

GRAD Guide to Career Planning During COVID-19

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CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS

Amidst health and safety concerns, economic turmoil and a weak labor market, it can be difficult to plan for the future. You can best navigate these kinds of situations by focusing on the elements of the job search that you can control. Your strategy and goals are up to you and should be shaped by both professional *and* personal factors. To ensure that you have considered all relevant factors, start by asking yourself questions about your priorities, constraints, resources, ability to sacrifice, quality of life, and sense of wellbeing.

Questions to Consider

- **What Is My top Priority right now?** To be financially stable? To pursue a specific career path? Your priority will depend on your personal circumstances. It may be right for you to take a temporary position in order to be financially stable, or it may make sense for you to spend more time pursuing a specific career goal, even if that strategy may take longer than expected. Think about what feels most important to you in light of current circumstances.
- **What Constraints Do I Want to Consider, both Professionally and Personally?** What location am I bound to? Are there specific visa constraints? Family factors? It is fine to make choices that are based on any of these—or other—constraints.
- **What Resources Do I Have?** What are your financial and non-financial resources, and how can they give you strength while job searching? Are you a part of alumni or professional networks? Do you have classmates who are cheering you on? Support networks and professional connections can help you stay motivated during your search.
- **What, if any, Sacrifices Am I Able to Make?** For what duration? For what reasons? Depending on your strategy, it can make sense to make some sacrifices in order to pursue what is important to you. This could mean, for example, considering adjacent positions or fields, or a different location.
- **How Is Your Quality of Life and Sense of Well Being?** What do you need to feel fulfilled and happy? Can you handle unemployment or financial uncertainty? These considerations are valid and important to take into account in deciding what is next for you.



DEVELOPING A LONG-TERM STRATEGY

Once you've decided on a strategy, there are a variety of steps you can take to continue working toward your professional goals. The suggestions below are meant to give you ideas. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with your career advisor to discuss what makes the most sense for your unique situation.

1. Continue Applying

If you know what positions you want to pursue, and you have been applying for opportunities, there is no reason to stop applying! Apply for positions as they are posted. Do not shy away from applying for opportunities that have been posted for more than a couple of weeks, either. It's difficult to predict hiring timelines, especially as organizations are adjusting to current economic conditions. As such, it may be worth tossing your hat into the ring.

2. Polish Your Resume and Cover Letter

Are you happy with your resume and cover letter? If the number of jobs in your field has decreased, you may want to use the extra time to polish your resume and cover letter to ensure that the documents make a strong case for your skills, experience, and motivation.

Keep in mind that strong resumes and cover letters are tailored to each specific opportunity. Strategies for effective tailoring include mirroring the language of the job description and the hiring organization's mission statement. You should also translate your experience and skills into the language of the job ad. It's okay to be overt about this; you can copy key phrases and terms. These strategies will make it more likely that your application will stand out and be convincing to the reader.

How Widely Should I Apply?

Applying widely rarely results in a job offer. That is because putting together strong applications takes time. Moreover, applying to a hundred positions in a short time period does not allow for tailoring applications and communicating genuine interest. Think about your priorities and what you need during the next few months. Which jobs fit into your larger strategy, and why? Are there certain organizations you are focused on because they allow you to show experience in, e.g. a specific industry? Or are there skills that you want to develop further to be as competitive as possible for specific positions? Start with questions like these to help you gain insight on where to focus your applications.

Will Hiring Timelines Shift?

As companies and organizations work to adapt and make strategic choices for the future, their hiring timelines may shift. If there is an immediate need to fill a position that is critical to the organization, hiring may happen quite fast. Conversely, the timeline for other positions may slow down, as human resources teams and hiring managers are navigating changing budgets. Delayed responses may not necessarily mean a lack of interest. When communicating with the organization, keep in mind the pressures that employees may be under, and be professional and kind.



3. Review Your Online Presence

As you practice social distancing, your online presence becomes an increasingly important way to communicate your professional identity to potential employers and professional contacts.

Start by googling yourself. Are there any results that you'd rather not have potential employers find? Perhaps a social media profile used for family and friends? Or an old gift registry? Consider making adjustments to your privacy settings as appropriate. In addition, many employers will try to find your LinkedIn profile to get a more complete picture of you. As such, it can be a good idea to either join or review your LinkedIn presence.

LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/>)

Does your LinkedIn profile communicate your professional identity and your goals? As a first step to strengthening your profile, look at your intro section (photo, headline, and summary) and ask yourself whether this section tells potential employers who you are and what you bring to the table. This is important, as this section is your profile's prime real estate. It is what LinkedIn users spend the most time viewing, and it is what is most likely to get people's attention. Here are some best practices for this section:

- **Photo.** People are seven times more likely to accept your LinkedIn connection request if you have a photo. Your photo should be a solo shot (no groups) with good resolution in which you are dressed professionally. You do not need to hire a professional photographer, as most cell phone cameras have high enough resolution.
- **Headline.** The headline is the customizable, 120-character line of text immediately underneath your name. Think of the headline as your branding statement. What do you want people to know about you at a glance? Use important keywords that you want associated with your profile. Review other people's headlines for inspiration.
- **Summary.** The summary enables you to tell a first-person narrative of who you are and where you are headed with your career. Keep this section relatively concise (1 or 2 paragraphs). You can think of the summary as a personal statement that emphasizes your strengths and accomplishments. It can also communicate your professional goals.

For additional LinkedIn tips, please refer to the resources on page 8.

4. Build Relationships

Building relationships is especially important during difficult economic times. Having conversations and other short exchanges with employers, alumni, and contacts who work in your field of interest gives you important information, such as what people value and what lingo they speak. This information, in turn, can help you tailor and strengthen your applications. Building relationships also shows people how much you care. Finally, and importantly, these conversations will make it more likely that when a position opens, contacts will remember you and let you know about the opportunity.

- **Get active on LinkedIn and WISR** (<https://uchicago.wisr.io/login/>). LinkedIn and WISR, UChicago's alumni platform, allow you to interact with professionals in fields of interest. On LinkedIn, you can join groups organized by specific job families or industries. Join the conversation by thanking people for the resources and thoughts they share, and show interest by asking questions. On WISR, you can indicate interest areas, find relevant alumni, and contact them via phone or chat.



- **Conduct Virtual informational interviews.** Informational interviews are informal conversations with professionals who are working in a field that interests you. They allow you to “interview” a professional to learn useful information about their day-to-day work and the best ways to break into their field. While these informational interviews are often conducted in person, they can be just as successfully conducted on virtual platforms such as Zoom or Skype.

Use LinkedIn, WISR, or company webpages to identify and connect with potential interviewees. When reaching out, limit your request to a brief, one-paragraph message in which you introduce yourself, express interest in the person’s career path, and ask for 30 minutes of their time for a Zoom or telephone meeting. Make short reference to the ongoing economic and health crisis, especially if you are contacting people who are in vulnerable professions or industries, such as in health care or tourism. For example, you could state that under the current circumstances, you’d be especially grateful for their insights and time.

- **Consider Joining Professional Associations.** Many professions and industries have professional organizations that provide resources to connect with professionals. For a small membership fee, you may also be able to participate in mentorship programs, which may be offered online, too.
- **Reconnect with Professional Contacts.** Are there professionals or employers with whom you have spoken in the past and with whom you could reconnect? Reaching out and thanking someone for the role they have played in your professional development can be an effective strategy to connect on a human level. Such outreach may be especially valued during difficult times in which many people appreciate connecting with one another.

5. Hone Your Skills

As you review job ads, are there skills that you notice that you’d like to develop or strengthen? If so, you may consider honing your skills to further bolster your qualifications for positions of interest. LinkedIn Learning (free to UChicago graduate students and postdocs), virtual internships, and volunteering opportunities are options worth considering.

LinkedIn Learning (<https://linkedinlearning.uchicago.edu/>)

LinkedIn Learning offers more than 15,000 courses that cover both soft skills, such as time management and office communication, as well as technical skills, including Microsoft Excel, R, and Python. After completing a course, you can add it to your LinkedIn profile and include it on your resume. This will not only show that you have important skills, but it will also signal to employers that you are willing to grow for a position.



Virtual Internships and Volunteering

Securing a virtual internship or volunteering opportunity, either full-time or part-time, can be a great opportunity to hone your skills and show your commitment to a specific career. Check out internship listings on the job search sites you usually visit. If the right opportunities are not advertised, it is sometimes possible to arrange an internship or volunteering opportunity directly with organizations (refer to resources on page 8 for relevant websites), especially if an unpaid option could make sense for you. If this is of interest to you, refer to the guidance about building and strengthening relationships above. It is not unusual for internship opportunities to result from informational interviews and mentoring relationships.



6. Learn about Employers and Gather Intel

The current economic and health crises can allow you to gain insight into organizations that interest you: How are organizations reacting to the crisis? What, if any, accommodations are they providing for employees? What seems to be the hiring outlook? And, importantly, what do *you* make of the organizations' responses?

