

## Tips for the Counseling and Mental Health Job Search

***Please make note of the following steps and resources for moving along in your search for a position in counseling and mental health services.***

- 1) Reflect on and document your practicum experience.
- 2) Explore and prioritize opportunities.
- 3) Build your network.
- 4) Tweak your resume and cover letter.
- 5) Attend Career Fairs.
- 6) Prepare for Interviews.

**1) Reflect on and document your practicum experience.** It is vital that you take time to think about what you have learned about yourself, your clients and your field, and how it impacts your philosophy of mental health and counseling. Make sure you do this on a regular basis as this will help you to:

- Improve your counseling practice and elicit helpful feedback from your practicum supervisors.
- Prepare more thoroughly for interviews and career fairs.

### **2) Explore and prioritize opportunities.**

- Consider how you see yourself working with clients.
  - **Population:** Are you interested in working with a particular client population?
  - **Function:** Do you want your role to primarily involve direct service and therapy or are you looking for some exposure to other roles such as research or program administration? Do you anticipate pursuing your license at some point?
- Consider the many possible contexts in which you could work, including:
  - *Social Services Agency (Government or Non-profit)*
  - *Healthcare*
  - *K-12 Schools*
  - *Higher Education*
  - *Community/Mental Health Facility*
  - *Direct Service/Program-based Organization*
  - *Corporation*
- Many resources for exploration are available on the following webpages depending on your interest:
  - <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/careerfields/psychologypsychiatrymentalhealth.php>
  - <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/careerfields/k12education.php>
  - <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/careerfields/higheredadmin.php>

**3) Build your network.** Connecting with others in your profession can provide insight into what it's like to work at a particular organization as well as how to market yourself effectively in the job search.

Informational interviewing is a great way to gather advice and build your network, though it's important to remember that the purpose of this type of meeting is to gather information and advice, not ask for a job or job interview. Here are some resources to get started:

- QuakerNet (Penn's Alumni Online Community): <http://www.myquakernet.com>
- Penn Alumni LinkedIn Groups: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/networking/linkedin.php>
- Professional Associations are also a good resource for networking. For example:
  - <http://www.counseling.org/>
  - <http://www.amhca.org/>
  - <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/>

**4) Tweak your resume and cover letter.** Career Services can provide critiques during appointments (call 215-898-4381 on weekdays between 9am-5pm to schedule), GSE walk-ins (Tuesdays, 1:30-2:30) or via e-mail. Keep in mind that the turnaround for e-mail critiques during this busy season is 3-5 business days on average. Therefore, it is best to use the following online resources to tweak your resume format as much as possible before a critique with a counselor.

- Resume Guide: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/gradstud/resumeguide.php>
- Resume Samples: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/PsychResumes.pdf>
- Cover Letter Guide: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/gradstud/coverletterguide.php>
- Cover Letter Samples: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/gradstud/coverlettersamples.php>

**5) Attend Career Fairs.** Career fairs allow you to meet a number of recruiters in one place so that you are able to offer resumes to and obtain contact information from employers of interest. Career fairs relevant to the fields of counseling and mental health, including Career Services' **Education and Social Services Career Day**, are typically held in the spring. Check the following links for updates on career fairs:

Career Services fairs: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/careerfairs/>

Other fairs: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/careerfairs/careerfairlinks.php>

**6) Prepare for Interviews.** The key to successful interviewing is thorough and thoughtful presentation. It is crucial that you reflect on your practicum as you prepare answers that reflect concrete examples of your experience.

- desire to work at a given organization and knowledge of its mission, values and services.
- desire to work with a given population and understanding of issues faced by that population.
- philosophy of clinical practice and approach to counseling/therapy
- highlights/challenges from working with clients
- strengths/weaknesses
- best practices

It is also extremely useful to practice interviewing. Career Services offers mock interviews as well as other tips and resources that can be found at: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/interviewingadvice/>