

UC Irvine

Division of Career Pathways



NZU GRADUATE STUDENT CAREER HANDBOOK

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BUILDING YOUR CAREER FROM THE GROUND UP

1. STARTING EARLY:

WHY CAREER DEVELOPMENT STARTS IN YEAR ONE

Graduate school marks a transition into advanced training, research, and professional growth. Many students experience excitement mixed with uncertainty, especially in the first year. It is common to wonder: *Am I prepared? Do I belong here? What comes after graduate school?* Taking steps to career development is one way to bring clarity.

Career development is not something to postpone until the end of your program. Instead, think of it as a parallel journey to your academic training. Starting early provides you with time to explore multiple career paths, practice professional skills, and build connections. By the end of your academic graduate journey, you will be grateful you began planning in year one!

[UC Irvine's Division of Career Pathways \(DCP\)](#) is your partner in this journey. Graduate career advisors offer tailored one-on-one guidance, and you have access to exclusive online tools like Handshake, Big Resume, Big Interview, and Beyond the Professoriate. You are not alone—thousands of UCI graduate students have used these services to successfully transition into careers inside and outside academia.

As important as it is to get a head start on your career development journey, we understand that many students may not begin planning or utilizing DCP services until they are closer to graduation. If this is the case, do not worry- this career guide still offers comprehensive resources and guidance to help you tackle the job search.







ACTION STEPS: GETTING AN EARLY START

- ✓ Schedule your first career advising appointment through [Handshake](#).
- ✓ Explore the graduate student career resources at career.uci.edu/graduate.
- ✓ Seek mentorship and advice from experts in your field early- whether it is your advisor, faculty, UCI alumni, or community/industry partners.
- ✓ Start a career log where you record feedback, skills, and accomplishments that you can use to help tailor future application materials.
- ✓ Consider crafting a career development plan using one of these guides/templates:
 - [Princeton Career Development - Guide](#)
 - [Teal Job Search Plan - Guide](#)
 - [UBC Career Development Plan - Template](#)
 - [CareerOneStop Job Search Plan - Guide](#)

2. LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: SELF-ASSESSMENT & CAREER EXPLORATION

Self-assessment means taking time to reflect on who you are as a professional and where you might thrive. Ask yourself: *What tasks give me energy? Which values matter most in my work? What environments bring out my best performance?*

UCI graduate students have access to a number of excellent self-assessment and career exploration online platforms, including:

- | | |
|--|---|
| IMAGINE PHD  | Self-assessment of skills, values, and interests for graduate students in the humanities and social sciences with comprehensive resources across multiple job families, such as research, policy, consulting, etc. |
|  myIDP Science Careers
<small>INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN</small>  | Self-assessment of skills, values, and interests for STEM students, with articles and resources for possible occupations |
| BEYOND 
<small>THE PROFESSORIATE</small> BEYOND
<small>GRADUATE SCHOOL</small> | Platform for career preparation & exploration across academic & non-academic career paths, including guidance on self-assessment, application materials, and webinar & informational interview libraries for over 150 advanced degree professionals |

STEP BY STEP: CONDUCTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Informational interviews allow you to connect with experienced professionals in a field of interest to learn more about their role responsibilities and their journey to their current position. Learn more about [informational interviews](#) on the DCP website.

Essentially, you will:

- 1 Identify someone whose career path interests you (e.g., UCI alumni, faculty, professionals).
- 2 Reach out via LinkedIn or email with a polite request for a brief chat (20-30 minutes) or a request to answer questions via email.
- 3 Prepare 4–5 thoughtful questions in advance- avoid questions you could find the answers to on your own!
- 4 During the conversation, listen actively and take notes. Make your limited time count and learn from every interaction you have with seasoned professionals.
- 5 Follow up with a thank-you email and record insights in your career log.

Sample Outreach Email:

Dear [Name],

I am a first-year graduate student at UC Irvine in [your program]. I came across your profile and noticed your experience in [field/role]. I am very interested in learning more about your career path and insights into the field. Would you be open to a brief 20-minute conversation over Zoom or phone? Thank you for considering my request.

Best regards,
[Your Name]



ACTION STEPS: GETTING AN EARLY START

- ✓ Complete at least one self-assessment tool (e.g., ImaginePhD or myIDP).
- ✓ Check out this [UCI Libraries Guide](#) on finding professional associations in your field! (UCI VPN needed if off-campus)
- ✓ Conduct at least one informational interview your first year and log what you learn.
- ✓ Join a professional association in your field and attend an event.



