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The Federal Government

Federal Employment: Overview

Many Swarthmore graduates have found the public sector to offer rewarding careers in which they can help transform society, make a difference in the lives of others, find intellectual stimulation, and gain career advancement. Working for the federal government provides the unique opportunity for Swatties to work on social problems while both earning a living in a professional career. The federal government has a strong need for applicants who can fill “mission critical occupations including medical and public health, security and protection, compliance and enforcement, legal, and administration/program management positions. For more information on federal hiring projections visit <http://data.wherethejobsare.org>.

The federal government’s hiring timeframe tends to be longer than in the private sector, so try to begin your federal job search early. Salaries for federal positions tend to be competitive with private industry, and public sector benefits tend to be more lucrative than those sponsored by private employers. The federal government offers generous vacation and holiday time, healthcare and retirement benefits, and many federal agencies offer loan repayment options for undergraduate student loans and partial tuition remission for advanced study.

Identifying Opportunities

Students of all majors are encouraged to consider employment opportunities in the federal government. Positions are varied and include Health Scientists, Engineers, Education and Training Specialists, Management Analysts, Social Workers, Computer Specialists, Writers, Editors, Community Planners, Policy Analysts, Economists and many more. Students may qualify for a large number of administrative jobs with a degree in any academic major.

Prior to applying for a position, it is recommended that you first identify the positions in which you have an interest and the organizations for which you might like to work. You can start by exploring a list of Federal Jobs by College Major:

[https://help.usajobs.gov/index.php/Federal Occupations by College Major](https://help.usajobs.gov/index.php/Federal_Occupations_by_College_Major). Additionally, you can explore a list of organizations that have been ranked on the annual publication of “Best Places to Work” <http://bestplacestowork.org/BPTW/index.php> based on factors such as diversity, work-life balance, leadership and teamwork.

The Partnership for Public Service Go Government site has information specifically for college students and entry-level job seekers: http://gogovernment.org/government_careers/students_entry-level_talent.php. This website describes the Pathways Programs, designed to hire college students and recent grads for internships and full-time employment:

Pathways Programs

The Pathways Programs, a result of Executive Order 13562, offer clear paths into federal service for high school, undergraduate, graduate students and recent graduates to federal internships or full-time careers.

The Programs provide meaningful training, mentoring and career development opportunities for individuals who are new to a federal agency. Most importantly, upon successful completion of a Pathways Program, you may be eligible for conversion to full-time federal employment. Begin your career in the federal government by choosing the program that is your best fit:

The Internship Program

This program offers current high school, college and graduate students with paid opportunities to work in federal agencies while still in school. The intern's work should be related to their field of study or career goals. Each agency decides how many interns they will hire. Upon successful completion of an internship, participants may be eligible for conversion to full-time federal employment.

<http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-authorities/students-recent-graduates/#intern>

The Recent Graduates Program

A full-time, one-year developmental program designed for individuals who have received undergraduate or graduate degrees from qualifying educational institutions or programs. Candidates must apply within two years of graduation, with the exception of veterans, who have up to six years to apply due to their military obligations. Participants in the Recent Graduates Program receive training and professional development, complete an individual development plan and are assigned a mentor. Each agency determines how many recent graduates they will hire. Recent graduates may also be eligible for conversion to full-time federal employment.

<http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-authorities/students-recent-graduates/#graduates>

The Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program

The federal government's premier leadership development program for advanced degree candidates. The PMF program increases its flexibility to attract talent to federal agencies. Individuals who received a qualifying advanced degree within the preceding two years are eligible to apply and are not required to be nominated by their school. Presidential Management Fellows participate in an orientation program, receive training and professional development, complete an individual development plan, are assigned a mentor, and have at least one rotational or developmental assignment. <http://www.pmf.gov/>

Methods of Applying for Federal Positions

- **Online through USAJOBS: (www.usajobs.gov)** This system provides worldwide job vacancy information, and allows users to submit resumes and track applications online for specific positions. This system serves as a clearinghouse for most federal positions and includes positions for recent grads as well as more experienced candidates. Entry level jobs can be found at: <https://www.usajobs.gov/JobSearch/Search/GetResults?Student=Yes>

- **Online through Federal Agency Website:** Some agencies hire candidates and interns directly such as the State Department, National Security Agency, CIA, FBI, Federal Reserve System, General Accounting Office, and Defense Intelligence Agency. Visit the websites of these agencies directly to learn about vacancies and the application process. You can access agency websites at: http://gogovernment.org/government_careers/students_entry-level_talent.php
- **Career Events:** Swarthmore offers the annual Government and Non-profit EXPO each February in Washington, DC. This is a great way to meet federal recruiters face to face and to learn about available positions. We also have government employers who recruit through the MetroLink DC interview day also held annually in February. Some federal agencies also post positions and do information sessions on campus. Be sure to check eRecruiting for these opportunities.

