

“Discovering Career Opportunities with Career Quest”

By: Mariya Khan

The end of your college years is fast approaching, and you're finding yourself bombarded with the ultimate question: “What are you going to do after you graduate?”

Yes, it's the question that makes us quake in our boots. Some students are luckier than others. They secure their first post-grad job long before they walk the aisle in their caps and gowns. Others, like me, don't have a job (or even a specific plan) lined up. Opportunities like Career Quest give GW students like me the chance to make that post-grad question easier to answer.

I've always known that I want to be a storyteller. I suppose, with a major in English and minors in Journalism and Creative Writing, I'm just learning different ways to tell a story. Luckily, with all my studies and internships I've picked up a lot of diverse skills and experiences. Unfortunately, that only makes life after graduation harder to figure out. I have so many different avenues I can take, and yet I am stuck staring at them all.

And that's where Career Quest came in: two days in New York City, visiting six companies for tours, panels, and Q&A sessions. Oh, and you can't forget the big alumni networking event. Yes, networking - a word that can be just as frightening as that dreaded question. If networking worries you (like me), then you're in luck. Career Quest forces you to face your fears by thrusting you in an experience where you do nothing but network. It actually wasn't as scary as I thought. Maybe it was because the alumni and employees we met were so welcoming and excited to share their experiences. I was surprised at how approachable they were, and how easy it was to talk to them. They were participating because they wanted to help us find our career paths, and their advice was invaluable.

The trip may be geared towards students interested in Media and Communications, but that doesn't mean that you'll only visit news organizations and public relations firms. GW staff take you to different types of companies that have various Media and Communications opportunities. My group visited Facebook, Spotify, *Bustle*, eMarketer, the NBA, and Bloomberg. Before going to New York, I tried to picture myself in these companies. Some (like *Bustle*) were easier than others (like the NBA). At the end of the trip, however, I could imagine myself at each of the companies doing tasks like research, marketing, social media, data analysis, and writing.

I wanted to keep an open mind when visiting these companies, especially since I have flexibility with my majors and minors. I was really surprised by all the companies we met with. Many of them shared how they valued initiative and collaboration, offered training and opportunities for intellectual development, and advised that our skills can be applied to any kind of industry. It was nice to also walk around their offices and see how open and inviting their spaces were. I wished that I could have spent more than a couple of hours there.

Many people from all the companies also stressed that life after graduation doesn't have to be perfect. You don't have to secure that dream job before the second semester of your senior

year or have a job at all right after you graduate. They assured us that it's okay if you end up spending a couple months after school applying for jobs or land a paid internship. Everyone has their own set path and will reach the end at their own pace.

Now that I'm back on GW's campus and have had time to reflect, I'm glad that I took a chance and applied for this whirlwind two-day tour of the Big Apple. When I returned I sent follow-up emails and LinkedIn requests with the people I met. More comfortable with networking and asking questions, I have even chatted with a couple of women from *Bustle* on the phone. We both talked about our experiences and they answered more individualized questions that I didn't ask during the trip.

No matter what I decide to do with my life post-graduation, I know that I'm more prepared. I am more certain of the types of jobs I'll apply for. I have new connections that I can draw on for advice. Now that question, "What are you going to do after you graduate?" doesn't seem so daunting. If you have the opportunity to participate in Career Quest or another program like it, I would jump on it. You never know how things will turn out.