When you are looking for a new role or career, networking allows you to market yourself to others in the field. In its simplest form, networking is essentially talking to anyone about the job search. By talking with people about your qualifications, positions, and employers of interest, you may hear about job leads or resources that you didn't know about. Additionally, networking allows us to connect people to opportunities. As you begin to network with individuals, consider the type of help you could offer these people as well. A connection within a company often is a much easier way to get your resume in the hands of a hiring manager.

Fun Fact: 80% of companies hire someone that was "already known" to the employer via a shared connection or employee referral.

Follow these steps and ideas to begin building your network:

- ☐ Send personal messages to past managers and co-workers
- ☐ Connect with peers and AU alumni on LinkedIn (be sure to include a personal message with the connection request)
- ☐ Discuss your future career with your friends, family, and other people that your frequently see
- ☐ Join groups on LinkedIn that are related to your field
- ☐ Join a professional organization and attend an event
- ☐ Reach out to LinkedIn members who work at companies you are interested in and ask for advice regarding getting your foot in the door
- ☐ Join Ashford's Alumni Network (Ashford Connect) and start engaging with your fellow alumni

Remember--- networking is about building relationship and it's a two-way street. Don't make the conversation all about you. Rather, approach the conversation with a genuine desire to deepen a relationship and possibly extend a helping hand to the other person, as well.

Now, create your own networking plan:

LINKEDIN:
To build my network I will:

FACE TO FACE:
To build my network I will:

ADDITIONALLY:
To build my network I will:

REVISIT RESUME:

Now that you have gained additional experience and have more classes under your belt, it's time to revisit and update your resume. Follow the steps below to begin the update process.

1. **Add the experience you gained under the appropriate section**
   - → For paid positions, list the experience under your "Experience" section
   - → For unpaid positions, list the experience under your "Community Involvement" section
   - → Regardless of the location of the experience, be sure to include details about the skills and knowledge gained within the roles

2. **Add any relevant course titles that you have taken since you wrote your resume**

3. **Add a link to your LinkedIn profile in the heading section**

4. **Include a link to your online portfolio (if applicable)**

5. **Review your summary section**
   - → Has anything changed? Are you more qualified for the role now? If so, be sure to update this section. Remember, this is where we grab the attention of the hiring manager.

6. **Review your work experience section**
   - → Has anything changed? Be sure to revise accordingly.

7. **Proofread**
   - → Proofread for spelling and grammar errors

8. **Resubmit through My Career to receive further review from a Career Services Specialist**

LET'S RECAP!

Upon completion of this section, you are job search ready and can confidently begin searching and applying for roles!

While you have revisited your resume already, be sure to reflect and revise frequently as you apply for different types of roles. Additionally, make sure to carry out your networking plan and continue to add new action items to build your network.

Pit stop with Career Services here if you are stuck. Email Career Services at careerservices@ashford.edu .

Before you move on, make sure you have completed the following tasks…

- ☐ Job Search Ready checklist
- ☐ Mock Interview
- ☐ Networking Plan
- ☐ Revisited Resume

AFTER 120

04

BEYOND GRADUATION

Congratulations, graduate! Now that you've graduated, the work doesn't end. Whether you're looking for a promotion or switching industries completely, your job search will require dedication, patience, and persistence. Utilize the tips below to continue navigating your career beyond graduation.

While Job Searching:
→ Be sure to utilize a Job Search Tracker to keep track of your job applications. If you aren't seeing results, take a look at how many jobs you are applying to each day/week and consider increasing it.
→ Continue to engage with your fellow Alum on AU Connect
→ Don't lose momentum and remember to stay motivated to get to your final destination
→ Connect with a Career Services Specialist to discuss your efforts and receive feedback/support
→ Continue to revise your marketing materials (resume, LinkedIn, cover letter, etc.)
→ Keep growing your network
→ Utilize even more job search resources

Career Management:
Once you've landed your first role post-graduation, or want to move up within your current organization, it's important that you still manage your career. Revisit your long-term goals often and make sure you are on track by continuing to accomplish your short-term goals and building your skillset for future opportunities.