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HOW LIBERAL-ARTS GRADS CAN ATTRACT ATTENTION

Summary: *Learn how you can use your liberal arts degree to land a job.*

Question: I keep reading that businesses are hiring people with the creative thinking, communications, and interpersonal skills that are the result of a liberal-arts education. Despite my own excellent liberal arts background (Master's degree in Philosophy) and an impressive resume, I've come to believe that I don't get interviews for the career jobs in business that most attract me because I lack specialized education in business or economics, despite the fact that I know I am quite capable of handling positions these businesses seek to fill. How can I best sell the merits of my liberal education to potential employers who do not necessarily relate what I have studied to what I have done?

Answer: Given the increasing complexities of the workplace, the globalization of the economy and the dynamics of employee and customer relations, a liberal education more than ever provides a solid foundation from which to launch a career in business or any multitude of work settings. Getting a foot in the door is often the most challenging aspect of a liberal-arts career. Once inside an organization, liberal-arts grads generally advance admirably as they gain experience and apply their learning to workplace challenges.

Unfortunately, although employers say they are looking for people with creative thinking, communications and, interpersonal skills, they don't always see the bridge between a liberal-arts education and their specific openings. You have to build that bridge for them. You may decide at some point, also, as many others have, to add a specialty area to complement your broad-based education.

Liberal education is not designed to relate to the needs of an employer. It is designed to educate the mind and the heart. A liberal education certainly does transfer to the work environment. I would suggest highlighting the following key areas of interest to employers:

- universal skills that employers need, including writing, speaking, critical thinking, problem-solving, research, and synthesizing;
- ability to learn quickly a new body of information, absorb it, synthesize it and understand what experts in this field are talking about;
- ability to work effectively as a member of a team having many different types and personality styles; and
- adaptability: the ability to move from one project to another fluidly, to adjust to different problems and new working conditions.

To demonstrate the relevance of your skills to employers, understand the importance of pulling examples of skills that you've used during college experiences (in class and out of class). It sounds from your comments that you, also, may have previous work experience. If this is the case, point to specific accomplishments and demonstrated successes to make a case for your candidacy.

Effective networking plays a major role in the searches of even the most sought-after job candidates. Be sure you are connecting with people who are employed in the fields and in the companies you are considering. Select a professional association to join to make contacts, gain inside information and incorporate business terminology into your vocabulary. Finally, take advantage of the university's career resources to create a customized resume that clearly links your skills and experiences to your targeted positions.

See **33 Quick Tips to Improve Your Networking Experience** for more information.

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