Writing about different tacquerias in different states (road trip project)

William & Mary people don’t apply to jobs unless they are really overqualified; end up applying to only a few jobs

False dichotomy between buying in and selling out

“which grad school”

Arbitrariness of job market instead of idealism that it is just about applying to right place

Write about the same thing at different times of day

Everything is Jane Eyre

Many of friends and acquaintances take a lot of care when applying to jobs. Sometimes, I think they take too much care when applying to jobs. I’ve noticed that many people at William & Mary—and I am sure William & Mary is not unique among colleges—only consider applying for the jobs that really, really suit them. They only apply to the jobs for which they meet (and more often than not, exceed) the requirements.

In my short history of applying to jobs, I’ve come to understand that the job market for college grads (and maybe the job market in general, but I only have experience with the former) is fundamentally arbitrary. It’s not, as I feel many of my peers consciously or unconsciously believe, a fair system. Last year, I applied for around 15 different technical writing internships. I got interviews with five of the fifteen and ended up with two offers. I did not get interviews for the internship postings for which I felt like I was the most qualified. I got flat-out rejected for internships I felt overqualified for. I got rejected for a technical writing internship at Disney the same day I applied for it.

This fall, I applied for 48 technical writer, content writer, and product manager positions. I got rejected for 10 of these jobs. Three of these rejections were explicitly timing related: the hiring manager was looking for someone to start before I was finished with school. I got rejected by one company after a skills interview. The other six rejections were Some of these rejections were swift and formulaic. I never heard back from the other 38 jobs to which I applied.

In December, a recruiter from Google sent me an email—she’d found me on LinkedIn and wanted to know if I was interested in technical writing positions at Google. I was, of course, and went through the interview process. The entire process took two and a half months, from initial email to offer. I keep a spreadsheet of the jobs I apply to, and when I looked back on it, I found that I had applied for a technical writing position at Google back in October. I never heard anything back from this application, and I am certain that the recruiter that contacted me never knew I had previously applied. In my mind, my two Google experiences paint a stark picture of the arbitrariness of the job market.

Toward the end of my Google interview process, I heard from a recruiter from Visa. In October, I applied to Visa for a Product Manager position. I applied to this position on a whim, and it was one of the jobs I felt least qualified for out of all my applications. I heard back from a Visa recruiter in February: Visa wanted to move forward with the interview process. I responded to that recruiter within the day, giving my availability for a phone interview and expressing my excitement about the position. Almost two weeks later, I got a phone call from an unknown number—I didn’t answer it, but it turned out to be the Visa recruiter, calling to set up an interview. I got an email from him later, requesting the same. By the time he set up an interview, I had accepted the Google offer—I ended the Visa process.

Using sites like LinkedIn, Glassdoor, and Indeed, it’s easy to apply to a lot of companies in a short span of time. This ease, I think, leads to a flood of applicants at many companies. I do think that I was qualified, and, in some cases, overqualified, for the jobs I applied to. But that didn’t make a difference. I didn’t receive responses (even rejections!) from most of the companies I applied to not because I was not qualified, but because of the sheer arbitrariness of the job market. I think it extremely telling that the job offer I ended up accepting originated in an email, not in an application.

So, why apply to any companies at all? Why not wait for your dream job to fall into your lap? I think there’s a lot of value in applying to a lot of jobs. Because the job market is arbitrary, I think it is necessary to apply to a lot of jobs to get a few hits. I also think there’s an inherent value in applying to jobs. The more job descriptions I read and the more application processes I went through, the more I understood what most companies were looking for (or say they are looking for) in a technical writer. I learned the key words and phrases of the technical writing industry. I also got a much better idea of what I wanted in a job, so when my dream job appeared, I could recognize it as a dream job.

If I applied only to the internships I thought I was completely qualified for, I would not have gotten the internship I got and had the really great, career-shaping experience I had. My job-applying experience went in a slightly different route: I applied, once again, all across the board. Many of the positions I thought was a perfect fit for fizzled almost immediately. I heard back from positions I thought I was overqualified for, but I also heard back from positions I thought I was completely underqualified for. There was absolutely no correlation between qualification and response. I applied for a Google technical writing position—I thought I fit the requirements, but also thought the process would be way too competitive to even make it to a first interview/response. I was right. Yet despite never hearing back from that Google application, a Google recruiter reached out to me, seeking me out because I had a resume that, in my recruiter’s mind, could possibly turn out to be a good, qualified candidate. I wasn’t qualified enough to make it through the Google process in October, but suddenly, in December, I was qualified enough.

The job market is arbitrary. Applying to 3 or 4 jobs you feel you are uniquely qualified for might get you a great job. But it also might end with 4 rejections, or no response at all. It seems to me that the best way to combat, or simply live with, what I see as an arbitrary job market, it to apply to a lot of jobs.