How to Gain Professional Experience

College students have spent the majority of their lives preparing for a career and the life challenges ahead. There simply are no lectures, tests, or papers that can substitute for hands-on professional experience.

Early hands-on learning for pre-professionals (a.k.a. "college students") is critical to bridge the gap of knowledge and experience between academic learning (school) and the 'real world' (work). Getting practical training for undergraduates is critical to get a leg up on career skills and advancement. The Top 10 Tips below give students various opportunities to pursue.

1) **Intern, intern and then intern some more!:** Start early [by Junior Year] and apply early to get the best positions for each semester.

2) **Join student organizations:** Build your résumé in those related to your field of study and participate by holding office, going on trips, and networking with affiliate professional members. Other organizations, like student government and civic-minded groups may also be enriching.

3) **Write for your school or community newspaper**: Build writing samples.

4) **Volunteer for a politician**: Election campaigns may be the best time. It's a life experience in and unto itself!

5) **Volunteer for non-profit organizations**: Build your character while you gain experience.

6) **Attend professional events and workshops**: Local chapters of professional associations often invite business leaders to speak on relevant topics.

7) **Join the local Chamber of Commerce:** It's a great place to network and get involved.

8) **Get a Job:** Even if it's not in your exact field of study, you may be able to hone your research, writing, telephone and project management skills, among others.

9) **Do Informational Interviews**: Identify several companies that interest you and contact the person you want to emulate. Ask if they'll share their career insights.

10) **Recruit Mentor(s):** Let them take you under their wing and show you the ropes. Be sure to keep the relationship active.

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