Common Answers to Questions Regarding the Federal Application Process

Q: What Information Do I Need to Have to Start My Online Application? Do I need to create a resume in USAJOBS, or can I just upload my own?

A: Applicants are strongly advised to build their resumes through the USAJOBS website. Uploaded resumes are not easily searchable by agencies and may be excluded when going through applications. To create your resume you will need to have the following information, in addition to the traditional industry resume information, at your disposal:

- Number of credits earned
- Names and contact information for your references
- Affiliations/Professional Associations (with dates)

When applying for positions with the federal government, it is important to remember that YOU MUST SUBMIT ALL REQUIRED INFORMATION. If you don't include all required information as stated on the job announcement, your application may not be considered. The resume you may be accustomed to is a shorter one-page introduction. Uncle Sam's resume must be highly structured with specific data or the resume may not be considered. Your federal resume will be longer than one page. See our sample federal resume at the end of this handout.

Q: What are KSAs and when do I need to worry about them?

A: KSA stands for knowledge, skills, and abilities. These are the requirements needed to perform a job and are demonstrated through experience, education, or training. You will find these in the tabbed section marked "Qualifications and Evaluations" within the vacancy announcement. KSA essay responses are no longer a requirement in the initial application process for federal positions. However, you may find that you are asked for them later in the application process and should know what to expect.

Your responses to the KSAs in the vacancy announcement should be a half page to one full page in length, and should be concretely written in the first-person. Be sure to draw from all your experiences including, coursework, any specialized training, research experience, leadership roles, student activities, volunteer experience, work experience, internship experience and school projects.

Some examples of KSA responses follow below.

Knowledge of biological and plant sciences

Example: While in college pursuing my Bachelor of Arts in Biology, I took courses in (give specific examples which show you have knowledge of biological and plant sciences). Additionally, I gained further knowledge of biological and plant sciences through my internship with.... In this position I was

responsible for (give specific examples). Performing these assignments gave me an opportunity to gain knowledge of (list some examples).

Skill in collecting, analyzing, and summarizing data using computer software

Example: In my current position, I have used the following software packages (list examples). Using these software packages, I have been able to complete assignments such as (discuss projects, your role, and the outcome).

Ability to use a variety of laboratory instruments

Example: While in college pursuing my degree in Environmental Science, I was required to complete lab classes, where I learned how to use equipment such as (give examples: spectrophotometer, gas chromatograph etc.) to conduct analyses of biological samples. In my current position, I use the following equipment on a daily basis to conduct analyses (give examples).

Q: When Should I Begin the Application Process?

A: Students are encouraged to apply for federal positions within nine months of graduation, or earlier. While it can be difficult to think this far ahead, due to the structured process of the federal government, it can often take this long before you are asked to interview for a position.

Q: If I Have a Question, Who Can I Contact for More Information?

A: Begin with the contact listed in the vacancy announcement if you have position-specific questions.

Congress

Identifying Opportunities

For those whose interests lie in politics, who have a desire to influence legislation, or who have a strong interest in a particular issue (i.e. healthcare, childcare, the environment), positions on Capitol Hill may hold appeal. Entry-level positions in a House or Senate office are usually very competitive. Be open to Staff Assistant and Legislative Correspondent positions, which can offer advancement to jobs as Legislative Assistant, Scheduler, Assistant Press Secretary, Legislative Correspondent, and even the highest-level positions of Legislative Director, Staff Director, Press Secretary or Chief of Staff.

Contact your own Senators and Representatives first. Even if they don't have available positions, they may know someone who does. Consider researching the position(s) a senator or representative has taken on issues, as it is essential that you be comfortable with their point of view. To find out where your Senator or Representative stands on important issues, conduct some research.

