Non-academic Career Options

Not all graduate students aspire to be faculty members in an academic institution. Some people might question why bother spending a significant period of your life in the pursuit of further education if that wasn’t part of the plan. Well, to be realistic, many graduate students stumble into graduate studies as a semi-profession that they enjoy doing without thinking too much about the future and sometimes do deviate from the norm to pursue careers outside of academia.

There’s a large and increasing population of post-graduate degree holders in all sorts of fields in the workforce: government, private industries, NGOs, small businesses and multi-national corporations.

But where do you start from this point in your graduate studies? The following tips and activities should help you start in mapping out your career management.

Tips

1. **Look beyond academia?**
   Firstly, you need to carefully assess if you are indeed destined for a non-academic career path. For most professions, the minute you step out of the academic route, it is difficult to turn back.

2. **CAPS**
   Visit the career centre at your university. Here at the University of Alberta, Career and Placement Services offers seminars such as: “Assessing your fit outside of academia” and “How to search for jobs outside of academia”. CAPS also provide in-house individual career consultations by knowledgeable counselors, who are trained to cater to graduate students. CAPS have in store, a plethora of job kinds and opportunities for graduate students in all discipline. Go visit them today!

3. **Talk to your department/graduate coordinator**
   Approach your departmental graduate coordinator and ask where previous graduates from your department are at now. If possible, you may be able to contact these people and seek out their advice.

4. **Network**
   Network with as many people as possible – this sounds far fetched but actually doable and smart. Talk to the next biotech sales person who comes to your lab and ask about his/her career option. Or the librarian who might be able to give insights on how his/her academic background is useful to that field. Opportunities are everywhere, you just have to learn how to identify and seize them.

5. **Search online**
   The internet is a good source for looking at the different career possibilities. For example, the government of Canada has compiled a list of occupational descriptions (see National Occupational Classifications at http://www5.hrsdc.gc.ca/NOC/English/NOC/2006/Welcome.aspx). Looking through websites like this might spur your interest in one area and you can follow up from there onwards.
Activities to Do On Your Own

- Read self-help books. You might be able borrow these out from the local library too. Examples of such books:
  
  "Library career opportunities for graduates of liberal arts colleges" by Rebecca Watson-Boone
  "Alternative Careers in Science: Leaving the Ivory Tower" by Cynthia Robbins-Roth
  "Great Jobs for Art Majors" by Blythe Camenson

Other Resources

- CAPS at the University of Alberta: http://www.ualberta.ca/CAPS