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Tap Your School for Job-Hunt Help

By LINDSAY GELLMAN

It wasn't until after Christopher Morel graduated from Pennsylvania State University that he realized how helpful the school could be in his job search.

Mr. Morel had visited the career-services office a handful of times as an undergraduate for a résumé review. But after graduating in December 2012 with a bachelor's degree in hotel, restaurant and institutional management, the 23-year-old turned to the school's online jobs database to look for openings tailored to recent Penn State graduates.



John Ueland

"Everyone who's posting in the database is looking for a Penn State grad, and some of them did the same [hospitality management] program I did, so they know my background," Mr. Morel says. "I got at least two interviews using the database."

Colleges offer students access to exclusive job posting databases, alumni career networks, workshops, job fairs and individual counseling. But even though graduation is around the corner, some students have yet to even visit their school's career center—and many aren't aware that

they can continue to take advantage of these services once they have their diplomas in hand.

Schools' career-services offices typically host career fairs, workshops on topics ranging from cover letters to apartment-hunting in a new city, and on-campus recruiting sessions with companies hiring recent graduates. These offerings provide the opportunity for students and young alumni to explore potential career paths, sharpen networking and other "real world" skills and land interviews with employers interested in hiring alumni of their school.

At some schools, current students and graduates also can meet with a career counselor for personalized advice, including résumé and cover-letter reviews and mock interviews. A counselor likely has experience placing graduates of your school with various employers and can speak to job-search strategies that worked for them and what pitfalls to avoid.

Another resource is the website of the career-services office, which typically lists job openings from recruiters for various industries, as well as guidelines for writing résumés and cover letters and interviews, says Kimberly DelGizzo, director of the Center for Career Development at Boston University.

Keep in mind that some schools—particularly large state schools—charge alums for career services. University of California at Riverside, for instance, offers services including a job-search package with access to its online database, job fairs and workshops for \$10 annually, according to the site. You also can get a one-time résumé critique package that includes a 30-minute appointment (by phone or in person) for \$25. A stand-alone counseling appointment costs \$65.

Students also often overlook the networking potential of their school's alumni. Many schools have an online directory of alumni who can serve as career mentors to students and recent graduates. It lists alumni's employment history, which can usually be sorted by field or geographic location. The database will either provide the alum's contact information or allow you to contact him or her via an internal messaging system.

Quynh Do, who graduated from Yale University in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in English, had intended to go to medical school until the winter of her senior year, when she decided instead to pursue a career in book publishing. Ms. Do searched Yale's online alumni database for contacts in the publishing industry and emailed a few asking for informational interviews.

She met with a receptive alum who had worked for a New York-based publisher to which she was applying. He suggested she mention his name in her cover letter, a move Ms. Do believes helped her land an internship at the company. She now works there as an assistant editor.

Alumni are usually eager to help one of their own and to "pay it forward," remembering help they might have received at the outset of their careers, says Lindsey Pollak, author of "Getting from College to Career: Your Essential Guide to Succeeding in the Real World."

Young alums are particularly well-positioned to help because they're likely more tuned-in to entry-level openings, says Ms. Pollak, adding it's increasingly common for companies to offer referral bonuses to employees who recruit others, which serves as additional incentive.

Conversely, she says, older alums are more likely to be in a position to hire someone.

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