Paying attention to these and related questions can help you reflect on what you value in an employer and for which kinds of organizations you may want to work. To track employer responses, you may consider signing up for news alerts about employers of interest, such as Google news alerts. To get a sense of which organizations are hiring, consult crowd-sourced websites such as Candor (<https://candor.co/hiring-freezes/>)

I am an international student. What does this mean for my strategy in light of the current economic and health crisis?

The current economic circumstances may make it more difficult for you to find a position, especially if your Optional Practical Training is limited to one year. As such, it is even more important to reflect on your priorities. What, if any, sacrifices may you want and be able to make? Would you, for example, consider volunteering in order to fulfill OPT requirements and extend your time in the United States? Would you consider extending your studies or applying for another graduate degree in order to stay in the United States? Think carefully about your options, and speak with your career advisor and mentors to make sure that you consider the short-term and long-term consequences of any decision you make. Be sure that you understand visa and OPT requirements and comply with them at all times. Please connect with The Office of International Affairs (<https://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/>) for guidance.

Also, think about what it would mean for you to return to your country of citizenship. Your back-up plan likely should include thinking about a career in that country and what you would need to do in order to secure employment there. Plan for multiple scenarios.

For additional information, please also refer to UChicagoGRAD's International Student Guide to the Job Search in the United States (<https://grad.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/InternationalGuide.pdf>).

CREATING FLEXIBILITY IN YOUR SEARCH

Depending upon what you have discerned about your priorities, constraints, ability to sacrifice, quality of life, and sense of wellbeing, you may want to consider a range of back-up options. Some of the ideas introduced below may be more relevant to you than others. We recommend discussing options with your career advisor and/or other trusted mentors. To book an appointment with your UChicagoGRAD advisor, please visit <https://gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu>.

1. Could Short-Term or Temp Positions Be an Option?

If securing an income immediately is key for your strategy or you want to wait out what may be the worst of the crisis, short-term or temp positions can be an option. Such positions are often filled by temp agencies, though some organizations and companies also do their own hiring for such positions. Depending on the nature of the work, many can be done remotely.

Continued on next page



The resource section includes several websites that list short-term and remote opportunities. While these positions can sometimes lead to a more long-term engagement with an employer, they are ideally options for a few months only.

2. Consider Adjacent Roles and/or Adjacent Organizations

Another option is to consider professions that are adjacent, or closely related, to the ones you are pursuing. This can be a worthwhile strategy because it could (1) help you build experience in a role or field that is relevant to your ultimate goals, and/or (2) provide opportunities for building pertinent skills. If you have been exploring or applying for positions in a specific industry, you could think about what other roles in that industry may be a good fit for you and your goals. For example, you could consider risk management instead of compliance, or communications instead of program management. Similarly, if you are interested in competitive, high-profile organizations, such as leading museums or consultancies, you may consider whether there are adjacent organizations or industries that could be of interest. For example, in addition to looking at leading museums, you could consider arts organizations or non-profit art organizations. Beyond leading consultancies, perhaps there are small business consulting firms that could be an option. Considering adjacent roles and organizations/industries can widen your pool of possibilities. If considering this option, be mindful not to stray too far from what is important to you.

3. Could Tutoring Online Be a Short-Term Source of Income?

If you have taught during your time in graduate school or as a postdoc, you may consider tutoring online as a way to further develop your teaching experience or to build an income in the short term. Tutoring can also be advantageous during a job search because the hours can be flexible. Refer to the resource section for websites that contain tutoring opportunities.

4. Are there other Ways to Use and Hone your Skills?

If honing your skills is your top goal, you may consider reaching out to small businesses or nonprofits to see if they have projects that could benefit from your help. Such projects help you build relationships, demonstrate additional experience, and show commitment to a specific career or industry. Having said that, such opportunities may be unpaid, and as such they may not be appropriate for your situation.

5. Can You Maintain Your Long-term Strategy by Combining Unpaid and Paid Options for the Time Being?

Some opportunities to gain experience and build skills may be offered on a volunteer or unpaid basis. If these opportunities are important to your goals, you may consider accepting an option on a part-time basis while also finding a part-time paid position to make ends meet. For example, you may consider a remote volunteering opportunity with the United Nations to show your interest in international affairs, while accepting an administrative paid position in a business environment. While not a strategy for the long term, this combination can help you get by while signaling your commitment to a specific field, building skills, and growing experience.



REMOTE INTERVIEWING

As some organizations and industries are hiring, interviews are still happening. During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote interviewing has increased, and it will likely remain a reality in many parts of the United States and other countries for the time being. As such, it is important that you are comfortable interacting with others online and that you practice such engagement on platforms like Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams. The practical considerations below are specific to remote interviews. To learn more about general interview strategies, make an appointment with your GRADTalk advisor (refer to the resources on page 8).

