Welcome to “Finding Experiential and Job Opportunities.” This session is presented to you by two members of your Walden Career Services advising team.

Before we get started, we would like to share a graphic we developed based on concepts from Herminia Ibarra’s book, Working Identity. This visual represents our holistic approach to proactive career management. Our career identities change as we gain new experiences, meet new people, and tell a new story about our academic and professional endeavors. We hope that you find this framework helpful as you progress through your academic program and start the next chapter of your career.

Keeping this framework in mind,

Our objectives for this session are to present strategies to:
Explore the skills and competencies required in your career field and identify any gaps in your experience,
Research experiential opportunities where you can build your skills,
and we’ll cover how to highlight transferable skills in your marketing efforts.
Here are four strategies to help you get started with determining what skills and competencies are needed in your field.

- Look at job postings and make a list of the job requirements.
- Conduct informational interviews where you ask a person working in your target field for information and advice about the skills required.
- Review LinkedIn profiles of individuals working in your future area. Note their career paths and their skills.
- And follow trends and hot topics relevant to your interests.

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Next, compare the qualifications required for the job with your qualifications. Ask yourself, what are my strengths and what skills should I develop?

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For example, here a few common skills that cross multiple areas.

Do you need to build your leadership and public speaking skills? Is there knowledge and experience with a certain technology or social media tool that would make you more marketable? Would budgeting, accounting, or finance experience make you a stronger candidate for your target position?

Next, let’s take a look at opportunities that can help develop these skills.

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We will explore four main areas: professional engagement, volunteering, freelance/contract positions, and (if you’re currently employed) internal activities at work.

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Professional engagement is essential to building your reputation and advancing your career. There are many types of organizations which provide opportunities to take action. Whether you’re seeking to lead, organize, develop, mentor, create, or inspire; there is an organization out there for you!

Have you joined a professional association in your field?

Professional associations such as the American Management Association, American Society for Training and Development, Society for Human Resource Management, and many others, present opportunities to enhance your skills. Toastmasters offers public speaking clubs where you can build your leadership and communication skills.
Community Organizations such as Parks and Recreation, Homeowner’s Association, and others, can help you get involved in your local community.

Service Organizations such as the JayCees, Rotary Club, or the Red Cross allow you to work on projects and engage in social improvement initiatives. Are you staying in touch with alumni from your alma mater? Find out how you can get involved with alumni groups!

No matter what organizations you decide to join, the goal is to become actively involved: deliver presentations or workshops, assume leadership roles such as serving as a board member; manage projects, host events, write articles, and engage in other activities. Active involvement is the key to building your reputation and connecting with people who can help you in your career journey. Next, let’s learn how strategic volunteering can lead to career success.

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You may wonder if volunteering makes a difference in your career? A study conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service found that individuals who volunteer have a 27% higher chance of finding employment. This study shows that volunteering makes a significant difference in career success.

For your volunteer experience to have the greatest impact, you want to be strategic in deciding what opportunities to pursue. Before you make a commitment, determine your goals and purpose, your passions, Interests, and Values, what opportunities are available, and the time commitment required. These considerations will help you maximize your experience.

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Did you know that Walden has a network of student, staff, and faculty volunteers? The Walden Service Network is a great way to find service projects in your area, organize events, and join the Walden community in supporting our social change mission. Search for volunteer opportunities in your area, or organize your own project or event. The Walden Service Network is a way to take initiative and apply your leadership skills!

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Another leading volunteer site is VolunteerMatch.org. Here, I searched by the word, “Business” and found 56 volunteer opportunities in Atlanta, GA. The first two opportunities are for a Business Associate and a mentor for small businesses.

Did you know that VolunteerMatch also offers virtual volunteering? When I searched for the word, “leadership,” VolunteerMatch found over 200 virtual volunteer positions.

Many organizations are seeking professionals who can contribute their energy, time, and passion. Volunteering is a great way to apply your academic knowledge, work on interesting projects, and strengthen your references.
Transition: If you are looking for additional volunteer sites, the Career Services Center offers a Volunteer Opportunities page with numerous listings.

