

To foster your transition into The Graduate School and further your career path, you may want to consider skills mapping, professional organization membership, and mentoring.

Skills Mapping



Organizations such as the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD), the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), and similar groups have encouraged the use of skills mapping. Skills mapping is exactly what it sounds like: it means to consider your current skills in a particular field or fields, and compare and contrast your skills to the skills that have been identified as necessary for advancement, leadership, and success in that field. In every discipline, there are certain skills, abilities, traits, leadership and communication styles, management techniques, and information that represent basic-, advanced-, and expert-level expectations for a particular field.

The organizations named above, as well as other resources, incorporate the US Department of Labor's profile of the core skills required for success in particular jobs and professions. The Bureau of Labor Statistics produces the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (www.bls.gov/ooh/), which provides in-depth information regarding the skills and training needed for particular fields. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* also identifies a range of careers associated with a particular field, lists generally accepted academic credentials for career fields, cites salary ranges, and identifies whether a career field is growing or on the decline (US Department of Labor, 2012).

During your graduate career, you are in a great position to embed skills development into your academic and professional plans. Even for fields in which you have already spent significant time, reviewing and refreshing your own information about the skills deemed important by your profession will help you become more valuable.

Gaining access to tools that help you map your skills is easier than you may think. Within UMUC, for example, there are readily available resources that will put you well on your way toward maintaining an active profile of your skills and being able to compare that information to what your field deems essential skill development. One such resource at UMUC is Optimal Resume. Optimal Resume is an online tool that assists students in developing their professional career needs. One of the modules within Optimal Resume focuses on skills assessment, as identified by profession, industry, job type, job level, degree field, and other similar qualifiers.

Optimal Resume



In partnership with Optimal Resume, UMUC is pleased to bring you a new OptimalResume 2.0—a career management platform to help you create, present, manage, and share your professional credentials. This exciting new tool is available to all UMUC students and alumni.

Getting Started

Follow this link to learn how to access and use Optimal Resume: www.umuc.edu/students/support/careerservices/resumecover

Skills Mapping

Once inside Optimal Resume, go to the Document Center and click Create New Assessment to watch the Getting Started video, a tutorial will help you navigate the skills assessment component.

Take advantage of these types of tools early and often. As you can imagine, skills mapping is also a great resource for individuals who are exploring different fields of interest. Performing a skills assessment, even when you have not fully decided your career path, will enable you to further investigate your interests and potential fit in different career fields.

Should you have any additional questions about Optimal Resume and similar tools that can assist you to map your skills, you can contact staff in [Career Services](#) at UMUC.

Membership in Professional Organizations



Similar to skills mapping, one of your goals in graduate school should be to enhance your knowledge about and become more engaged in your desired profession. Consider becoming involved with a professional organization that is associated with your field.

Hundreds of organizations of varying sizes, structures, missions, membership types, and practices can benefit your academic and professional growth. Involvement in professional organizations is a great way to learn more about the history and the rise of your field, the current state of your field, and most critically, the direction in which your field is heading. Professional organizations can help you find new innovations, areas for research, employment trends, networking opportunities, and a host of other resources.

Many professional organizations have a specific focus on graduate students, as graduate students represent the up-and-coming membership of their fields. Benefits for graduate students may range from free or reduced membership rates, scholarship opportunities and research grants, support for conference attendance, mentoring programs, and even awards for research and scholarship.

The benefits offered by different professional organizations vary greatly, as do the personal cost and commitment necessary to join them. You will need to conduct research to identify a reputable professional organization that is a fit for you. One of the best places to start is by researching the professional organization that established and/or maintains the governing standards for your field. However you get started in your research into professional organizations, you are encouraged to actively explore how this relationship may benefit your graduate school experience.

Examples of Professional Associations

Below are several examples of professional associations affiliated with the fields of business, education, engineering, human resources, information technology, and public relations.

