

Transitioning out of Academia: Career Paths and Timelines

Opportunities abound for master's and Ph.D. students in private, nonprofit and government sectors. Whether having a graduate degree is very common in your field or your transition from academia to industry is less traditional, there is a lot you can do with what you've learned outside of the university. These are just a few ideas.

STEM Careers	Humanities Careers
Research and development	Writing, editing and publishing
Technology, programming, biotech	Teaching and instructional design
Lab work, testing, quality assurance	Counseling and social work
Conservation and environmental work	Marketing, PR and communications
Law, policy and patents	Law, policy and patents
Technical and grant writing	Business and finance
Science education and outreach	University or municipal administration
Nonprofit, government and consulting	Nonprofit, government and consulting
Field scientist (geologist, hydrologist, ecologist, biologist)	HR, recruiting and training
Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship

Sample paths inspired by The Versatile Ph.D. (versatilephd.com), a site dedicated to helping "graduate students, ABDs and Ph.D.s identify, prepare for and excel in professional careers."

Tips for Transitioning from Academia to Industry

• INVEST IN A GREAT RÉSUMÉ

An industry résumé is not just a shortened CV. Tailor it to each new opportunity by identifying keywords and specific qualifications from the job posting to reflect back to the employer. Consider including “selected” publications or presentations, versus full lists. Run the new résumé through the career center’s online résumé reviewer, **Vmock**, and have a non-academic person read it for any language that is too university-centric.

• PRACTICE TALKING ABOUT YOUR TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Think about what you know how to do in non-academic terms. Maybe it’s creating plans or reports, teaching, public speaking, problem-solving, building things with your hands or using specific software or equipment. Break out of the academic framework of research-teaching-scholarship-service and think about your skills. (Refer to the Transferable Skills Checklist in this guide). Put yourself in the mind of a potential employer. What words and qualifications will they most understand and want to see? **Think specifically about the value of your degree and how it equips you for your future.**

• DO INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

These are a great way to network and learn about possibilities outside of academia. Identify three to five employers or industry contacts, then call or email them requesting to learn more about their work. Remember, informational interviews are not geared at getting a specific job. They are an opening for you to meet a company and for the company to learn about you in a low stakes environment. But prepare all the same! Come with a list of thoughtful questions and practice talking about your qualifications in advance.

• NETWORK INTENTIONALLY AROUND EACH JOB APPLICATION

You’ll increase your odds of getting a great industry position by ensuring the organization knows your name. Make it a rule to never apply without attempting to initiate personal contact. This could be calling a recruiter or hiring manager to ask good questions, connecting with alumni on LinkedIn, sending a thank you for a previous interaction, following up after applying to check in, etc. The job search doesn’t begin and end with the application portal. (And don’t forget to mention your connections in cover letters or interviews.)

• INVESTIGATE INDUSTRY JOB BOARDS

Start looking at the real jobs that exist—figure out what’s in demand in your region and do an inventory of what skills you already have or what you might need to build. **Spend some time looking in advance of graduation.**

• GET SOME INDUSTRY OR VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

If your experience is 100 percent academic in nature, consider getting some industry experience. Perhaps there is volunteer or project-based work you could do to get your foot in the door. Or you can take on an internship or do an industry-based research collaboration. Begin developing some evidence of industry experience on your résumé.

Industry Job Search Timeline

Though every field is different, **industry jobs are typically posted throughout the year** versus on a set timeline. Many employers, especially larger ones, start recruiting college talent in the fall in anticipation of the following summer. Otherwise, a rule of thumb is to spend one month job searching for every \$10,000 in annual salary you want to make. So if you are looking for an internship or temporary job, you might be able to find it in a month or two. If you want to make \$70,000, it may take much longer. **Budget extra time for government positions** because of the amount of procedures and paperwork involved in a government search. A rule of thumb for a government job is one to four months from application to hiring.

18 Months Before Graduation

- **Meet with mentors, advisors and faculty** to talk about your job search strategy.
- **Build your network** through industry conferences, informational interviews and LinkedIn.
- **Examine your skills** through an industry lens—consider volunteering or industry-based projects or internships to build your résumé.
- **Refine your résumé and cover letter** using Career Development Center tools and resources. If pursuing government work, build a profile on [USAJobs.org](https://www.usajobs.org) and state or local government sites.

9-12 Months Before Graduation

- **Figure out when organizations** in your industry **are hiring** and start applying.
- **Attend Oregon State career fairs**, which often have great opportunities for grad students encompassing nonprofits, corporations and governments.
- **Tailor your materials** (résumé, cover letter, etc.) to specific applications. Confirm references.
- **Set up as many phone or in-person conversations as possible** to gather information and reconnect with your network. Make your job search known; ask for help!

0-6 Months Before Graduation

- **Follow up personally** on existing applications and continue applying.
- **Prepare for interviews** using **Standout** or by practicing with someone in the field.
- **Practice salary negotiation** and evaluating offers.
- **Follow up and thank interviewers** for their time.
- **Prepare to defend your thesis or dissertation** and graduate! Yay!

Finish Line!

- **Start a new job.** Remember, you can reach out to your college-specific career advisor for help for up to 12 months post-graduation, as well as your network any time.