Preparing Student-Athletes to Compete and Win in the World of Work

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IN COLLABORATION WITH CAREER PARTNERS, INC.
Foreword

Congratulations! If you have made it this far, you are already among the elite. You are a member of the collective group of student-athletes who made up fewer than 3% of the 21 million students attending colleges and universities in America last year (Fast Facts, 2015). I understand what it has taken for you to get here. I was once where you are now. And now I am on the other side, the work side, waiting for you to join my world after graduation.

Have you thought about how you will introduce yourself to the workforce after you graduate? How will you effectively communicate your value to a future employer? How will you hone your skills and market your talents to impress the many interested employers looking for you after your college playing days are over? If you begin to prepare now, you will enjoy a distinct advantage over your non-athlete peers. Your sports career will serve you well in your professional career, and despite what you may think, we in the work world are looking for you. The Career Game Plan will show you how to leverage the work you have been doing your whole life and translate your capabilities to the business community. This book will also help you identify gaps and eliminate weaknesses, while gaining clear understanding of how to play the career game. I challenge you to approach this opportunity with the same passion and focus that has led to your successful athletic career. If you can impress us as you have your coaches and peers by translating your on field talents to the work world, you will find yourself in high demand.

Growing up in suburban Boston, I was a sports fanatic. I played six different sports competitively (from baseball to track) as a kid and another two (golf and tennis) for fun. My family and I constantly juggled my transportation needs, uniform washing, meals on the run, homework in the car, etc. for my events. Sound familiar? By the time my family relocated to Atlanta for the start of my freshman year of high school, I had whittled my competitive sports down to just three.
I also played summer baseball and had an accompanying 30 hour per week job. I didn’t go on “Spring Break.” I played in tournaments. I didn’t spend August at the lake or the beach. I spent it participating in three-a-days in football pads in the sweltering Georgia heat.

By my freshman Spring semester at Colgate University, following surgery for a shoulder injury that essentially ended my football career, I was down to just one sport: baseball. Though my skills were peaking, my passion did not wane, and I kept playing for the camaraderie, for the competition, and for the love of the game. But I knew it would be over soon, and I began to focus on life after college and life after competitive sports. And probably like many of you, I was not exactly sure where to begin.

Fortunately for you, this book will be where you begin, and it just may be the most important book you will read during your entire college career. My good friend and former college quarterback Dr. Shaun Tyrance and his team of experts have compiled an amazing resource to help you proactively manage your transition from college life to work life, and ultimately lead you to a career that will provide you financial resources and intellectual satisfaction. Your authors have created a toolbox that will help you systematically assess your abilities and interests, organize your accomplishments, resolve weaknesses, set goals, and prepare to compete on your post-collegiate playing field.

Have you ever looked around at your fellow students in one of your classes, or in the library, or at an evening, social function and thought to yourself, “these folks have no idea how much effort and time I put into to playing my sport in addition to all my other responsibilities?” In fairness, athletes aren’t the only ones taking on additional pressures at school. There are musicians who practice six hours a day and members of the debate team who travel to competitions while learning material about which they will never be formally tested, among many others. Yet just with the examples above, students like you, who are able to distinguish themselves in managing the rigorous curricular and extracurricular balance, will graduate with a distinct and recognizable advantage over students with fewer demands. Your dedication, while perhaps overlooked by your non-athlete peers, will assuredly not be overlooked by your future employers.

In fact, you are already successful in so many of the areas that will ultimately help you distinguish yourself in the workplace: you have mental and physical discipline, you are a successful time manager, you demonstrate leadership, you work successfully within a team, you understand how to compete, and you exercise good sportsmanship. This book will help you package the skills you
have been developing your whole life, while providing you a new set of tools to help you translate your current abilities into future opportunities after college.

Just for a moment, think back to your junior and senior years of high school when many of you were deeply engaged in the athletic recruiting process. You collected news clippings, compiled personal statistics, and edited highlight reels of your performance on the field. You recruited coaches, friends, and players to validate your abilities and help convince your favorite schools that you were capable of contributing to their respective sports programs. You may have even visited college campuses and interviewed with coaching staffs and various team members.

What was the purpose of all this? It was to package your skills with the purpose of successfully selling yourself and your abilities to prospective schools and coaches. You had to realistically assess your skills, build your resume, network with your playing peers and supporters, identify schools and athletic programs that fit your goals, interview with coaches and players, and ultimately close the deal. So, in some respects, you have done this kind of search before.

With this book, we take it up a notch and formalize the process to greatly increase your prospects for success. The Career Game Plan will walk you through each of the steps above, and many more as you work through the 14 modules. This time, the approach will be tailored towards helping you succeed in work after college while building a successful career over the longer run. The key for a successful work life, just as with a successful sports life, is preparation. This playbook will prepare you for the biggest and most important opportunity of your life.

