

What's Next?

"What's next after graduation? What do you want to do?" The classic question for every recent college grad, in some form or another, haunted my steps as I tried on different jobs and internships in the few years following undergrad. I found my personality type thrived in positions where I felt I was part of the bigger picture - affecting change in some small part. Those exploratory jobs and that haunting question lead me to where I am now – happily pursuing a Master's in Public Health at GWU. Yet with graduation less than a year away, I find myself once again hearing the question – *"What's next after graduation? What do you want to do?"*

Career Quest Seattle was an incredible opportunity for me to explore companies, build alumni connections, and dive deeper into my own career exploration. It may have seemed a little unusual for a graduate student to be going on a career exploratory trip – or at least I felt self-conscious of it – wasn't I the one who should have it all figured out? My insecurities quickly subsided though as with each company visit, I learned valuable and surprising advice from our hosts. Our hosts ranged from GWU alumni, Seattlites, vice presidents, to low level administrative managers – despite their diverse job titles one common theme that stood out to me was how none of their careers were a straight line. Over and over it seemed company culture and the right opportunity at the right time lead each of them on an unexpected journey.

I learned how important it is to truly know who you work for – company culture and values are not just words in an employee manual but determine work/life balance and important benefits. I learned that what I want to do in a general sense – is just that very general. How my career plays out in daily tasks can vary company to company. Most importantly, I learned that the when and the where, in regard to the perfect job or the right career choice is not something anyone had figured out, but rather it's about being open to opportunities and career development as a lifelong practice. While I know that my career goals haven't changed (still going to be a public health professional), going on Career Quest Seattle has given me a new appreciation for being open to career opportunities no matter how different they may seem (such as from the Gates Foundation to Amazon, that's a leap!). So, here's to graduation and answering the question *"What's next?"* for the rest of my life.