Resources are available online to help you identify members of Congress, their committees, and their political stances: The easiest way to identify members and committees is through www.senate.gov and www.house.gov.

Another approach is to try to schedule informational interviews with your home state/district representatives' Chief of Staff or Legislative Director. Additionally, you might want to see if any Swat alums currently work on the Hill through the *Online Alumni Directory*. By selecting the advanced search options, you can search for alumni by *career category*. Some searchable career categories that will be helpful include Elected Official, Govt. Administrator, and Legislative Assistant. You can also search by *employer names* of United States Senate or United States House of Representatives. This may help you to start building a network which is so vital to getting a job on the Hill.

If you are able, volunteering a few days a week is a wonderful way to learn of vacancies on the Hill, and to have individuals with whom you are working provide references for you. If your schedule allows, spending a summer interning on the Hill is the best way to make connections and learn about future employment opportunities. Each summer, the Hill is buzzing with interns, both undergrad and recent graduates. Internships are available within the Congressional Members' Offices, Congressional Committees, and House and Senate Leadership Offices. Within the personal offices of the Member, interns will be expected to provide some administrative assistance, respond to constituent inquiries, and assist visitors. Within the committee offices, students may have more of an opportunity to learn about the legislative process, yet may not have as much personal contact with the Member of Congress and his or her staff. The last option of interning with a Leadership Office allows an intern to work with a high profile member of Congress. Since fewer of these internships exist, they tend to be more competitive.

Members' websites usually have an internship section providing application instructions. Typically, an applicant sends a resume, cover letter, and writing sample to an Intern Coordinator. If Washington D.C. is not where you want to be in the summer, many members of Congress offer internships in their district offices. This work focuses more on constituent relations than the legislative process. These opportunities can also be great ways to build up experience within the public sector.

Career Services subscribes to *Opportunities in Public Affairs* <http://www.opajobs.com/>, an online database of Capitol Hill jobs and internships, and *Internships USA*, featuring Congressional and policy-related internships in DC: <http://cei-internship.squarespace.com/undergraduate-online/>. Contact us for the usernames and passwords to access these sites.

Another source to learn about vacancies on Capitol Hill are the following offices, which serve as resume referral sources, and publish weekly vacancy bulletins. However, don't rely solely on these referrals. Individuals who have successfully found positions on the hill have followed the networking strategies outlined above.

- **House Employment Opportunities**

<http://www.house.gov/content/jobs/>

Open M-F 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM

U.S. House of Representatives

Office of Human Resources

263 Cannon House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515-6610

- **Senate Placement Office**

http://www.senate.gov/visiting/common/generic/placement_office.htm

Offers a link to the current senate vacancies as well as information on how to have your resume posted in their resume books.

Application Overview

The process for applying for a job on the hill can be lengthy, averaging six months. Additionally, applicants who have a local Washington D.C. address may have a better chance of securing interviews.

Application materials for positions will include a resume and targeted cover letter, and often include a writing sample. If contacting your home state Representative, mention where you are from in the first

paragraph of your cover letter. This can help getting your resume reviewed due to the overwhelming number of resumes that are collected for each position.

State Government

State government agencies offer a variety of positions. While the majority of these civil service jobs are located in the state capitol city, the remainder are spread throughout the state in district offices, parks and recreational areas, highway offices, unemployment offices, mental health and retardation facilities, prisons, and public assistance offices.

Much like the federal government, state government vacancies can be found online. Visit the personnel websites for the states in which you have an interest. When applying for a civil service position, you will need to complete an application and will be rated based upon your training and experience. In some instances, you will be asked to take a written test and/or an oral exam. This will be determined by the position for which you are applying. Most state positions have a state residency requirement. If you are seeking a position with a state senator or representative, contact these individuals directly.

A Selected Listing of State Employment Information Centers

Pennsylvania State Civil Service Commission

www.scsc.state.pa.us

New Jersey Department of Personnel

<http://www.state.nj.us/nj/employ/>

New York State Dept. of Civil Service

<http://www.cs.ny.gov/>

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Human Resources Division

<https://jobs.hrd.state.ma.us>

California State Personnel Board

<http://jobs.ca.gov/>

Local Government

Most major cities have an Office of Personnel that posts positions within local government. For Philadelphia, job listings are posted at <http://www.phila.gov/personnel/Jobs.html>. The process works similarly to that of the state government, wherein applicants may be required to pass a civil service examination and/or prove residency requirements. Types of jobs within the local government sector vary and may include job titles like Management Analyst, Program Manager, Recreation Supervisor, Housing Specialist, Urban and Regional Planner, Economic Developer, Environmental Specialists and more.