Even for those of you unfamiliar with the classic, sports-business movie in which a hot-shot sports agent played by Tom Cruise begs his high-flying, wide receiver client played by Cuba Gooding Jr. to “Help me Help You,” the message is paramount — the more you put in, the more you get out. The same qualities that have driven your success on the playing field will drive your success in your career.

Today, I run an investment management firm. My career has included positions with a professional sports organization, a Wall Street investment bank, and a boutique hedge fund before co-founding Kingfisher Capital in 2009.

Every game has rules and if you don’t know the rules, you cannot play the game effectively. The work world has rules too, and you better learn how to play the game before you step onto the field. The Career Game Plan will teach you the rules and prepare you for success. If you invest in

“Help Me Help You…”
—Jerry McGuire
your future by learning the playbook, you will be amazed at your results now and over time. The Career Game Plan will position you to succeed and really help you win.

Business owners, corporate recruiters, and other professionals are looking for people just like you; people who know how to compete. You are valued in the marketplace. Seize this moment and change the trajectory of your future. It is not enough just to earn your degree, you must do more than that. And it is not enough just to get a good job, you must reinvent yourself throughout your life while keeping your skills current and relevant. The world after intercollegiate sports is just as competitive as the one you are in now. Learn the playbook to compete and win at the next level.

Alexander B. Miles
Managing Partner & Chief Investment Officer
Kingfisher Capital

Career Spotlight

DEVON FRANCOIS is currently a 7th Grade math teacher at Jefferson RISE Charter School. He graduated from Alcorn State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Health and Recreation, and he played safety for the ASU football team.
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The intent of *The Career Game Plan* is to introduce you, the student-athlete, to the tools you will need in order to manage your transition from the life of a college student-athlete into the rapidly changing and complex working world. Why is *The Career Game Plan* program important? Because, according to the NCAA, while there are more than 460,000 NCAA student-athletes, fewer than 2% will go pro in their sports (Probability of Playing, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that every student-athlete prepare for life after college. Unfortunately, given the demands that competing at the collegiate level places on your time, energy, and attention — often approaching up to 40 hours a week for athletics alone — it remains extremely difficult to take advantage of this unique opportunity to engage in career planning and exploration during your college career.

The goal of this program is to coach you through the career development process and give you the tools necessary to develop a realistic plan for a career after college (and college sports). This plan will be rooted primarily in your own interests, goals, personality, experiences, and skills, both in and out of the world of sport. This program will help you prepare for and then pursue a variety of vocational options that fit your interests and skills. *The Career Game Plan* is important to all students, even those who are considering graduate school. Many students choose graduate school because they are stressed or feel overwhelmed by the change in lifestyle that comes with entering the world of work. The better prepared you are, the less stress you will experience around starting your career. It should be noted that most graduate and professional schools prefer that you have two to three years post undergraduate experience before attending.
As noted, this program is written specifically for you — the 98% of student-athletes who will spend an incredible amount of time while on campus in the pursuit of athletic excellence, but will do something else once your eligibility runs out. We know with certainty that, over the course of your college athletic career, you will be learning and practicing the kinds of transferable skills that are in demand in today’s workforce and will serve you well throughout your professional career. For example, teamwork, leadership, discipline, time management, perseverance, risk-taking, and rebounding from failure are all skills organizations look for in their employees. Despite having these and many other abilities and advantages in your toolkit, you will nonetheless find yourself in another competition upon graduation. You will be competing for a rewarding, well-paying, and satisfying job. Your competition will be other college graduates, often from totally different departments, majors, and universities, and who have completely different experiences and backgrounds. Although your competition for these jobs will have vocational goals similar to yours, very few, if any of them, will have engaged in the 40 hour weekly commitment required in college athletics. Instead, your competition may have held part-time or full-time jobs, summer internships, or found other ways to make their resumes and credentials more appealing to the job market.

Our goal through this program is to level the playing field and give you, the collegiate student-athlete, the tools necessary to successfully compete in the job market. We will coach you to master both the concepts and the actual skills associated with winning at the game of career management.

