EDUCATION POLICY: CAREER EXPLORATION AND JOB SEARCHING

A Guide for Students and Alumni
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“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world”

~Nelson Mandela
We have an obligation and a responsibility to be investing in our students and our schools. We must make sure that people who have the grade, the desire and the will, but not the money, can still get the best education possible. ”

~ Barack Obama

Education policy graduates find jobs in such areas as:

- **National Government Agencies** such as the US Department of Education
- **State Education Agencies** such as state departments of education and state higher education coordinating boards
- **Local Education Agencies** such as public school districts and charter school management organizations
- **Other government related agencies** such as Congressional and state legislative staff; mayoral and county executive staff
- **Higher Education Institutions**
- **Not-for-Profit Organizations**
- **Charter Schools**
- **Consulting Firms**
- **Think Tanks**
- **Research-Based Advocacy Groups**
EDUCATION POLICY POSTIONS

National/State/Local Government Education Agencies
• Policy Analyst
• Research Analyst
• Research & Development
• School Superintendent
• State Board Administrator
• Education Specialist
• Grants Coordinator
• Budget Officer
• Data Collector

Think Tanks/Research-Based Advocacy Groups
• Policy Analyst
• Research Analyst
• Project Manager
• Creative Director
• Database Coordinator
• Designer

Higher Education Institutions
• Academic/Administrative Vice President, Provost, Dean
• Faculty Member
• Admissions & Enrollment
• Student Affairs
• Assessment, Accreditation & Compliance
• Development and Fundraising

Not-for Profit Organizations
• Policy Analyst
• Research Analyst
• Program Director
• Project Coordinator
• Campaign Organizer
• Communications Officer
BEGINNING THE JOB SEARCH PROCESS

What Kind of Job Do You Want?

- **What are your areas of interest in education policy?** For example, are you interested primarily in policy research, policy development, program/policy implementation, or policy advocacy?
- **What type of organization would you like to work for?** For example, would it be a school district office, state agency, other public agency, nonprofit, or for-profit? Would you want the organization to be big or small? What kind of mission or goals should it have?
- **Key job features:** What are the key features you would be looking for in your first job and in later jobs? What would you be looking for in terms of salary, hours, responsibilities, supervision and autonomy, co-workers, promotion possibilities, etc.?
- **Location:** In what areas of the country and in what cities or rural areas would you like to work?
- **Skills, knowledge, and abilities:** What relevant knowledge and skills can you bring to your areas of interest? What job-relevant abilities do you have?
- **Advice:** Have you talked to your advisor and other faculty members about your career and job interests?

What Kinds of Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities Do You Have?

- **Knowledge** of education policy, public policy/public administration.
- **Experience** working with educational programs and agencies.
- **Research and analytical skills**: How good is your knowledge of statistics? Have you used statistical software such as SPSS and Stata? Have you used qualitative research software such as Atlas.ti?
- **Communication and writing skills**: Have you written research reports and policy briefs?
- **Ability** to engage in strategic, creative, and conceptual/ theoretical thinking.
- **Ability** to multitask under strict deadlines in a fast-paced environment.
- **Ability** to work collaboratively and independently.
BUILDING UP YOUR CREDENTIALS

- **Get the right academic experiences**: Have you developed the knowledge and skills you will need? Are the following aligned with the field and job in which you would like to work?
  - Your area of substantive specialization;
  - Your research methods “toolkit”;
  - Your culminating paper/project.

- **Get the right job experiences**: Are the following aligned with the field and job in which you would like to work?
  - Your job experience prior to your time at TC (often, teaching experience or other professional experience working with students, teachers, or others is very helpful);
  - Your internships and volunteer experiences;
  - Other job experiences during your time at TC.

- **Develop the right network**: Make sure many people make your acquaintance, and help some of them get to know you well. Try to form ties to the following kinds of people:
  - Professors, especially your advisor, who you can ask to serve as references;
  - Fellow students and alums with shared interests;
  - Employers in your intended field;
  - Other professionals in your intended field (meet them through internships, research positions, and presentations at conferences).

- **Develop an attractive professional portfolio to bring to an interview**:
  - Resume: Attend a resume writing workshop hosted by the Office of Career Services.
  - Samples of professional writings: Good samples of your policy work that you can hand out to employers e.g. your culminating paper; reports written on internships; and policy and research memos that you wrote in courses with Profs. Huerta, Wohlstetter, Kagan, Ready, and other faculty.
  - Cover letter.

- **Keep informed about your field**:
  - Keep up with key education newspapers, journals, newsletters, and website e.g. Education Week, Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Education, Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Education Policy.
  - Check websites and get on listserves for professional associations and research and policy groups in your field.
  - Follow EPSA-logue newsletter to keep up with what research your professors, fellow students, and alumni are involved with.
Do some advance scouting
- See what employers are looking for.
- Follow job postings even before you’re ready to start looking for a position.
- Notice the qualifications of people with jobs like the one you would like to have.
- Get advice from Office of Career Services on what listserves to subscribe to.

Get leads from your advisor and other faculty, fellow students, and recent alums.

Keep track of job openings announced in
- Program emails;
- Office of Career Services news sources;
- Alumni listserves from your undergrad college;
- Idealist.org;
- Fritzwire - http://www.publicprivateaction.com/fritzwire;
- Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management - http://www.appam.org;
- Education Policy Alliance - http://educationpolicyalliance.org;
- USA Jobs - https://www.usajobs.gov/;
- Education Week;
- Chronicle of Higher Education;
- Inside Higher Education.