This is a sample of what the federal resume looks like once it is built on USAJOBS.gov

Abraham Lincoln

111 President Drive / Washington DC 20005

Evening Phone: 202 200 2222 / Email: alincoln@pastpresidents.com

Country of citizenship: United States of America

Veterans' Preference: No

Highest Grade: GS-02-07, 06/20XX-08/20XX

AVAILABILITY

Job Type: Permanent

Work Schedule: Full Time

DESIRED LOCATIONS

US-DC-Washington/Metro

US-VA-Northern

WORK EXPERIENCE

ABC Afterschool Program
Philadelphia PA US
9/20XX-4/20XX
Salary: 15 USD Per Hour
Hours per week: 40

Program Coordinator

- Oversee three mentoring programs in limited resource communities
- Recruit, train, and manage 25 adult mentors and 20 youth
- Develop marketing and training materials for use in programs and mentoring initiatives
- Write and manage program grants, hire outside contractors for grant implementation
- Communicate in Spanish with program participants and their families (Contact Supervisor: Yes, Supervisor's Name: Clyde Jackson, Supervisor's Phone: 215-555-1212)

U.S. Consulate (Department of State)
Madrid, Spain
6/20XX – 8/20XX
Grade Level: NA
Hours per week: 45

Political and Economic Section Intern, NA

- Researched and wrote regional economic and political briefs for US Ambassador's Madrid consulate district visits
- Worked with professionals in regional chambers of commerce, banks NGOs, and government offices to compile briefs
- Utilized Spanish language skills and political and cultural knowledge in a variety of settings (Contact Supervisor: Yes, Supervisor's Name: Lisa Mil, Supervisor's Phone: State Dept of Wash. DC)

Department of State (Educational and
Cultural Affairs)
Washington, DC US
9/20XX – 8/20XX
Grade Level: 02
Hours per week: 20

Intern then Public Affairs Assistant, GS

- Wrote articles in Bureau newsletter & press releases
- Drafted memoranda for the Undersecretary of State
- Supervised contractors on communications project
- Contacted and pitched media for program publicity
- Assembled financial and budget information for use in ECA material (Contact Supervisor: Yes, Supervisor's Name: Nina Bishop, Supervisor's Phone: 202-203-7024)

EDUCATION

Swarthmore College

Swarthmore, PA US
Bachelor's Degree – 5/20XX
35 Semester Hours
Major: Economics, Spanish Language (double major)
GPA: 3.50 out of 4.0

LANGUAGES

Spanish
Spoken: Advanced
Written: Advanced
Read: Advanced
Spanish
Spoken: Advanced
Written: Advanced
Read: Advanced

AFFILIATIONS

National Spanish American Foundation Member

REFERENCES

George Washington Swarthmore College Professor, Spanish Language
Phone Number: 610-328-8000
Email Address: g washington@pastpresidents.org
Reference Type: Personal

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Skills:
-Strong written and oral communication skills
-Strong analytical abilities and problem solving capabilities
-Grant writing experience (awarded "Dream Catchers Award" by Community and Recreation Services, Delaware County Government, Dec. 2006)
-Regional expertise in Balkan, Post-Soviet, and Western European political issues (including extensive regional travel)
-Proficient in Microsoft Office programs

Leadership and Service Roles:

Tri-College Winter Institute: Diversity Workshop Facilitator Sep. '10-May '11
-Developed forums for dialogue between diverse student groups
-Built partnerships between student groups through cultural programming

Swarthmore Business Society, President Sep. '10-May '11
-Recruited executive committee members, planned meetings
-Managed a membership base of 40+ students
-Organized club involvement in business related workshops/events

Other Roles at Swarthmore College:

War News Radio
Spanish Department Representative Sep. '10-May '11



Swarthmore College
CAREER SERVICES
www.swarthmore.edu/careerservices.xml