Junior Year – Lots to Look Forward To!

By Liz Larson

Junior year is a very busy time for college students—you are starting to explore and look ahead to what you might do after graduation, whether it be grad school, getting a job or volunteering. In order to prepare for these decisions, there are many things to consider and many opportunities in which you will want to take advantage.

No matter which direction you are headed, a few things are a must:

**Resumes** – Your resume gives others an overview of who you are and what you have accomplished. During the fall of your junior year, make sure to fully develop your resume, note areas where you may be lacking in experience, and make a point to fill in those gaps throughout the next year. Also keep in mind that every resume you make should be tailored to the specific position or organization for which you are applying, so be prepared to edit, edit, edit!

**Cover Letters**—Knowing how to create a cover letter/email is also a crucial skill for juniors. Many organizations will require you to submit a cover letter in addition to your resume, and, like your resume, your cover letter should always reflect the position for which you are applying.

**Interviewing**—Interviewing skills are necessary for students from every major. Employers and recruiters want to know that you can communicate effectively and present yourself in an appropriate manner. It’s important to practice and improve your skills. One of the best ways to practice is with Interview Stream, available on the Career Services’ homepage. This program allows you to conduct a practice interview on the computer; it will record your responses so you can look back on how you answered the questions and what your body language could communicate to employers. If you have a nervous habit or tend to say “um” a lot, you will know to work on those before entering an actual interview.

**Experiential Learning**—Gaining experience is huge no matter what you plan to do after graduation, and one of the best ways to gain experience is through some form of experiential learning. This includes internships, undergraduate research, clinicals and service learning programs. Experiential learning programs allow students to gain real-world experience in professional situations. There are many different kinds of programs that students can do, and they can be done for credit, pay, or just for the experience. These programs are also important for developing your professional network and making connections that can help you in the future.

Another way to gain experience is through volunteering or joining clubs on campus. With over 80 campus clubs and organizations, students can certainly find some that apply to their interests. By being involved with groups both on and off campus, students can gain real-world experience and practice their networking skills by interacting with others both inside and outside the organization.

If you are thinking about employment after graduation:

Two big events for juniors to attend are Career EXPO (November 10) and the MN Private Colleges Job/Internship Fair (February 2011).

**Career EXPO** gives students an opportunity to explore/learn about different companies and career areas through seminars, a career fair, and a networking reception with alums.

The **MN Private Colleges Job/Internship Fair** is a professional event where students can speak with recruiters from many different companies and apply for summer internships. Be sure to have your resume prepared, cover letters written and have practiced your interviewing skills before this event!

If you are planning to attend graduate school or volunteer after graduation:

Ask yourself, “What do I want from a grad school or volunteering experience?” The more you know about what you want to get out of the experience, the better you are able to find schools or programs that match your goals.

**Research programs.** Every program is different, so you will want to find ones that are consistent with your goals and that fit your interests and skills. Attend the Graduate School Fair or Volunteer Fair to talk with reps.

**Get to know your professors.** This may seem obvious, but students underestimate the power and influence they may have. Having a good relationship with your professors will come in handy when you need letters of recommendation or professional references.

**Start preparing for grad school exams.** Since most students take these exams in the fall of their senior year, junior year is the perfect time to begin studying. The task of preparing for these exams may seem overwhelming, so the earlier you start, the more confident you’ll feel when you take them.