3. BUILDING YOUR PROFESSIONAL TOOLKIT

Your professional toolkit consists of the materials and platforms that communicate your skills and experiences. Developing these in your first year will make future applications less stressful and give you a strong foundation. DCP has a collection of [resources](#), sample materials, and writing templates to help you craft a strong application.

CV VS. RESUME

Do I need a CV or a resume?

If you are applying to industry and non-academic positions (e.g., government jobs), you will likely be submitting a resume for your job application. You will typically submit a CV for academic positions and certain kinds of non-academic positions that prioritize research and research output. Regardless of the setting, always pay attention to application instructions! Employers may request one type of document over the other. Be sure to keep in mind contextual and cultural considerations as well. For example, in some countries, CVs and resumes are used interchangeably.



CV



Comprehensive professional history primarily used for academic roles. Includes education, publications, teaching, research, & service.



Resume

Concise (1–2 pages), tailored to specific jobs. Emphasizes transferable skills and results.

- [Graduate Student Resume Best Practices](#)
- Learn more about the differences between a CV and resume here:
 - [DCP Resume Sample + Resource Page](#)
 - DCP job search handbooks
 - [Non-academic \(Resume\)](#)
 - [Academic \(CV\)](#)
- UCLA Career Center guidebooks on resume & CV writing for additional tips and samples:
 - [UCLA Career Center PhD Resume Book](#)
 - [UCLA Career Center PhD CV Book](#)

 **bigresume** is a feature of  **biginterview** that allows you to upload a job posting and your resume and receive tailored, AI-based feedback! Use this tool to get suggestions for improving your resume, including keyword matching and recommendations for formatting changes. This is particularly helpful for non-academic job searches where AI-based applicant tracking systems (ATS) are used more frequently in initial rounds of recruitment & application review.

COVER LETTER BASICS

A cover letter introduces who you are, explains your interest in a role, and highlights how and why you are a good fit based on shared values and relevant skills/experiences.

- [Cover Letter Writing Guide](#)
- [Annotated Cover Letter Sample](#)

LINKEDIN AND ONLINE PRESENCE

LinkedIn is a critical tool for networking, building your online presence, and learning about potential job opportunities. Employers may review your LinkedIn profile and run it through ATS, so you want to make sure that your profile is kept up-to-date and aligns closely with your resume/CV! Be sure to complete all sections of your LinkedIn profile and make time to engage with others' posts. Join groups, follow organizations, and connect with alumni to broaden your network!

- [Linkedin Tips Handout](#)

Pro Tips

- ✓ Tailor your resume to each position.
- ✓ Ask mentors or peers to review your CV/resume and LinkedIn profile.
- ✓ Use action verbs and quantify accomplishments when possible.
- ✓ Customize your LinkedIn URL.

Common Mistakes

- ✗ Using the same resume/CV for all applications.
- ✗ Leaving LinkedIn incomplete or outdated.
- ✗ Neglecting proofreading.

4. STRENGTHENING YOUR INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

NETWORKING

Networking at its core is about establishing a mutually beneficial relationship. This goes beyond a formal “business” transaction and is ultimately about forging a connection with others that you can leverage to find opportunities and community in your job search.

Check out our DCP resources on networking, including:

- [Career Guide on Academic Networking for PhDs](#)
- [DCP’s Networking Resource page](#), including:
 - [Crafting your elevator pitch/one-minute intro](#)
 - [Networking tips for beginners](#)
 - Networking platforms and resources




INTERVIEWING

It is entirely common to feel nervous about the prospect of interviewing. Practicing your interview skills and becoming familiar with interviewing techniques and best practices can help you reframe interviewing as an engaging way to show off your personality and connect with potential employers!

- Check out [DCP’s interview resources page](#) for guidance on how to best prepare for, conduct, and follow-up on job interviews.
- DCP has some additional handouts highlighting helpful [interview techniques](#) and [different types of interviews](#).



 **biginterview** is an online platform that helps you build your knowledge and skills in interviewing! You can review common interview questions and helpful tip handouts, practice with mock interviews, and learn more about what employers are looking for in an ideal applicant.