In many ways, this responsibility for taking charge of and continuously managing your own career is a relatively new concept. Until recently, the career planning process really wasn’t a big problem. Companies used to hire people, put them to work in entry-level jobs, sometimes at a competitive salary, promote them as appropriate opportunities surfaced, and otherwise watch over them while they worked for the company. Often, in those days, people stayed at their jobs for their entire careers. After you worked for that company for 30 years, they’d throw you a nice retirement dinner, and off you would go to the golf course, into volunteer activities, or into some other form of retirement, with financial security for life.
No longer, though, is this the case. According to 2015 data, the average worker has 11.7 jobs between the ages 18 and 48, and nearly half of these jobs were held from ages 18-24 (Number of Jobs, 2015). As the world of work continues to change, the responsibility for marketing and selling yourself in the job market is a set of life skills that few understand — but these days, everyone needs. This program is intended to introduce you to the very specific skills, behaviors, and insights necessary to not only get a good job after graduation, but also help you understand and execute the practice of managing your own career throughout your working days. With this program, we hope to serve as another one of your coaches — your career coach.

Career Game Plan — Three Key Concepts
In sports, before you ever take the field or court, your coaches usually outline a solid game plan to execute for success. Similarly, in order to prepare yourself for the lifelong game of managing your own career, you’ll need to understand and act upon the intersection between the three key concepts that will be the basis for all of the activities included in this program. They are:

1. **YOUR QUALIFICATIONS:** As simple as this sounds, first and foremost, you will need to be qualified and able to perform specific kinds of work if you want to get hired — and get paid! Some of your qualifications will come to you in the form of your education (major, classroom, and project work) and internships. And some will come as a result of your athletic endeavors in the form of your demonstrated leadership, perseverance, and ability to learn from your experiences and your coaches. We’ll be reminding you throughout this program that you will need to continue to add specific qualifications to your portfolio of skills as your college years progress. You’ll certainly gain some of the necessary skills through athletics, but you will not acquire all the skills that you’ll need for the working world on the playing field or in the gym. The job you seek after college has to provide you with rewards — financial and otherwise — that are reasonable and in line with your efforts and expectations. However, you’ll need to be qualified to perform the work you’re hired to do, whether through degrees, certifications, licenses, or hands-on experience. In other words, there has to be a match between what the job market requires and your resume, background, training, and experiences. You will have to be the one who takes responsibility for that. The Career Game Plan will help you begin to identify many of the skills you’ve already developed, and will guide you toward gaining additional skills while on campus that will contribute to your
success in landing employment opportunities after graduation and throughout your career. Similar to your sports performance, the sure way to bring your “A” game from a career perspective is to be prepared. This text will give you the skill set you need to present your best self in your job search process.

2. **THE MARKETPLACE:** The marketplace of jobs and careers has its own rules and rate of change. In order to be effective in managing your career, you will need to learn how to keep up with the trends that will affect various fields of work. Here’s an illustration: looking back to the job market of the past, there were once hundreds of thousands of solid “middle class” jobs in assembly line manufacturing settings. Men and women (many without formal education or degrees) worked side-by-side “on the line” at automobile or appliance plants, for example. These were considered good jobs for many, as they paid solid wages (especially with overtime), and a single wage earner could easily support a family with such a job as recently as the 1970’s.

Today, however, robotics are in the process of replacing a lot of those manufacturing jobs. And at the same time, the job market is creating and supporting new jobs, such as for industrial-electrical technicians who are building those robots. So, while many of those former “line workers” are still at the plant, they are now being paid to program those robots, using programmable logic control software. On the other hand, this new marketplace is finding it a lot harder (but not impossible!) to replace your nurse, teacher, or speech therapist, for example.

The point of these examples is that you are going to have to learn how to see into the future a little bit, so that you can begin to identify what jobs the market will need in the years ahead. For a job to exist, and to command a competitive salary, there has to be a market, a customer, a consumer, or an end user for the work, just like there has to be a paying ticket buyer to support college and professional sports. Fortunately, there are sources that provide this kind of information out there to help you with these thorny research questions, and we’ll expose you to many of them throughout the course of this program.

3. **YOUR PERSONALITY:** Beyond understanding that a “good” job is one that you can do well (see #1 above), and that is supported in a competitive workforce (see #2 above), you should recognize that the work you pursue should allow you to be yourself while you’re doing it. The
demands of the work should be aligned with your own unique personality characteristics, personal and professional interests, and personal value system. We will help you explore these seemingly intangible, yet very important issues as well. As a part of this program, we’ll help you begin to uncover the unique strengths, skills, and interests that contribute to who you are. You will utilize assessment instruments that are specifically designed to help you better understand yourself and to gain a greater awareness of what satisfies you in the work that you choose to pursue after graduation.