- Background.** Keep the background neutral and avoid distractions. A blank wall is generally fine. Likewise, a bookshelf or a plant in the background is appropriate, especially if the position you interview is one that requires a personal touch, such as a role in sales. Avoid backgrounds that may invite the interviewer to, for example, read the titles of posters or books. Avoid virtual backgrounds that may be interrupted by your movement on the screen or may give the appearance that you are hiding something.
- Information Displayed on Screen.** Depending on the program used, your screen may display your username, profile picture, and email address. To ensure that the appropriate information is displayed, check your profile settings prior to the interview. For example, is the profile picture neutral, such as a professional looking picture? Is your username as close to your actual name as possible?
- Technology.** To ensure that your internet connection is stable, you may want to hold several test runs to ensure that your internet is fast enough for the interview. If you encounter any issues, try strategies such as moving closer to the router or using an ethernet connection, if available. You can also check if there are other programs or other devices that are using the same WIFI connection and may be slowing down the internet. If connectivity issues nevertheless occur during the interview, acknowledge that you are having technical difficulties and, if appropriate, ask for a question to be repeated. If there are larger connectivity issues, you may offer to turn off your video and switch to audio only.
- Camera Angle and Lighting.** If you are using a laptop, it is a good idea to elevate your device to keep the camera level with your eyes, which improves the viewing perspective. If possible, avoid windows that may create a glare on the screen.
- Where to Look.** Focus on the camera in order to maintain eye contact. Try to avoid looking off screen, which may signal that you are consulting notes or that you are distracted.
- What to Wear.** Wear what you would to an in-person interview, and do not assume that parts of your body will be invisible on camera. Dressing the way you would to an in-person interview signals that you know the norms of the hiring field and that you are excited about the opportunity.
- Avoid Disruptions.** Turn off any computer programs that you may normally have running in the background, such as chat or email software that could interrupt the interview.



Source: CNN.com



How do I signal to the interviewer that I am finished speaking?

Use verbal cues to orient your listener to where you are in your answer. One way to do this is to group answers into discrete numbers. For example, you may state that there are three reasons why you are interested in this position. Another way to use verbal cues is to be clear when you highlight an example of what you just explained (e.g. “to provide an example of this, ...”). This, in turn, signals that you are nearing the end of your answer. Finally, you can restate the question in order to communicate to the listener that you have finished answering a question (for example, “these are what I consider to be my main strengths.”).

Is it appropriate to negotiate a job offer during an economic crisis?

It's always a best practice to negotiate a job offer because it shows that you know your professional worth. In fact, employers typically expect job offers to be negotiated, and they may not initially offer the best possible package. As such, it is still appropriate to negotiate an offer during an economic crisis. Having said that, it's important to be mindful of constraints that the hiring organization may be under, particularly regarding salary. For example, it is possible that the salary range they are able to offer may be lower. As always, think about the offer holistically. If a hiring manager signals to you that they are unable to offer as high a salary as you are seeking, you may think about other aspects of the job that you could negotiate, such as stock options, a bonus, or vacation days. Your leverage may be lower, especially if you do not have other options on the table.

RESOURCES

Relevant Articles

Elizabeth C. Tippet “Pants or no Pants? Tips for Virtual Job Interviews from Home” *The Conversation*, May 1, 2020: <https://theconversation.com/pants-or-no-pants-tips-for-virtual-job-interviews-from-home-137552>

Christine Kelly “Career Planning in a Pandemic” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 20, 2020: <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/04/20/career-advice-getting-through-economic-downturn-caused-pandemic-opinion>

Stephanie K. Eberle “At-Home Networking Strategies” *Inside Higher Ed*, March 23, 2020: <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/03/23/how-network-while-you-are-social-distancing-home-opinion>

Marcelo Barros “9 Job Search Tips for International Students in the Age of Coronavirus” *Vault*, March 20, 2020: <https://www.vault.com/blogs/international-students/job-search-tips-for-international-students-in-the-age-of-coronavirus>

The Muse Editor “The 31 Best LinkedIn Profile Tips for Job Seekers” *The Muse*: <https://www.themuse.com/advice/the-31-best-linkedin-profile-tips-for-job-seekers>



Where to Look for Positions

In addition to company and organization websites, there are many job boards that list available positions. Below are suggestions for ways to find positions that are not industry or field-specific. If you are interested in a specific field, please consult UChicagoGRAD's career guides, which include job search sites for different fields (<https://grad.uchicago.edu/career-development/career-development-resources/career-exploration-resources/?tab-section=careerguides>).