5. HABITS FOR GRADUATE & CAREER SUCCESS

Graduate success comes not only from academic achievement but also from sustainable professional habits. Three critical areas include *mentorship*, *professional etiquette*, and *wellness*.

1 MENTORSHIP

Identify mentors for different areas: academic, professional, and personal growth. A mentor map helps diversify support- check out this [example](#)! Remember, your mentors not only serve as valuable sources of information and potential networking/job opportunities but also may act as critical support systems during times of stress in the job search.

2 PROFESSIONAL ETIQUETTE

Practice professional email etiquette, learn how to introduce yourself at conferences, and follow through on commitments. You can refer to DCP resources on [networking best practices for graduate students](#), [dining etiquette](#), and [interview attire](#)!

3 WELLNESS

Establishing practices early on to prioritize your wellbeing will continue to serve you well throughout your academic and professional journeys. Explore UCI and OC resources below that may help support you in your wellness.

UCI Campus Wellness Resources:

UCI Counseling Center

- Counseling services
- Crisis resources and support
- Referrals and resource network

UCI Graduate Division Wellness & Inclusion Services

- Academic, equity, and inclusion support
- Time management strategies
- Tools to master effective communication skills
- Strategies for navigating professional & academic expectations

UCI CARE

- Personal violence
- Sexual assault
- Relationship abuse
- Family violence
- Stalking

UCI Basic Needs Center

Provides UCI students with access to essential resources such as food, housing, financial wellness, and holistic support.

OC Wellness Resources:

OC Links

Provides Orange County residents with a free and confidential telephone and online service offering information, referrals, and navigation support for behavioral health services and crisis needs.

211OC

A free, confidential helpline and online resource that connects individuals to local health, housing, food, and social service programs 24/7.



ACTION STEPS

- ✓ Identify one mentor in your first year and set up regular check-ins.
- ✓ Attend one conference or symposium and practice professional introductions.
- ✓ Commit to one wellness practice each quarter.



6. ACADEMIC & NON-ACADEMIC PATHWAYS

ACADEMIC CAREERS

Faculty roles require teaching, publishing, securing funding, and service. You will need a CV, teaching and research statements, and strong letters of recommendation. Start gathering experiences and evidence early. We encourage you to visit [UCI's Center for Excellence in Writing and Communication](#) for additional consultation on teaching and research statements!

We also want to highlight:

- DCP's [academic job search handbook](#) that discusses how to navigate the academic job search process, find open positions, craft application materials, and interview!
- UPenn Career Services [faculty job search resources](#).
- [Beyond the Professoriate](#) ➔ academic career path.

NON-ACADEMIC CAREERS

Opportunities exist in industry, government, nonprofits, publishing, policy, and more. Employers look for transferable skills like leadership, communication, problem-solving, and technical expertise. A resume and strong interview skills are essential. The [graduate student section](#) of the DCP website has a number of resources on applying to government and industry research positions.

We also want to highlight:

- DCP's [non-academic job search handbook](#) that covers navigating the industry job search process, finding positions, crafting application materials, interviewing, and offer negotiation!
- [Beyond the Professoriate](#) ➔ non-academic career path.

HYBRID CAREERS

Some professionals blend academic and non-academic roles, such as teaching at community colleges while working in industry. Exploring both pathways early broadens your options in the future! Postdoctoral scholar positions often allow for this hybrid combination of academic and non-academic roles and opportunities. Visit [UCI's Graduate Division resources](#) for postdoctoral scholars to learn more about what it means to be a postdoc!

