

Applying to Federal Jobs and Internships



Career Services
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www.southwestern.edu/careers
Explore. Experience. Engage.

Tools for searching

www.makingthedifference.org

Search the Partnership for Public Service's site job seeker site for resources and tools, including:

- Ten reasons to consider a federal career
- Red, White, and Blue Jobs Library: How to Find Great Jobs in the Federal Service
- Interest-specific career guides
- Internship database: Search by Major, Agency, Location, Year in School, Compensation, Hours per week, Availability, Keyword
- Agency profiles
- Profiles in Public Service
- Security clearance

www.usa.gov

The U.S. Government's official web portal

- Check out the Jobs and Education section
- **Always look for positions on agency-specific websites:** use the A-Z index in the right-hand menu bar

"Where the Jobs Are"

A Partnership for Public Service report with government hiring projections through 2012

- Download from www.makingthedifference.org under "What kind of federal careers are there?"
- Outlines projected hiring needs through 2012
- Covers 99% of the federal workforce, 34 agencies
- 193,000 mission critical jobs
- Presented by agency and by occupation

www.bestplacestowork.org

The most comprehensive and authoritative rating of employee satisfaction in the federal government

- Responses from 221,000+ civil servants across 283 federal agencies and subcomponents
- Scores agencies in 10 workplace environment categories such as effective leadership, employee skills/mission match, and work/life balance
- Offers snapshot overview of each agency and subcomponent, trend data, tips and information for job seekers, and expert analysis of what the results mean.

www.usajobs.gov

- Main posting site for all full-time, permanent federal jobs
- Use resume builder to create federal resume
- Pay grade GS 5-7 is typical for entry-level jobs for new grads
- Many entry-level jobs through special programs like STEP and SCEP are not posted here – make sure to also look at individual agency websites
- Any postings that have closing dates less than two weeks from posting dates are not worth applying for – they have an internal candidate in mind
- To find a list of job titles by major, go to <http://www.usajobs.gov/El/jobsbycollegemajor.asp#icc>

www.studentjobs.gov

- Targets government jobs that are entry level, summer, internship, etc.
- Some postings are for graduate-level only
- Don't limit yourself to this site as a student but use it as one tool

Student employment programs

Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP)

- What we think of as a traditional "internship"
- Great program for a summer or short term experience
- Need not be related to your academic field of study
- Any student enrolled in an accredited degree-granting institution
- Typically paid
- Length of the experience is set by the agency
- Not required to be posted on www.USAJobs.gov or www.StudentJobs.gov

Student Career Experience Program (SCEP)

- Must work in area *related to what you are studying*
- Must be enrolled in an accredited degree granting institution
- Southwestern must form an agreement with the employing agency
- Typically paid positions
- Usually work at least 640 hours (or less depending on academic achievement or prior experience)
- After experience, you are *eligible* to be hired into agency noncompetitively
- Not required to be placed on www.USAJobs.gov or www.StudentJobs.gov

Online application process

- Create your federal resume using the resume builder – agencies are used to and like this format
- Be sure to complete any requested forms or questionnaires that must accompany the resume.
- Submit the complete application package by the stated deadline
- Follow up with the posting's agency contact to inquire about progress in hiring for the position; contact information of some kind is listed for each position vacancy

Online federal resume

- Go to www.usajobs.gov and go to "Create an Account" in the top right corner. Once you've set up an account, you can use the resume creating tool. Be very detailed in your resume – do not limit yourself to one page. Resumes are assessed on a point basis. You can only earn points for experiences you explicitly detail on your resume.
- Sections include:
 - Candidate information
 - Work experience
 - Education
 - References
 - Affiliations
 - Desired locations

Federal resume components

Federal resumes require more detail than other resumes:

- Information about the opening (e.g. vacancy #)
- Your personal information (e.g. SSN)
- Education and coursework levels
- Work experiences
 - Dates and number of hours per week
 - Location of position; supervisor contact information
- Other qualifications

Sample questionnaire

The following statement might appear on a questionnaire, requiring you to pick the answer that best describes your experience:

Serve as primary point of contact for a specific subject matter.

- A. I have not had education, training, or experience in performing this task
- B. I have had education or training in performing the task, but have not yet performed it on the job
- C. I have performed this task on the job. My work on this task was monitored closely by a supervisor or senior employee to ensure compliance with proper procedures
- D. I have performed this task as a regular part of my job. I have performed it independently and normally without review by a supervisor or senior employee.
- E. I am considered an expert in performing this task. I have supervised performance of this task or am normally the person who is consulted by other workers to assist them in this task because of my expertise

KSA application essays

- Agencies no longer use Knowledge, Skills, Abilities (KSA) essays as part of the initial application to address characteristics they seek, but KSAs may be used later in the application process.
- Can be extremely important in the evaluation process in sorting out the best-qualified candidates
- Vary depending on the job, but examples include: skill in written and oral communications; demonstrated technical ability; knowledge of specific subject matter areas
- Are similar to interview questions; answers should provide concrete examples (coursework and volunteer experience count), particularly to demonstrate quantifiable results, complexity, or leadership
- Should be a narrative written in first person and about 1-2 pages each; give 3 examples per KSA (1 example per paragraph)
- Responses should:
 - Address key words/ phrases mentioned in the position description
 - Tie your experience to each KSA
 - Use illustrative examples
 - Focus on outcomes to which you directly contributed
 - Use plain language, without acronyms
- Review your answers to ensure they are succinct, easy to read and grammatically correct

KSA response approach: CCAR

- **Context:** Describe the specific problem you had to address (What did you have to solve, resolve, respond to, handle, etc.?)
- **Challenges:** Describe the factors that contributed to a particular challenge such as budget cuts, new legislation, institutional reform, new goals from upper management, etc.
- **Action:** Describe the steps you took to solve the problem (Stay away from the ordinary; be extraordinary in your response)

- **Result:** Outcomes of your actions; use %, #s, grades (what was the difference you made; highlight THE BEST)

Sample KSA

- **Prompt:** Skill in applying engineering concepts and theories to the solution of engineering problems
- **Response:** "Earning undergraduate and graduate degrees in mechanical engineering has given me a firm foundation of the engineering principles necessary to solve challenging problems. As a senior engineering major I often tutored freshmen in introductory level engineering classes such as Dynamic Analysis and Fluid Mechanics. For my thesis project at the University of Michigan I designed a remote controllable Geiger counter that could be used by the military to detect radiation sources that are too hazardous for personnel to approach. The project gave me the opportunity to solidify my knowledge of physical, chemical, and mathematical concepts as they apply to the real world. For my work on my thesis I received the highest honors from the university and my paper has since been published in an academic journal."

What happens after you submit your application?

- After the application closing date, the agency evaluates candidate qualifications
 - From this assessment, the agency produces a list of qualified candidates
 - From the list of qualified applicants, agencies select candidates for interviews
- From this point, agencies are like other employers, conducting interviews and selecting the best candidate(s) for the job
- Note that some jobs require security clearance

Federal job application process summary

- **Plan ahead:** Allow plenty of time to thoroughly complete your application
- **Select carefully:** Always consider using a tailored application for each vacancy you apply
- **Prepare for a wait:** Don't assume you've been rejected if you don't hear back within weeks of submitting your application
- **Follow-up with agency:** Contact the identified representative to learn the status of an application or find out more about a job