

The Value of Part-Time Work

Ideally, your part-time positions will be related to career goals, but any work experience has potential benefits. A working student builds networks, gains confidence in abilities, and demonstrates responsibility, strengths, and work ethic. In fact, some research indicates that GPA actually increases for students working 15 to 20 hours per week.

I Don't Have Any Experience!

If you have limited work experience, you may believe that you have few marketable skills. However, it is important to remember that skills are developed in many situations. You gain knowledge not only in classrooms and workshops, but also through part-time work, volunteer experience, and even hobbies.

While it is desirable to work in at least one internship or other experience in your discipline before you graduate, you will probably hold a job or two that isn't directly related to your field. **THIS IS STILL VALUABLE EXPERIENCE!!** You are gaining and developing "TRANSFERABLE SKILLS."

ALL experience is "relevant" even though it may not be "related" to your field. Don't assume that an employer isn't interested in your summer job as a telemarketer. The key is to describe your position in terms that will make the "bridge" for the employer. Focus on those transferable skills, rather than the everyday duties performed.

What Do Employers Look For?

Transferable skills are skills that are applicable across settings. Chances are that in your part-time work experience you have learned and practiced abilities that employers value, such as:

- **Communication**
- **Leadership**
- **Problem solving**
- **Teamwork**
- **Organization**
- **Flexibility**
- **Computer skills**
- **Work under pressure**
- **Reliability**
- **Self-starter**

As you develop your resume, describe your experience in terms that will make it clear that you have used these skills. For example, in your burger-flipping position, did you display coolness under pressure, work with the team to accomplish goals, or demonstrate reliability through your work habits? Be ready to cite specific examples in an interview.

Here are some ways to identify and develop your transferable skills:

- **Identify skills required by employers in your field.** Look at job descriptions, professional journals and newspapers; talk to employers, faculty and advisors; join a professional listserv and do research on the Internet or in directories in the library.
- **Look at your experience.** Where have you applied the skills you have identified? Again, be able to provide specific examples. The employer will not assume that you have developed strong communication skills in your cashier position. You will need to make it clear.
- **Improve your weak areas.** Perhaps you can improve on a skill or learn a new one in your current position. Talk to your supervisor about the possibility. Campus organizations and volunteer work are great ways to take on leadership roles. Consider enrolling in a class that will increase your knowledge.
- **The CAP Center staff can assist you.** There are many resources available including books, videos, and company literature. We conduct several workshops on resume writing and interview skills throughout the year. A staff member can also individually review your resume and provide feedback.
- **Keep records.** Make notes of steps you have taken and the results of your actions. Keep copies of job descriptions, class projects and papers, completed application forms, and anything else that will jog your memory when it comes time to relate your experience to an employer.

Consider The Experience

Many factors (in addition to money) come in to play when considering how much a job will benefit you currently and in the future. While other aspects may also be important to you, the following list presents some questions to ask yourself when considering a part-time job:

- **Atmosphere:** Will you enjoy the surroundings? Will you like your co-workers?
- **Flexibility:** Can work be scheduled around your classes?
- **Networking:** Will you develop contacts for future job searching?
- **Expenses:** Do you need to purchase work clothes, equipment, transportation, etc.?
- **References:** Would you want this employer to write a letter or speak to a future employer? In order to obtain a positive reference, do not burn bridges in your part-time job.
- **Skills:** Will there be opportunities to develop skills needed in the future?

How Do I Find A Part-Time Job?

- **Prepare your resume.** Many part-time positions will not require one, but attaching a resume to an application form shows that you are organized, professional, and serious about your part-time work. Always be thorough in completing application forms, even if you attach a resume. Stating, "See resume" on the application is usually not acceptable. Staff in the CAP Center can help you with resume preparation and review.
- **Check with the South Dakota Career Center.** A campus branch is located in the lower level of the CAP Center. The staff will assist you in locating on and off-campus opportunities for which you may apply. It is important to follow up with the employers

you are referred to and to check back often with the SDCC office while you are job-hunting.

- **Contact employers directly, even if they are not advertising a position.** One may open unexpectedly. Call or submit a cover letter and resume in person or by mail. Make follow-up phone calls to be sure they received your material and then check in periodically to keep your name in front of them. Be sensitive to the reaction you receive when you check back to determine how frequently you contact them. Usually every one or two weeks will not be considered intrusive.
- **Talk to people in your network (teachers, past employers, friends, family, etc.) about your job search and ask if they know of openings or other people you should contact.**
- **Check with local temporary agencies.** Some employers use them to fill their part-time needs. Look in the phone book under Employment Agencies.
- **For volunteer experience,** contact the Volunteer Service Bank at 692-6102 or directly contact the organization that interests you.

Landing The Job Is Up To You!

Take responsibility for your job search. Finding a job while in college may be very different than it was in high school. There are many resources to help you, but to be successful, you will need to apply positive job search skills.

- Convey respect for yourself and the employer at every stage of the process.
- Whether you are picking up an application or going to an interview, wear clothes that are clean, pressed, and suitable for a work setting.
- Treat receptionists with courtesy.
- Fill out applications completely and neatly.
- If you expect to complete an application on site, take an old application form or the Information Tool available from the South Dakota Career Center on campus. Then you will have the information you need to easily complete the forms. If you take an application complete at home, request two copies, in case you make mistakes on the first. If you have an answering machine, be sure the message is simple and to the point.
- To give yourself a real edge, research the employer on the internet and through your network, so you can let them know how interested you are in their mission and goals.
- Think about how you will answer common interview questions, such as, “What are your strengths and weaknesses?”, “Tell me about yourself.” “Why should I hire you?” “How do you handle stressful work situations?” Think in terms of transferable skills!
- Convey a positive attitude and a willingness to work hard.