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND WORKING ABROAD

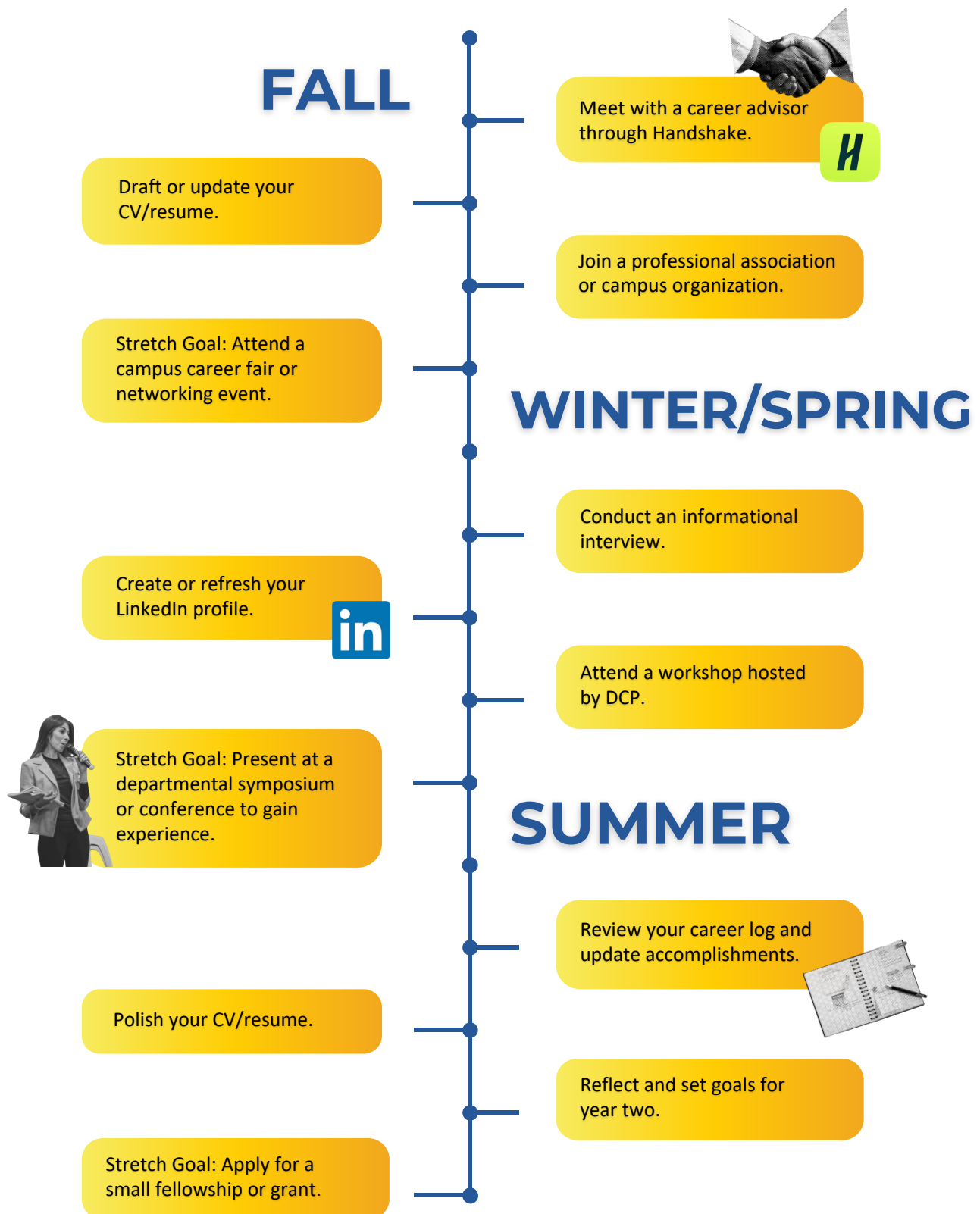
[Interstride](#) is an online platform designed to support both international graduate students and students interested in working abroad. Explore its centralized resources, including: job opportunities, networking and global career connections, informational webinars, and career readiness resources. You can also find US employers' past sponsorship records of hiring international candidates.

ACTION STEPS

- ✓ Attend one academic and one non-academic workshop this year.
- ✓ Draft both a CV and a resume.
- ✓ Speak with alumni pursuing both tracks.



7. FIRST-YEAR TIMELINE EXAMPLE (QUARTER CHECKLIST)



QUICK START CHECKLIST:

TOP 10 FIRST-YEAR CAREER ACTIONS

1. Meet with a career advisor through Handshake.
2. Start a career log for achievements and feedback (see page 2 for career plan templates/guides).
3. Take one self-assessment (e.g, ImaginePhD or myIDP).
4. Draft or update your CV/resume.
5. Create or refresh your LinkedIn profile.
6. Write a short professional bio and have a professional headshot taken (check out [DCP's free professional photobooth](#)).
7. Identify a mentor and build the relationship.
8. Attend both an academic and a non-academic career workshop.
9. Conduct one informational interview.
10. Log accomplishments and review at the end of the year.