How The Career Game Plan Works

In this program, we have broken the complex topics you’ve just read about into manageable segments. Each module will introduce you more fully to each specific career development topic and will guide you through a very hands-on set of exercises designed to help you put each of the concepts together and into practice. At the end of this program, you will have a well-thought-out and fully executable career exploration plan and strategy. Each step of the process is presented in a specific sequence, and each module puts another building block in place that will culminate for you in a market-ready career management toolkit. Here’s how we’ve broken down the topics for you:

In **MODULE 1**, where we are right now, we present an overview of career development as well as an assessment of your knowledge to date. **MODULE 2**, “Tools of the Trade,” will introduce you to the five key tools that make up this toolkit, so you can begin to see more clearly the overall path we’ve set forth for this career journey of yours. You’ll get an overview of the importance of a thorough career assessment, the elements of a well-crafted resume, an overview of the value of learning to research today’s job market and the tools to pull it off, as well as an introduction to the importance of developing a comprehensive job search strategy. Finally, we’ll cover the process of how to acquire and negotiate job offers through successful interviewing strategies.

In **MODULE 3**, you will begin the actual Career Assessment process by exploring the most widely used career interest survey in the country, the Strong Interest Inventory. This will help you begin to chart a path toward a career choice. We continue with assessment work in **MODULE 4** by guiding you through a process to help you identify the kinds of transferable skills that your athletic and academic experiences have given you. This work will pay double dividends, as you will return to this module later in the program when you use these results to lay the groundwork for building a competitive and market-ready resume.
THE CAREER GAME PLAN

**Module 5** is designed to help you begin the process of researching the job market. A good job market analysis will inform you about what jobs are growing or declining in the marketplace, and what skills and education will be needed for you to land a job in that field. You will also learn how to research salary ranges and other key facts about potential career options. We will continue this experience of assessment in **Module 6** by having you take the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the world’s most administered personality assessment instrument. The MBTI will allow you to gain a better understanding of your personality, so you may consider how your personality could and should impact the types of jobs you target.

*The Career Game Plan* devotes two full modules to resume development and design (Modules 7 and 13). In **Module 7**, you will get an overview of the role resumes play in today’s electronic job search universe. You’ll also learn about the formatting choices you may need to make when you are ready to enter the job market, and you’ll begin the actual resume writing process. We’ll continue to build on, and wrap up, the assessment component of this program in **Module 8** by having you consider your work-based values. With the assessment instruments that are included in this program, you will gain the kinds of insights into your personality and interests that very few of your future competitors have the opportunity to gain.

In **Module 9**, the program explores the range of options available to you as you begin the process of finding and applying for advertised job openings. We’ll cover how to identify and use various websites and job boards, including commercial sites and company home pages. We’ll continue with this exploration in **Module 10**, where we give you a road map to begin tackling the task of networking for job search purposes. There is a lot of research out there to suggest that as many as two-thirds of all jobs are landed though this particular aspect of the job search process. We’ll give you the tools necessary to navigate this challenging terrain. We also address the broad range of issues associated with using social media to follow employers, gain market information, and get connected to the right people.

Modules 11 and 12 are devoted to the topic of interviewing. We’ll cover the basics of preparing for and conducting an interview in **Module 11**, and then move on to helping you master the nuances of Behavioral Interviewing in **Module 12**. Behavioral Interviewing is a specific type of interview style that much of the employment community has adopted to guide their interviewing processes. We’ll teach you how that interviewing strategy works from the employer’s perspective, and get you ready for your first interview.
In Module 13, a deeper dive into the nuances of writing a market-ready resume is explored. This module layers in more and more resume design/writing activities that you have completed over the course of the program. You will find yourself building, module-by-module, an outstanding resume that accurately reflects your skills and career interests. We’ll also spend some time on cover letters, providing samples for your use. Then we wrap up this program in Module 14 by helping you actually close the deal. We’ll cover the steps involved after that first job offer actually comes in, how to evaluate, negotiate, accept, or decline the offer.

In each module you will find quotes from former college athletes who have successfully transitioned into the workforce. We also provide survey data results from a study that we conducted with former student-athletes to learn about their career development needs when they were college athletes. In order for you to put each of the career development concepts into practice, every module has a set of exercises and activities that will provide you with practical, hands-on experience, allowing you to develop your skills in each area. Throughout this program, you will be asked a number of questions about yourself, your interests, and your values. You will need to consider each of these questions seriously and respond as honestly as you can at this point in your life; the results of this exploration will be most helpful if they are a true reflection of you.

As you can see, we have tried to cover every base in introducing you to the complex game of career management. We’re convinced that this curriculum should be as much of a focus as you give to your academic and athletic preparation for gradation, and we encourage you to participate fully in each module. It’s now more competitive than ever out there in the world of work, and you must have the tools and a solid game plan to be successful. The good news is this: we already know that you — the college student-athlete — loves a challenge, knows how to compete, and loves to win.