- **Google** (<https://www.google.com/>). Visit Google and type “jobs” into the search field. You can then sort opportunities by category, title, location, date posted, type, company type, and employer.
- **GRAD Gargoyle Job Board** (<https://gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu>). Find positions from employers who are looking for UChicago talent.
- **Indeed** (<https://www.indeed.com/>). Indeed is the highest trafficked job website in the United States. It lists positions in the United States as well as some countries abroad.
- **LinkedIn Jobs** (<https://www.linkedin.com/jobs/>). LinkedIn's job page can be a great resource as it makes suggestions for positions you might be interested in based on your profile and positions you have viewed in the past.
- **Twitter** (<https://twitter.com/>). Many companies and organizations, especially smaller ones, advertise positions on Twitter. In addition, you can set notifications with terms related to an industry you are interested in in order to find out about new job openings.

Remote Work Opportunities

There are a variety of remote job boards. Visit more than one website to get a sense of which offerings could be right for you.

- AngelList (<https://angel.co/>)
- FlexJobs (<https://www.flexjobs.com/>). Cost associated.
- JustRemote (<https://justremote.co/>)
- Pangian (<https://pangian.com/>)
- Remote.Co (<https://remote.co/remote-jobs/>)
- We Work Remotely (<https://weworkremotely.com/>)

Remote Volunteering Opportunities

Many nonprofits and non-governmental organizations offer volunteering opportunities, including remote volunteering options. If there are specific organizations you are interested in, please also visit their websites directly to see what may be possible. Some options include:

- Amnesty Decoders (<https://decoders.amnesty.org/>)
- Crisis Text Line (<https://www.crisistextline.org/become-a-volunteer/>)
- One Good Deed Chicago (<https://onegooddeedchicago.org/>)
- Project Gutenberg (https://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Gutenberg:Volunteering_for_Project_Gutenberg)
- Smithsonian Digital Volunteers (<https://www.si.edu/volunteer/DigitalVolunteers>)
- Translators Without Borders (<https://translatorswithoutborders.org/volunteer/>)
- United Nations Volunteers (<https://www.onlinevolunteering.org/en>)
- Zooniverse (<https://www.zooniverse.org/>)



Online Tutoring

Several websites facilitate online tutoring and finding clients, though there are important differences with regard to experience requirements, pay, and payment systems.

- Chegg Tutors (<https://www.chegg.com/tutors/>)
- Preply (<https://preply.com/>)
- Prep Now (<http://www.prepnow.com/about/tutor-application.php>)
- TutorMe (<https://tutorme.com/apply/>)
- VIPKid! (<https://www.vipkid.com/mkt/faq/becoming-teacher>)
- Wyzant (<https://www.wyzant.com/tutorsignupstart>)

Staffing and Temp Agencies

Below are suggestions for staffing firms that offer temp placement services. Please note that different agencies cater to different fields and areas.

- Brooksource (<https://www.brooksource.com/>)
- Careers in Nonprofit (<https://careersinnonprofits.com/>)
- Culture Fit Technology Staffing (<https://culturefit.com/>)
- La Salle Network (<https://www.thelasalnetwork.com/>)
- Robert Half (<https://www.roberthalf.com/locations/il-Chicago>)

UChicagoGRAD Job Search Resources

Career Advising. During a career advising appointment, you can . . .

- Receive feedback on your resume and cover letter
- Review your LinkedIn profile
- Reflect on your career options and come up with a strategy that is right for you

Book an appointment by logging into GRAD Gargoyle (gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu).

GRADTalk. During a GRADTalk appointment, you can . . .

- Practice your interview skills through one-on-one mock interviews
- Prepare for online interviews and test technology

Book an appointment by logging into GRAD Gargoyle (gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu).

GRAD Diversity. During a GRAD Diversity appointment, you can . . .

- Discuss issues and concerns related to diversity in the context of the job market

Book an appointment by logging into GRAD Gargoyle (gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu).

Sounding Board. During a Sounding Board appointment, you can . . .

- Problem-solve challenges that you are encountering on the job market

Book an appointment by logging into GRAD Gargoyle (gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu).

Online and Library Resources. Available resources include . . .

- Job search advice books, located in the Graduate Career Development Resources Collection on the first floor of the Regenstein Library (guides.lib.uchicago.edu/careers)
- UChicagoGRAD's online guides to resumes, cover letters, and more (gradcareers.uchicago.edu)

