



# It's Your Career: Work-Based Learning Opportunities for College Students With Disabilities

**DO-IT**

## How Students Can Prepare for Career Success

Most students expect to work after college graduation. However, your job search shouldn't begin when you graduate. Career planning and preparation should occur throughout your college studies. You do not need to settle on one area to pursue right away, and you can change directions. But, be sure to prepare for the long run—for your lifelong career or multiple careers.

There is a myth that if you have a college degree, you have a job. The fact is that it takes the average college graduate three to six months to secure employment after graduation. You need a career seeking strategy and a little experience. Otherwise, you're likely to be just another résumé in a stack of hundreds.

As a future employee, a college student with a disability faces unique challenges. Like other students, you need to find a way to meet the specific qualifications of the desired job. You also need to demonstrate that you have transferable skills—in other words, skills you've acquired through education and previous work experiences. Transferable skills include communication, trouble-shooting, decision-making, leadership, and problem-solving. These are some of the skills that cross jobs, careers, and industries. Opportunities to acquire these skills are available on campuses nationwide.

interaction of study and work experience, you can enhance your academic knowledge, personal development, and professional preparation. Specifically, work-based learning opportunities can help you:

- apply practical theories from classroom work,
- clarify academic and career interests,
- develop human relations skills through interaction with co-workers,
- develop job-search skills,
- develop résumés and cover letters,
- earn academic credit,
- gain contacts for employment after graduation,
- gain exposure to specialized facilities not available on campus,
- identify career assistance programs, and
- pay for your education.

As a student with a disability, work-based learning can also give you a chance to practice disclosing your disability and requesting accommodations from potential employers as well as determine which accommodations work best for you.

Many colleges offer programs that help students gain work experience before graduation. Programs vary from campus to campus. You will need to do some research to find those best suited to you. Work-based learning options found at many postsecondary institutions include internships, cooperative education, job shadowing, service learning, independent study, informational interviews, and career services. Below are descriptions of typical services these programs offer.

### What is an Internship?

An internship is a time-limited intensive learning experience outside of the traditional classroom. You are placed in a supervised work-based learning situation with employers for planned learning activities. Internships give you broad overviews of

### Careers

**C**areers  
**A**cademics  
**R**esearch  
**E**xperiential  
**E**ducation  
**R**elevant  
**S**kills

### Why Participate in Work-Based Learning?

Work-based learning experiences can help you choose careers, network with potential employers, select courses of study, and develop job skills directly relevant to future employment. Through the



occupational fields, while providing opportunities to experience work responsibilities and develop work-readiness skills. College credit may be provided depending on your academic program.

### **What is Cooperative Education?**

Cooperative education programs work with students, faculty, staff, and employers to help students clarify career and academic goals, and expand classroom study by participating in paid, practical work experiences. These programs provide opportunities to work in trainee positions in your fields of interest and to gain career-related experience as a part of your academic programs. Academic credit may be arranged.

### **What is Job Shadowing?**

Job shadowing, where you visit a business to observe one or more positions, provides you with a realistic view of one or more occupations. You observe essential functions of occupational areas of interest. Experiences vary in time from one hour to a full day depending on the amount of time employers can provide as well as your level of interest. Job shadowing experiences offer opportunities for career exploration. However, they do not typically generate academic credit.

### **What is Service Learning?**

Service learning programs offer you opportunities to become a concerned, informed, and productive citizen by providing community service in non-paid, volunteer positions. These programs increase the relevancy of academic learning by giving you opportunities to apply knowledge and skills while making contributions to your local community. Academic credit may or may not be arranged depending on your field of study.

### **What is an Independent Study?**

It is often possible for you to earn academic credit for work experiences outside of a structured career-based program. Many academic programs allow independent studies as optional program components. If you choose to take this option, you would work one-on-one with an individual faculty member to develop projects for credit. Projects can range from research papers to work experi-

ence within your field of study. Work experience, coupled with documentation, such as a journal or paper, is an excellent way to practice and demonstrate the skills you've learned in college.

### **What is an Informational Interview?**

Informational interviews, where you meet with people working in your chosen careers to ask questions about particular occupations or companies, allow you to gain personal perspectives on your career interests. Through informational interviews you can learn more about your career interests from the people who work in the field every day. Those experiences do not typically generate academic credit.