“Start preparing for getting your first job as early as possible. In college I never thought much about what information should go on a resume, how to sell myself in an interview, or how I should dress when going on interviews. I started learning all of this after I had graduated, and I was looking for jobs. I made some mistakes that I would not have if I had prepared better over the course of my entire college career.”

— Physical Therapist and Former Division III Women’s Golfer
EXERCISE

RATIONALE: At the very core of The Career Game Plan, and built into all the associated modules and assignments is the assumption that those who take a systematic, step-by-step approach to career exploration and development will ultimately win in the “world of work.” The first step to such a process is to figure out where you are now, assess where you need to go from here, and to begin to chart a path to help you get there. The following checklist is simply designed to give you a preliminary look at where you are now in this process, to give you a better understanding of what we will be presenting in the modules to come, to help you assess what progress you might have already made, and finally, to underscore where you’ll need to concentrate your efforts over the course of this program.

EXERCISE 1.1: Career Development Needs Assessment

DIRECTIONS: Looking back on the career development activities that you have engaged in to date, please circle Yes (Y) or No (N) to the questions below.

Y  N  Have you ever undergone a thorough assessment of your personality, values, and interests from a vocational perspective?

Y  N  Have you ever undergone a thorough assessment of your abilities, skills, and accomplishments from a vocational perspective?

Y  N  Have you identified or begun to explore a list of specific jobs, job families, or areas of concentration?

Y  N  Can you list two to four specific job titles that are associated with any of the academic majors that you are considering?

Y  N  Do you have a draft of a professional resume?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Y</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Do you know how resume management software works, and what formats are best suited for electronic job applications?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Have you begun to make a list of key contacts, friends, and supporters who can help you with your upcoming career explorations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Have you ever visited the “career” website page of a major employer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Have you ever had an interview of any kind?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Do you know the 10 most common interview questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Do you know the most effective way to answer Behavioral Interviewing questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Do you know how to research a potential employer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Are you aware of the salary ranges that are associated with specific jobs or job families that are appealing to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Can you identify services that are available to you on campus that will support your career development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Can you identify the basic components of a job offer (other than job salary and benefits)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Have you ever negotiated a job offer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Have you ever written basic job search correspondence (cover letters, networking approach letters, interview follow-up, etc.)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior to a game, the best coaching staffs will have prepared a detailed scouting report. In it they generally address these three key components:

1. What kind of shape are we in as a team for this week’s game? What are our strengths and weaknesses? Is our first string point guard out with a high ankle sprain? Do we have key players out on academic suspension? Has our team free throw shooting percentage gone up in recent weeks?

2. What does the other team look like? Does their starting pitcher rely on first pitch strikes? Does their football team run the ball on the first three possession of every game? Is their anchor really the faster runner on their team?

3. Where are the key match-ups? Is our center four inches taller than theirs? How do our bats line up against their bullpen? How many curve ball pitchers vs. first pitch fast ball hitters do they have? How much better is our anchor swimmer than theirs?

As in sports, in order to win at the interview game, you’ll need to prepare yourself in three ways. You’ll have to assess your own skills, credentials, and experiences; you’ll have to assess the prospective employer’s business model and employment needs; and you’ll need to see how your resume and experiences match up with the employer’s current and future plans and needs. If you take this kind of approach to interview preparation, you can win the job offer!
With this in mind, let’s take a look at the key issues associated with the interview process, from start to finish: ways to prepare yourself before the interview, key issues and questions that will likely come up during the interview itself, and how to follow-up after the interview.

**Before the Interview**

**RESEARCH:** In order to win in the game of interviewing, you’ll need to do some research on both the company and the specific job position before you ever show up. At minimum, you should carefully review the organization’s website and look for articles about the organization in major periodicals or industry trade journals. You will want to know as much as possible — more than the other interviewees do — about the company’s mission statement, values, and history, before moving on to learn about the products or services they offer, who some of their bigger clients are, and who their biggest competitors are. If you have the connections (on LinkedIn or Facebook, for example) you can also talk with a handful of the company’s current employees as well. You should go above and beyond your competition in this investigation, as this is one of the clearest ways you can demonstrate to the interviewer and others at the company how committed you are to winning the interview competition.

**REVIEW THE JOB POSTING CAREFULLY — AGAIN AND AGAIN:** What are the top three specific skills, experiences, and interests you can offer this specific employer? Identify them by comparing your background specifically against the job posting, and then determine how you’ll communicate your skills to the prospective employer when answering interview questions. When possible, tell stories from your background that matches up with the needs you’ve identified in the posting. Even when you don’t have specific transferable skills for some aspects of the job, remember that you should still have stories that demonstrate that you are quick learner, that you are committed to finishing tasks that you start, or are a recognized team player. Remember, these strengths too are a part of a younger worker’s profile. If you’re interviewing for an entry-level role against others with similar levels of experience, the employer may be looking just as much at your potential to learn as your ability to come in and hit the ground running. Being prepared to address these less tangible strengths and personality traits can go a long way.