- The Association of Accountants and Financial Professionals in Business: www.imanet.org
- National Education Association: www.nea.org
- National Society of Professional Engineers: www.nspe.org
- Society for Human Resource Management: www.shrm.org
- Association of Information Technology Professionals: www.aitp.org
- Public Relations Society of America: www.prsa.org

Engaging in a Mentoring Relationship

Those of you who have experienced a successful formal or informal mentoring relationship are acquainted with the benefits of such a powerful resource. Organizations such as the International Mentoring Association (IMA), the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), and the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM) have all recognized the concept of mentoring as a best practice for the professional and personal development of individuals and organizations.

Ragins and Kram (2008) have conducted over 20 years of research on the benefits and importance of mentoring across various career fields. They define *mentoring* as an intentional relationship between a senior, more experienced leader and a less experienced protégé that seeks to foster the protégé's career growth and development. Therefore, engaging in a mentoring relationship during your graduate program will likely

present notable benefits that will help you meet your academic and career goals. Some of these benefits include

- the opportunity for you to engage accomplished leaders in your chosen field
- the opportunity to compare and contrast what you are learning during graduate school with the direct experiences and perspectives of seasoned leaders
- the ability to gain high-level insight regarding the standards, professional expectations, and values that characterize success in your career field
- the opportunity for you to more rapidly expand your knowledge about and access to resources that promote career and personal advancement
- the addition of a professional, well-established resource in your life that is invested in your academic and professional success

Whether or not you have had a mentor, you may be wondering where and how to begin. Below are some tips that can help you get started.

Tips for Finding a Mentor

Determine what you want your mentor to help you with. For example, someone who can help you successfully navigate and possibly advance in your field, or someone who is able to help you think generally about your life goals and provide direction.

Think about several accomplished people who have held roles or had the experiences you are seeking. Make a list of those people, and identify characteristics about them that you admire.

Consider characteristics that are important for you in a mentor. These may include demographics such as location, gender, race/ethnicity, profession, etc. In thinking about such demographics, you want to strike a balance between finding a mentor who can understand unique challenges you may face and finding someone who will broaden your perspectives.

Consider whether you want a formal or an informal mentoring relationship. A formal mentoring relationship may from its outset have more clearly defined outcomes, areas of focus, meeting times, set expectations, and a defined start and end of the relationship based on identified outcomes. An informal mentoring relationship is one that evolves more casually; the goals and expectations evolve as the mentor's and the protégé's needs, availability, and opportunities for engagement change.

Use your current network of colleagues, friends, and family to help you identify possible mentors. Let others know that you are seeking a mentor, as well as what you hope to gain from such a relationship.

Be honest with yourself about your strengths and areas for growth when looking for a mentor. Remember, you want to connect with someone who can be of significant assistance to you.

Be prepared for a prospective mentor to decline, even if you know he or she is mentoring someone else. The mentoring relationship can be time-consuming. Good mentors know the limits of how and when they can be helpful.

Be sure you have time to commit to a mentoring relationship. It is far worse to engage in a relationship that you neglect than to delay the start of a relationship.

Be open to feedback. The premise of a mentoring relationship is based on the protégé wanting to get information and insight in order to grow. This does not mean that your mentor is always right and will always have the best answers, or that you will always agree. There must, however, be an openness and trust that allows for honest sharing to occur.

When established and managed well, the mentoring relationship can be transformational, for both the protégé and the mentor. As you contemplate whether having a mentor could benefit you, you may want to consider the resources below:

International Mentoring Association

www.mentoring-association.org

Articles (available in the UMUC library)

Neal, T. M. S. (2011). How to be a good mentee. *APS Observer Student Notebook*, 24(2), 35.

Noelke, N. (2012). Coaching versus mentoring for professional development. *On Balance*, 8(3), 14–15.

Zachary, L. J. (2009). Make mentoring work for you: Ten strategies for success. *T+D*, 63(12), 76–77.

Tremendous opportunities await you in graduate school. As you continue to build your academic and professional portfolio, seize every occasion to transform your learning environment.