The mission of Stephen F. Austin State University Center for Career and Professional Development is to assist students and alumni through quality programming in the development and implementation of life-long career decision making and job-search skills in order to maximize their career satisfaction and employment opportunities.

“Give me the formula”
Many times career development professionals are approached by students and alumni seeking a formula to be used in the job search, which, if implemented, would lead to the perfect job in the perfect company or agency. It is important to understand that there is no magic or secret formula for success in the job hunting effort. There are, however, important principles and procedures to assist those in the market for the very first time as university graduating seniors or graduate students.

The widespread effects of the most serious recession in decades will complicate the job search for those entering the labor force in 2009. Unemployment in February 2009 rose to 8.1% and many economists predict double digit unemployment rates during the year and even into 2010.

It is useful to begin the job search by understanding what has been accomplished. Data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board indicates that on average, a full-time public university student needed 4.6 years and completed 13 excess semester credit hours to attain a bachelor’s degree that requires four years and 120 credit hours. Graduates need to see that their persistence and commitment to accomplishing a long range goal paid off. This same resolute focus will bring many dividends when applied to the job search process.

Where do you begin?
It may be a bit trite but it is nonetheless true that you should ‘begin with the end in mind’. Many things germane to this process seem elementary but are essential to a comprehensive job search strategy. Understand that you are not alone in this process. Over 1,500,000 undergraduate degrees, over 600,000 master’s level degrees and over 145,000 professional and doctoral degrees were conferred in 2007/2008 according to the National Center for Education Statistics. It is evident that graduates find rewarding careers each year and many begin this process utilizing the resources provided by their colleges and universities.

Graduates will be well served by getting organized. Writing a résumé, writing a cover letter, preparing for interviews, and follow-up interviews, negotiating salaries and benefits, are some of the things to attend.

When do you begin?
Now. Yesterday. Early in the last year of university. Inquire in the CCPD department about services related to these steps. In many cases, assistance for on-line for writing an effective résumé can be dizzying - there are only about 17 million ways to construct a résumé and they are all posted on the internet. CCPD at SFA is in the unique position of relating to hundreds of prospective employers each year and stays current with issues needing attention on résumés. SFA also offers document critiques via online and in-person so that your professional documents will match industry standards and help land you the job.

Preparing for the interview
If preparing your résumé ends the inertia and engages you in the job search process, the next step often brings anxiety to the heart of many graduates – the interview. How do I prepare? What are the questions asked? What if I am asked a question and I do not know the answer. What should I know about the company or agency with whom I am interviewing? It has been said, “Prior planning prevents poor performance.” SFA CCPD provides InterviewStream, a video tool used to present sample interview questions and record your responses. You may review your responses privately or ask a staff member to review with you. Also, staff members will provide mock interviews which are very helpful to many students.
Most companies, agencies, and districts provide significant information useful to prospective employees on the company website. The Vault Career Insider and other industry and district listings contain much useful information on industries as a whole and on specific companies.

Who will hire me?
I prepared my résumé and I believe that I can answer questions related to my education, experience, internship, volunteer experiences and such, but, who will hire me? Where will I find a list of companies, agencies and districts to contact? Graduates of SFA have several resources at their disposal. Companies provide recruiters in the fall and spring semesters to interview prospective graduates in many academic disciplines at career expos. Students can go on-line to Jobs4Jacks and review the list of companies and agencies coming to career exposions in order to complete company research before interacting with recruiters. Students may also sign up for individual interviews on Jobs4Jacks as eligible. Job Fair Tips are provided for students before the fair. After determining that companies, industries, agencies, or school districts coming to campus may be among those with whom you would like to interview – sign up for the interview and attend the job fair with extra résumés available on-hand.

Use your network
Sometimes students say, “I am not finding companies or agencies looking for students with my academic major. What do I do?” There are some reports that up to 85% of job openings are not advertised. This means that networking is a very important resource for graduates to pursue. SFA CCPD research indicates strong evidence of the effectiveness of networking in the job search process. Some students are at a loss when developing this strategy, but it is far from being mysterious. Rather, networking is a remarkably intuitive venture. Communicate with family, friends, professors, and parents to determine who you may network with. Many students feel like they are imposing on others, but it is helpful to remember that you are not specifically asking these contacts for a job, but you need guidance to find work in your field.

Think of it this way: if you get one piece of information from each contact, you will gather valuable leads to explore. Other network contacts may be offered through a variety of professional organizations. Graduates may be convinced of the value of networking but are interested in additional Internet Resources to locate job opportunities.

Job Fairs are organized in many cities and by many professions. Newspapers, classified ads, and related trade journals list many jobs. Even the ‘Yellow Pages’ offer indicators for graduates to explore. State and local employment agencies such as the Texas Workforce Commission and local Employment and Temp agencies list jobs. Public libraries have resources in print and on-line on many of the issues involved in the job search. One agency estimates that only about 5% of résumés and cover letters sent in mass mailings are read by the receiving agency. To that end, a better approach may be a letter of inquiry rather than résumé mass mailings.

Create a spreadsheet
Résumés, cover letters, networking, interviews, job fairs – done, done, and done. Now what? It is critical that part of your preparation includes listing every contact as well as the company or agency name, person to contact, person actually contacted, date of contact, phone numbers (with area code), email addresses, websites, date résumé and cover letter sent, date of interview, date “Thank You’ letter sent, post-interview phone calls, date of follow-up interview, offer made, and acceptance letter in writing to the one making the offer – keep a copy. An important aspect of this effort is to help you to ‘stay in touch’. If a contact does not hear from you, it may be assumed that you are no longer interested or that you have found other alternatives. Concomitant to that is hearing, “No”. Learn to accept rejection as part of the process, stay encouraged, and try over and over until someone says, ‘Yes’.