**PREPARE EXAMPLES:** Think about actual stories (see Module 4) you can tell from your previous experience to support your candidacy for the job. The interviewer will want to see how your current...
skills fit with the requirements of the job, and the best way to accomplish that is to tell stories about your previous achievements. Remember, most interviewers are trained to believe that anything that you’ve actually done before is the best predictor of whether you can do it again — for them after you are hired. Why? Because demonstrating that you’ve actually done the work in the past is more convincing than just saying you can do it. Make sure your stories are appropriate, interesting, and to the point, and that you know them inside and out.

**Tip:** You can actually bring a list of these stories with you to the interview, as long as they are in a professional looking portfolio or binder. You should also consider bringing a few extra copies of your resume, a pen, and an 8½ x 11” pad of paper. You should plan on handing your resume to anyone that has not seen it.

**DEVELOP INTELLIGENT QUESTIONS:** Most interviewers will save five minutes or so at the end of the interview to ask you if you have any questions for them. The right answer to that request is, “Yes, I do. Thank you for giving me that opportunity.” (The WRONG answer is, “No I think you’ve explained everything perfectly.”) There are two issues in play here: one is your chance to show genuine interest in the role, and the other is to show that you have prepared more than your competition to generate really thoughtful questions that will engage the interviewer/interview team in a conversation with you.

This is your chance to demonstrate your level of interest in the job and to show how seriously you took the preparation for the interview itself. If, for example, your research demonstrates that the stock price of the company has fallen steadily in the last 90 days, and also that the company has been building a new plant in Tennessee, you might ask something like, “I see that your stock has taken a bit of a drop in value recently. Do you think that is tied to your new expansion plans, or is there something else going on in the marketplace?”

Below is a list of some of the more typical questions that candidates ask in interviews. You should use these as a starting point rather than as final products. You should plan to edit and amend these based upon the results of your research rather than using them word-for-word.

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“Student-athletes should form a plan for job interviews. The interview is the selling point and very important. If you are not prepped, it could be a disaster. Play up the skills learned and challenges faced by student-athletes. Also, diversify your experiences so you can tell non-sports related stories and you seem more well-rounded”

— Paralegal and Former Division II Women’s Swimmer
• What is a typical career path for someone hired into this position?
• Can you tell me more about how employees are evaluated in the performance review process?
• If I were to be hired, what are the departmental priorities when I come on board?
• Will I receive any training or mentorship for this position? If so, for how long?
• What should a person in this position focus most on accomplishing in the first two or three months?
• What do you like most about working with this company?
• How would you describe the culture at this company?
• What is the next step in your hiring process?
• Can I send you any other information to help with your decision?
• What would you say is the greatest challenge in this job?
• How do you rate your competition?
• What is a normal day like for a person who holds this position?
• What types of projects or job assignments would I be asked to handle?
• What are the biggest challenges of this job?
• What are the most important elements of this job?
• What goals do you expect the person who takes this job to achieve during the first year (or 30, 60, or 90 days)?
• If I was starting in this position today, what would you advise me to learn first and do first?
• What opportunities do you make available for professional development and training?
• Are there any reservations you have about my fit for the position that I could try to address?
• What is the next step in this process?
• What is your timeline for getting back to candidates about the next steps?
• What are the three main factors you will be using to determine the right person for this job?
• What did the last person in this position go on to do — and what was their background?

SELECT WHAT TO WEAR: In an interview, you will need to dress professionally. Invest some time to put together a dark-colored business suit or a jacket and matching pants or knee-length skirt. Make sure you feel comfortable and confident in what you’re wearing. Do not to wear sneakers, tennis shoes, sandals, or any open-toed shoes. Above all, do not wear a t-shirt or jeans to an interview. You only get one opportunity to make a first impression.
KNOW WHERE YOU’RE GOING: You cannot be late for interviews — period. Get there at least 15 minutes in advance. Get good directions to the company ahead of time, and if you can, practice traveling to the site. Don’t trust your GPS this time.

During the Interview:

BE READY FOR “TMAY” (TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF”) RIGHT OUT FOR THE GATE. Referred to sometimes as your “elevator speech,” or the “90-second commercial,” this is often the first question in an interview. It is a really good ice breaker for both of you, and it gives you a chance to kick off the interview in a positive way. If you’re ready for it, that is. In some less scripted interview formats, what you say in response to this standard question can actually influence the next questions during the interview in a positive way. Keep your response under two minutes, and make sure that it connects with the needs of the position.