Attend panels with alums and employers, hosted by the Office of Career Services and Young Education Professionals (http://www.youngedprofessionals.org/yep-nyc.html).

Conduct informational interviews with professionals in the field to find out how they see their field evolving, what employers are looking for, etc. (see the next page for tips on informational interviews.)

Ask your professional contacts if they are aware of opportunities that might be a good fit for you (but don’t ask directly for a job; let that be their idea).

For more on job searching, visit this Office of Career Services website: Job Search Tip Sheet
INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviews allow you to gather information about the job conditions and education of people in jobs you find interesting, add those people to your professional network, and tap their professional network.

**Tips for Conducting an Informational Interview**

- Research your contact’s organization beforehand so you don’t have to ask obvious questions.
- Introduce yourself and state that you are not expecting them to have a job for you, but you would appreciate 20 minutes of their time to talk about their field and the way your skills might be applicable.
- Have questions and materials prepared and figure out what information would be most beneficial as you explore your career options.
- Present yourself in a businesslike manner. Allow the person being interviewed to do most of the talking. Do not dominate the conversation. Be positive and assertive – not overly flattering or obnoxiously aggressive.

**Types of Questions to Ask**

- What are the main responsibilities that come with your present position?
- What does a typical day look like for you?
- What positions did you hold before coming to this position?
- What kind of education and training did you get before taking your current job?
- What previous training in grad school has been the most helpful to you?
- What skills or training do you realize now it would have been useful to get in grad school but you didn’t get then?
- What have been the biggest challenges you have encountered in your position??
- What did you wish you knew before you started that could have helped you?
- What advice would you have for someone like me who is just entering the labor market?

*For more on informational interviews, visit to this Office of Career Services website: [Informational Interview]*
Social media can be instrumental to your job search! Utilizing social media can help you better market yourself to employers and help you connect to alumni and professionals in your field.

**Information:** Facebook “Info” tab can act as a resume. Make sure all your social media accounts are consistent with the same school and job information.

**Status Update:** Use your status updates to keep your connections informed on your job search.

**Groups & Fan Pages:** Follow groups and fan pages within the field (i.e. The Education Policy & Leadership Center, Education Policy Analysis Archives etc.)

**Tweeting:** Tweet updates about your job search. (i.e. “I am looking for a Policy Analyst position in NYC.”)

**Hash Tags:** Use hash tags in order to filter results, using # as a prefix. It acts as a tag that will show up for those who are looking for it. For example, if you are looking for a Research Analyst position, you may use #jobsearch #researchanalyst etc. and an employer may post a job using the same tags, creating a filter.

**Establish an Active Twitter Presence!** Post relevant articles, trends & don’t forget to use industry hash tags!

**Send a request** to a LinkedIn friend to ask him/her to introduce you to one of their LinkedIn friends.

**Contact potential employers** and contacts in your network to conduct informational interviews!

**Connect with Alumni.** See where TC Alums in your field are currently working.

**Join Groups!** (i.e. Education: Public Policy Network, PIE Network, The Education Policy Fellowship, Special Education Consultants-Law, Policy & Practice, Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management etc.)
INTERVIEWING FOR A JOB

Be Prepared for the Interview

• **Learn interview skills**: Learn how to anticipate questions, talk about yourself, and ask questions of your interviewer. Draw on the following sources of advice:
  - Workshops by the Office of Career Services;

• **Carefully research the job before interviewing for it**:
  - Make sure you understand what the job announcement is driving at;
  - Talk to people who might know about the organization and the job it is offering;
  - Check the organization’s website to make sure you understand the organization’s goals, main activities and programs, and organizational structure.

What to Do in the Interview

• **Relate your remarks to the organization**: When discussing your skills and experiences, remember to relate them to the mission of the organization and the population it serves.

• **Bring in both your academic and extra-academic experiences**: Highlight both your in and out of the classroom experience and how they have shaped your views and knowledge.

• **Provide concrete examples**: Be prepared to provide specific examples to help ground your points.

• **Ask questions**: Be prepared when the interviewer asks you if you have any questions. Show you know the position well by asking well-informed questions. Ask questions to get at information that is not available publically.

*For more on interview tips, visit this Office of Career Services website: Interview Tips and Preparation*
Once you have a job and salary offer in hand and you are beginning a salary negotiation, keep in mind both your value and the value of the position you’re applying for. At the same time, remember that organizational policy may largely determine the terms you can get.

**Things to Keep in Mind**

- **Research the position:** Remember to research the position and its value. You can begin by visiting: [http://salary.com/](http://salary.com/) or [www.payscale.com](http://www.payscale.com)

- **Type of position:** Keep in mind that an entry level position typically has a lower salary range. Most salaries are commensurate with experience. Also, salaries differ by employment sector. Government jobs usually have a set salary while a nonprofit job may vary depending on size or funding.

- **What to consider when evaluating a salary offer:** Don’t just focus on the pay. Also consider fringe benefits, expenses, job responsibilities and tasks, your comfort with your likely boss and co-workers, and promotion opportunities.

For more information on salary negotiation, visit this Office of Career Services website: [Salary Negotiation](http://salary.com/)

FURTHER INFORMATION

Office of Career Services, Teachers College

http://www.tc.edu/careerservices

Email: careerservices@tc.edu

Education Policy Program

http://www.tc.columbia.edu/epsa/edpolicy

Email: epsa@tc.columbia.edu