### **What is Career Services?**

A career services office provides a variety of career and job search services to students and alumni. It acts as a liaison between students, alumni, faculty, staff, and prospective employers by organizing campus interviews, employer information, and career fairs. Many career services offices also provide job listings and job lines for students and alumni to access in their search for employment. Some help students develop career plans and job search skills through individual counseling and job search workshops.

### **Which Employers Participate?**

Federal and state agencies and public, private, and nonprofit businesses seek college students for placements across the country and overseas. The majority of opportunities are for sophomores and above, but some employers also offer opportunities to freshmen and high school students as well. Microsoft, Boeing, USDA Forest Service, Weyerhaeuser, IBM, NASA, U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, and the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities are just a few of the thousands of employers nationwide who offer valuable work-based learning opportunities to students.

### **Who are the Team Players?**

Many work-based learning opportunity providers are committed to assisting all students, including students with disabilities, as they prepare to enter the professional world. If you are...



### **A college student with a disability:**

- Register with campus work-based learning programs, such as career services and cooperative education, so they can notify you of work-based learning opportunities.
- Participate in available orientations, seminars, workshops, and individual counseling sessions to effectively enhance your job search skills.
- Let the work-based learning and disabled student services coordinators know what types of accommodations you may need to effectively perform in a work setting.
- Access local support networks and disability services organizations that may be able to aid you in your job search.

### **An employer:**

- Update your position announcements and notify work-based learning coordinators of new positions.
- Work in partnership with work-based learning centers to proactively develop strategies to encourage students with disabilities to participate in your work environment.
- Educate your staff regarding diversity.

### **A faculty member, staff, teacher, or counselor:**

- Encourage students with disabilities to gain work experiences.
- Invite staff members from cooperative education, career services, and other campus programs to speak to your classes.
- Encourage employers to recruit students with disabilities for work opportunities.

### **Disabled Student Services:**

- Encourage students to register and participate in work-based learning programs on campus.
- Be proactive in students' academic and career plans. Let them know how accommodations are provided in the workplace.
- Help campus work-based learning programs recruit and accommodate students with disabilities.

### **Resources**

You can learn more about work-based learning opportunities, job search skills, employers, legal issues of employment, and career planning at the following Web sites:

- *AccessCAREERS*  
<http://www.washington.edu/doi/Careers/>
- *ADA Technical Assistance*  
<http://www.dbtac.vcu.edu/>
- *Career Builder*  
<http://www.careerbuilder.com/>
- *Career Resource Center*  
<http://www.careers.org/>
- *Careerfile*  
<http://www.careerfile.com/>
- *DisabilityInfo.gov*  
<http://www.disabilityinfo.gov>
- *Entry Point*  
<http://ehrweb.aaas.org/entrypoint/>
- *Job Access*  
<http://www.jobaccess.org/>
- *Job Accommodation Network*  
<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/>
- *Job Net*  
<http://careerweb.westga.edu/JobNet.htm>
- *Monster.com*  
<http://www.monster.com/>
- *Occupational Outlook Handbook*  
<http://stats.bls.gov/oco/>
- *The Riley Guide*  
<http://www.rileyguide.com/>

Prepare now to make yourself attractive to future employers. The resources are out there. You just need to make use of them.

### **Video**

A 13-minute video, *It's Your Career*, may be freely viewed online at <http://www.washington.edu/doi/Video/>, or purchased in DVD format.

### **About DO-IT**

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic



programs and careers such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education. The contents of this publication and accompanying video were developed under a grant from the Department of Education, No. H078C60047-97. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

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### How Can You Get Started?

To get started, use the DO-IT CAREERS acronym:

**C is for Careers.** Think about what interests you. Be imaginative, then narrow down the list.

**A is for Academics.** Determine which academic programs best suit your career goals.

**R is for Research.** Research careers that spark your interests, maximize your strengths, and minimize your weaknesses.

**EE is for Experiential Education.** Practice job search skills. Participate in internships, service learning, cooperative education programs, or other work-based learning opportunities.

**RS is for Relevant Skills.** Use on-the-job experiences to learn practical “real world” skills. Apply what you’ve learned in school to the workplace. Test which accommodations work best for you.

Grants and gifts fund DO-IT publications, videos, and programs to support the academic and career success of people with disabilities. Contribute today by sending a check to DO-IT, Box 355670, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-5670.

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