As you prepare your answer, think about including your degrees and credentials, some of your favorite recent experiences, why you chose this major/their industry to explore, and most importantly, how and why you think you can help them achieve their goals as a future employee. If it fits the format and the mood in the room, you should try to finish your response with a question of your own, in an effort to transform this “interrogation” into a give- and-take discussion. You can close with something like, “Are there any specific aspects of my background that you’d like me to spend a little more time on at this moment?”

In any case, this is your first and best chance to show them that you are very clear on who you are, what you want from your career, and what value you can offer their organization. Remember to stay in control of what you can control, and that is how you feel, look, and respond to questions. So — be ready!

BE READY FOR OTHER QUESTIONS: There are, of course, a lot of very common interview questions. A list of the most common ones are found at the end of this module. You should certainly read this list carefully, but trying to memorize a list of 50 answers to 50 questions in advance will probably hurt you more than help you. Instead, you should have a strategy that will help you anticipate or respond on the fly to all questions. A few pieces of advice include:

- A whole family of questions, often called “behavioral” questions, rely on an interviewing strategy of trying to get you to tell actual stories from your training, education, and experiences. You will recognize these if you’re aware of the strategy, as they will all be
phrased in a similar way, in that the attempt is to get you to “tell me a story.” Thus, the beginning of these questions will start with: “Tell me about a time when...”; “When was the last time you...”; or “Can you give an example of a time when you...” So, as pointed out earlier (and will be covered again in more detail in Module 12), be prepared for these types of questions by thoroughly analyzing your background and develop “stories” that point out your skills and qualities.

- Use as much of your attention and focus as you can muster to REALLY listen and respond directly to the questions that are asked. If, after you’ve heard the question, you just come up totally blank, you can always ask the interviewer to repeat it. That will show that you’re fully present in the interview and give you some valuable time to think and re-group.
- When you think you really don’t have a good answer to a question, don’t apologize or offer excuses for shortcomings. Instead, emphasize your willingness to learn new things and develop these skills. Similarly, when asked the “weakness” or “shortcomings” question, own up to it. Of course, you have a lot to learn. The only way you can really hurt yourself here is by coming off as defensive or uncomfortable. If they had a candidate with every single qualification for the job, they wouldn’t be talking to you!

**EMPLOY GOOD BODY LANGUAGE STRATEGIES:** Start your interview by greeting the interviewer with a smile and a firm handshake. Maintain eye contact at all times. Make eye contact with all members of an interview panel, with special emphasis on the one that asked the question when they alternate. Don’t squirm around in your chair, pull on your hair, or fiddle with your fingers.

**CLOSE THE INTERVIEW WITH STRENGTH.** Don’t forget to be ready with those questions that you have prepared for the interviewers. Also think about forming new questions over the course of the interview that will bring out additional information on any of the more interesting topics that came up during the interview. Be sure to use these final exchanges of conversation and information as a chance to repeat how this position and/or the organization are a good match for you. If you think it makes sense, you can also ask if they have any concerns about your candidacy for the job after today’s discussion, as you would certainly want to address any reservations while you have the chance. And, don’t leave the room without asking when they expect to make a decision and/or let you know about next steps in the process. Finally, try to get contact information on everyone you met, so you can follow up appropriately after the interview is concluded.
THE CAREER GAME PLAN

Below is a brief list of commonly asked interview questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your top three strengths?
- What are your top three weaknesses?
- Why do you want this job?
- Where would you like to be in your career five years from now?
- What attracted you to our company?
- Why should we hire you?
- What do you know about this industry?
- What do you know about our company?
- Are you willing to travel? If so, how much?

After The Interview

Even though the interview is over, the hiring process isn’t. Although you are now headed home, the interviewer and his or her team or committee is still on the job. Although you can’t see it from the outside, the team will soon be filling out evaluation forms on all the candidates that they met, and they’ll meet as a group to discuss and share their impressions of each candidate. In many cases, this process can go on for another several weeks — leaving you time to continue to compete for the offer! Since the game is still on, below are a few recommendations for the follow-up phase of the interview process.

TAKE SOME NOTES: As soon as it is practical, find a quiet time to sit down and record your observations, recollections, and questions about the interview. You’ll need this information specifically to write good follow-up notes to the interviewing team, to prepare for the next round of interviews, and to evaluate more clearly any potential job offer. As you take your notes, pay special attention to the following:

- Do you have the full names and contact information for each interviewer?
- Do you know the department of each member of the interview team (HR, Marketing, Operations)?
- Can you list any specific questions or concerns that each interviewer expressed?
• What did you learn about each interviewer?
• What did you learn about this industry/company?
• Did you learn anything that either confirmed or modified your interest in this job or career path?

