

## STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

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In a tough job market, it's more important than ever for new grads and career changers to differentiate themselves from the competition.

While the Federal Reserve reports slow economic improvement, the unemployment rate has held steady at 10%.

About 15 million people in the U.S. are unemployed. An additional 9.2 million who want full-time jobs are only working part-time because their hours have been cut or they can't find fulltime positions. The National Association of Colleges and Employers reports that employers expect to hire almost 30% fewer new graduates in 2010 than they hired two years ago. In spite of the tight job market, students entering the workforce or changing careers can take action to improve their chances of finding satisfying jobs.

"The job market is tough, but it's not impossible," says Linda Ryan, Director of Rivier's Career Development Center. Recent graduates who have found jobs typically have some kind of internship experience, she says. "About 75% of the students getting jobs do some sort of practical experience during their college careers—it's one of the greatest tools to becoming competitive in the job market."



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— Linda Ryan, Director of Rivier's Career Development Center

### Developing depth

Volunteer work and a willingness to take on leadership roles also helps, Ryan says. “It’s not enough to focus only on academics, you have to do other things to promote your career,” she says.

Senior graphic design major Alicia Egan says she joined the Rivier Fine Arts Society because she knew it would help her learn about art in different ways and help her compete in the job market. “It looks good on a résumé that I was involved,” she says. She plans to highlight her experience brainstorming ideas for the club as preparation for developing ideas for clients.

Many recent graduates who have found jobs were involved in Rivier’s Student Government Association, the Student Nurses Association, and other clubs on campus where they had an opportunity to build skills potential employers find appealing.

### Getting creative

Elizabeth Murphy says getting laid off in May 2008 rocked her family. “I didn’t see it coming,” she says. After a few days of shock, Murphy shifted gear and took action. “I couldn’t sit on the couch and just wait for something to happen,” she explains. She enrolled in Rivier’s graduate program in mental health counseling full-time and started her own business, Simply Swimming.

In addition to American Red Cross-certified swimming lessons and aqua boot camps, Murphy has used what she’s learned in her counseling classes to provide adaptive aquatics. “If a child is working with a Licensed Mental Health Counselor or physical therapist, I can bring some of that therapy into the pool,” she says. For example, she created a waterproof show-me board for an autistic child to use in the pool. “Having additional repetition and routine as he’s learning to use the board allows him to build confidence and have a way to communicate with instructors and therapists,” she says.

Though Murphy initially started her business to pay for groceries and help save the mortgage on her family’s house, now she has a long-term plan to incorporate her counseling practice into her swimming business once she completes her master’s degree. She’s able to combine her passions into a meaningful—and enjoyable—career.

### Taking control

Computer programmer Warren Turner enrolled in Rivier’s undergraduate evening program as a history major in 2001, after the September 11 attacks drove him to want to understand the world better. “It became an imperative,” he says. Though Turner had always loved to read, write, and learn and had pushed himself to grow, he says he put off earning a degree, putting his family and his career first. After starting at Rivier, he had to take semesters off due to the demands of his full-time job.

In 2007, Turner left his programming position for a job that allowed him to do more technical writing and editing, a role he enjoyed. But after only six months, the company reorganized and he was back in IT. In December 2008, he was laid off.

While Turner has focused his job search on two fronts, both present obstacles. He’s tried to return to programming, but points out that in the technical world, those who aren’t actively working can quickly fall out of currency. He’s also attempted to find another writing or editing position, but says “again, my resume isn’t strong. Six months of experience isn’t convincing.”

Turner has increased his course load and reevaluated his career goals—he’s decided to pursue a master’s degree and become a history teacher. “I’ve been trying to use my time wisely since I’ve been unsuccessful in finding a job and was uncertain in what I wanted to pursue,” he says. His experience at

Rivier has helped him focus and build confidence. He says focusing on school is a good way to seize control of your life, “not just to make yourself marketable, but to put yourself in a place where you can make a difference.”

“I’ve focused on how I can move forward when a lot is not under my control,” Turner says. “Sometimes maybe things DON’T happen for a reason—maybe I have to make my own opportunities.”

### Staying Proactive

Ryan says it’s important for job seekers to be proactive. “When people are up against factors they can’t control, a lot of students go into avoidance mode,” she says. CDC staff encourage students to explore careers early and know what experience they need to develop to become attractive to employers.

Ryan also suggests getting involved with a professional organization—a lot of recruiting happens through these types of groups. “Don’t just sign up as a member. Attend events or join a committee,” Ryan says. “That’s how you meet people and hear about jobs.”

Though job seekers currently face tough competition for a limited number of openings, Ryan points out that the outlook in the northeast is better than in other areas of the country. She also reminds people that the job market is cyclical. “The pendulum will swing,” she says. In the meantime, there are plenty of things students and graduates can do to increase their chances of finding the right job.

## Seven tips for an effective job search

### 1 FOCUS.

“People will say, ‘I’m willing to do anything’—that’s not what employers want to hear,” says Linda Ryan, Director of Rivier’s Career Development Center. Job seekers need to look for a position that’s a good fit for their skills, abilities, and interests. “Research and apply strategically, with a targeted résumé and cover letter,” Ryan says.

### 2 EXPAND YOUR NETWORK.

Since 80% of jobs are filled through networking rather than posted ads, Ryan stresses the importance of letting people know you’re looking for work. “Talk to everyone you know... anyone may have contacts in the field you’re interested in,” she says. Networking events, informational interviews and online tools like LinkedIn™ can be effective ways to connect with people.

### 3 GAIN RELEVANT EXPERIENCE.

If you didn’t do an internship while in school, you can still do one after graduation. You can also work for a temp agency or volunteer to get experience.

### 4 BE PROFESSIONAL.

“Show maturity and appreciation when people give you help or job leads,” says Ryan. “Make sure your voicemail greeting is professional and maintain an appropriate online image.” She suggests that job seekers Google™ themselves once in a while to see if a search yields information that could damage their chances of landing a job.

### 5 HIGH LIGHT YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

Ryan says most résumés the CDC reviews are focused on duties and responsibilities, not accomplishments and achievements. “Your résumé then looks like everyone else who’s had the same job,” she says. “You want to

stand out through results.” Ryan helped an alumna who wasn’t getting any responses to her résumé rewrite it to showcase her accomplishments—using the new résumé, the young woman landed a job within two weeks.

**6 PERSEVERE.**

Stay motivated. Finding a job in a tight economy can take time. Use multiple strategies to boost your chances of success.

**7 BE FLEXIBLE.**

“You may not get your dream job or ideal salary right now, but you can find something that will help you prepare for a better job when the economy improves,” Ryan says. She suggests looking for jobs at nonprofit and government agencies or in growing industries such as energy, health care, education, and security. ■

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