A Word Or Two About References

Employers often want to check references before making a job offer. This information is usually requested on the application form, but you should also type up a list to accompany your resume. (See the example below.)

- Include 3 or 4 people on your reference list.

- List people who can address your work-related abilities. i.e. past or present supervisors in paid and volunteer experiences, teachers, advisors in academic or activity settings.
- Friends and family are not appropriate references. Clergy are appropriate if they have known you in a work or volunteer capacity.
- Before including someone on your list, ask if they will serve as a strong reference for you. If they have reservations, thank them and look for someone else. Give them a copy of your resume and let them know what types of jobs you will be applying for.
- Keep them informed of your job-hunting activity and let them know when you have found a job. If time passes and you want to begin using them again, update them on your situation and ask permission to continue using their name.
- Your references should be as recent as possible. When you begin applying for internships and post graduation positions, high school references will usually be too out of date. Keep this in mind as you progress through the university. Get to know faculty who will know more about you than your grades and class attendance.
- Check with employers so you know their policy on giving references. Some can only confirm that you worked for them and when. You may still want to work for them, but you will need to be developing enough other references to compensate. If your employment with such an employer has been long term, it is wise to list them on your reference sheet, make a note of their policy (see example below), and provide an additional reference (i.e. 4 instead of 3).
- Use the person’s work contact information unless they request otherwise. If you list their home information, label it as such.
- List email only if the person checks it frequently.
- If you list someone who has left the job they held when you worked with them, list their current contact information and a line that explains your relationship. (i.e. Supervised me for two years at Burger Mama’s.)
- Thank your references for helping you.

At the top of your reference page, reproduce the heading (your name and contact information) from your resume. Title the page, “References”, and list them in the order you would like them contacted.

References

Name

Title

Place of employment

Address

Phone

Email

(Employed here for 3 years. Company reference policy is to confirm employment dates only.)

You Have The Skills Employers Want! Can You Convince Them?

These are the skills employers find desirable in a good employee. Think about how you can

describe your experience to illustrate your skill in each area. Incorporate your examples into your cover letters and answers to questions in your interviews.

Communication: "After three months as a counter attendant at Burger Mama's, I was made trainer for new counter attendants because of my ability to explain information clearly."

Teamwork: "As Student Body President I worked with the administration and other students to set new policies on in-school suspension."

Leadership: "Last semester I led the food collection drive for the campus chapter of the Help Others club. Next year, I plan to run for secretary of the chapter."

Problem-solving: "Two of the children I cared for in my child care position fought often over sitting in the front seat of the car when we were going to and from activities. Since they both loved planes and rockets, I made them co-pilots, responsible for keeping me on course. This could only be done by sitting next to each other. It worked well and they learned to cooperate with each other."

Organization: "I am taking twenty credits and working fifteen hours a week. In order to make sure I get everything done on time, I have set up a daily schedule on my computer that includes class, study, leisure, and work time. I try to look two weeks ahead to work things into the schedule."

Flexibility: "My schedule sometimes changes on short notice and I make any necessary adjustments. For example, last week an instructor assigned an unexpected project and my boss asked me to cover two extra shifts. I decided to postpone a planned weekend trip home in order to complete the class project. This made time to work the extra shifts."

Accomplishments: "Making the adjustment to college life was difficult for me and my grade point suffered the first two semesters. However, since then, I have become focussed on my major and my career and have raised my GPA from a 2.6 to a 3.4."

Computer Skills: "I use Word 2000 regularly and have begun to learn Excel in my job as Student Assistant at the CAP Center."

Resume Writing Basics

- A resume is meant to be a brief overview of your experience. Limit this document to one or two pages.
- There should be no typographical errors or misspelled words.
- There are many resume formats. Look at examples in the CAP Center, in books, or on the internet for ideas that will work for you.
- Margin size may vary, but should not be larger than an inch or smaller than half an inch.

- Font size in the body of the resume should be no smaller than 11 and no larger than 12. Larger fonts may be used for your name and category headings.
- Font styles should be easy to read, such as Times New Roman or Arial. Do not mix more than two font styles. (One is preferable.)
- Use bold and/or italics to emphasize information and add visual interest. Use underlining sparingly.
- Within each category, list information in reverse chronological order, with the most recent listed first.
- Categories that are mandatory include your contact information, education, and experience. Include additional categories such as activities, honors, leadership, etc., to fit your situation. An objective is optional. A list of related courses may be added to demonstrate a knowledge base that has not been built through other experience. This is usually listed after the education section.
- If your GPA is 3.0 or above, consider listing it in the education section. You may list your cumulative and/or your major GPA. Anything other than your cumulative GPA MUST be labeled accordingly. I.e. Major GPA: 3.2/4.0. If not labeled, it will be assumed that it is cumulative. Include the “/4.0” to indicate the scale on which your GPA is determined. The university calculates your cumulative GPA, but not your major GPA. For information on how to calculate you major GPA, contact your advisor.
- Focus on the skills you have used that will transfer to the position you are seeking. A job description or other information about the job will help you determine what to emphasize.
- As you reach the junior level at the university, your high school experiences will generally be dropped off your resume unless they are very relevant or outstanding.
- Use brief phrases to describe your experience. Begin the phrases with action verbs. Vary the verbs to keep the reader interested.
- Verb tense should fit the situation. When describing current experience, use present tense. To describe past experience, use the past tense.
- A resume should be accompanied by a cover letter when you are not delivering it in person.
- Print your documents on resume paper, using a laser printer whenever possible.

For more assistance or an appointment, stop by or call the Career Planning offices in Medary Commons, 688-4153. You can also visit our website <http://careercenter.sdstate.edu> or the South Dakota Career Center site <http://www.ajb.org/sd>.