SEND THANK YOU NOTES: Although there is a great deal of discussion today about the best way to follow-up with thank you notes after an interview, there is NO debate on whether or not it is a critical part of the process. You must send follow-up notes to each individual you met — no duplicates. Whether it is an email or a written thank-you note, this kind of follow-up is a hallmark of professionalism. These thank you notes should, at minimum, thank the people who interviewed you for time and interest, inform them of your continued interest in the role, let them know that you look forward to hearing from them, and tell them they should not hesitate to let you know if you can answer any more questions.

Tip: If you were presented initially to the company by an outside recruiter or agency (see Module 10), be sure also to follow up with a phone call to the recruiter and ask how the interview went and what next steps you should take.

IF YOU DO NOT GET THE JOB, LOSE GRACEFULLY: While no one likes losing, it takes a lot of class to lose in a way that might just set you up for a win down the road. You should write a second thank you note if this happens, letting the interviewer know that, while naturally you were disappointed to learn that you were not the top choice, you still retain a great deal of interest and enthusiasm for the company. Let the employer know that you’d be happy to be considered for opportunities that might surface in the future. Remember, the organization liked you enough to bring you in in the first place. This could simply be a case of you being almost the right fit this time — but the perfect fit next time.

Summary
In this module, we’ve introduced you to the basics of interviewing. With this information, you can begin to think about the kinds of questions you’ll need to be ready for, and, more importantly, the kind of preparation you’ll need to do in order to compose and deliver the kind of solid answers that will win you offers. It is important to remember that:
1. When the interview and selection process is working most effectively, both parties — the company and you — are doing their part. Hiring managers should have already thought through what kinds of skills, experiences, and credentials they want in an ideal candidate, and the interviewee should have already reviewed his/her skills, experiences, and credentials as well. The interview itself — that critical 30–60-minute period — is when the two parties can compare and contrast the results of all this preparation together. In other words, the company has probably already done their homework. You’ll be at a big disadvantage if you haven’t done yours.

2. Getting ready for interviews works best when you plan on action steps for each of the three specific periods: before the interview, during the interview itself, and after the interview. Each has its own requirements, characteristics, and purposes. If you can take each one of these challenges on in its own time and place, you have a solid chance of winning the interviewing game.

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**Career Spotlight**

**SHANA HARTMAN** is currently Associate Professor of English at Gardner-Webb University. She graduated from East Carolina University with a Bachelor’s of Arts degree in English education, and played defense for the women’s soccer team.
EXERCISE

RATIONALE: Just as in any game or match you’ve ever participated in as an athlete, you know better than most the value of research and preparation. Employers want to know that you have given meaningful thought not only to YOUR vast array of talents, strengths, and skills, but that you’ve focused considerable attention on THEIR needs and business challenges as well. The following worksheet is a hands-on reminder of the kind of research that you can, and should, conduct in advance of any job interview. If you can complete most of this worksheet before you show up at the interview, you’ll be better equipped than most of your competition to win a job offer.

EXERCISE 11.1: Interview Prep Checklist

DIRECTIONS: Find an open job from any job board or other source that you would be interested in competing for if you were currently looking (or use one of those you identified in Module 9). Now assume you have been scheduled for an actual job interview with that organization. Using the worksheet below, prepare for your “interview” with this company.

Company Information

Employer Name:

Address:

Position Interviewing for:
Name and Title of Interviewer(s):

Date and Time of Interview:

Directions to the Interview:

Company Research

Key Information from Company Homepage:

Industry Trends:

Key Competitors:

Percentage of Market Share:
Current Contacts Connected to the Company:


Social Media Presence/News (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn):


Your Value

Key strengths relevant to job description

1. 

2. 

3. 

3-5 key stories to sell your abilities and skills (See Module 4)

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Questions you want to ask

1. 

2. 
3. _________________________________
4. _________________________________
5. _________________________________

**Items to Bring to Interview**
- Portfolio with paper & pen
- Job Description
- Resumes for each interviewer
- Questions for interviewer
- Project samples (if applicable)

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**Career Spotlight**

**SHANNON MCGINLEY** is currently the Founder & CEO of CityShape Fitness. CityShape is a premiere fitness pass in Kansas City offering members one membership to multiple fitness studios around the city, eliminating the need to commit to one type of workout. CityShape aims to change Kansas City’s fitness landscape. Shannon graduated from the University of Kansas with a Bachelor’s of Science degree in Business Marketing, and played left field for the KU softball team.