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Visit the Career Services Center website to explore additional volunteer opportunities

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Other ways to hone your skills is through contract or freelance work. Non-traditional work arrangements offer opportunities to apply new skills, meet new people, and learn about different organizations. Next, we’ll look at non-traditional work arrangements that include staffing firms, freelance sites, virtual opportunities, and part-time/flexible employment.

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Have you considered working for a staffing firm that specializes in your area of interest? There are over 17,000 staffing firms in business today and temporary staffing is on the rise due to rapid change within organizations. The American Staffing Association lists the following in-demand industries for temporary employment. They include accounting/finance, information technology, sales/marketing, technical positions, healthcare, management, and many other professional fields.

If you’re interested in assignments at specific companies, try reaching out to their HR departments to inquire about what staffing agencies they use.

For example, a Walden student approached a company and was referred to a staffing agency that company used to fill positions. Through the staffing agency, he landed a contract position that helped him build new skills and qualified him for a full-time position in his target field. Temporary assignments can be stepping stones to future opportunities, especially for career transitioners.

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Freelancing is another way to build experience. Did you know there are many professional freelance sites with thousands of jobs to bid for?

As an example, one of the largest freelance sites is oDesk. To get started with oDesk, you can create an account, search for a category based on skills, and apply for individual projects.

Other large, popular sites include Elance, freelancer, guru, and many others.

If you have an entrepreneurial spirit and are able to effectively market your skills, then freelancing might be right for you!
Other options to consider are flexible and virtual jobs.

Flexjobs is a site that advertises professional telecommuting, part-time, and virtual positions.

Virtual Vocations is another popular site. As you can see here, this site lists virtual, telecommuting jobs by category. Here you’ll find a broad gamut of positions, from virtual managers to remote senior living supervisors. You’ll be surprised at what you’ll discover!

If you are currently employed and seeking to gain new skills and/or move into new career directions, consider ways to build your professional reputation by initiating improvements in your department and beyond. Take initiative to start a blog, learn a new program or system, or improve an existing process. Become known as the “go to” person in your place of work.

Seek out leadership roles in your organization. Examples may include:

Serving on committee, volunteering to lead a project, training others on skills or job functions, fostering communication between departments, and seeking out collaborative projects.

Consider ways you can build your internal network. A few ideas are to:
Attend company events; organize office activities; and ask for informational interviews – let’s say you’re working in HR and are interested in finance. Ask a financial analyst out to lunch to gain insights into their field and department.

Finally, don’t forget to take advantage of opportunities to learn new skills and engage in professional development activities such as: computer courses, improving communication skills, leadership training, etc., and find ways to apply your new knowledge to the workplace.

To sum up, Professional Engagement, Volunteering, Freelance/Contract work, and internal activities in the workplace are all ways to increase your marketability, “test out the waters” in your future field, and expand your professional network.

Take time to determine which activities are right for you based on your current situation, personality, interests, and goals. Consider engaging in multiple activities that will enhance your professional growth and provide you the satisfaction of helping others.

While you’re engaged in your new activities, be sure to track your new skills and experiences. Keep a log of specific accomplishments and quantify them if possible. Here are examples of accomplishments related to Leadership:
- Organized a fundraising event that helped raise $12,000 for homeless youth services.
- Served on a nonprofit board of directors and co-organized an annual conference with keynote speakers and 200 attendees.

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Here are examples of accomplishments related to Public Speaking:
- Delivered 10 speeches and achieved the Competent Toastmasters Award.
- Designed and delivered a workshop on business communication skills.

What are your next steps?

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After you’ve built new skills, it’s time to market them through...
- Online and face-to-face networking
- Your resume and career portfolio
- And share your accomplishments and experiences in formal and informal interview settings.

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To recap the process we walked through in this session:
First, explore the required skills and competencies in your field and determine your gaps.
Second, search for relevant experiential opportunities
Next, find an experience that will help you fill your gaps and strengthen your marketability
and finally, share your new skills and experiences with others.

Slide 23 & 24

Here are sources we referenced during this presentation.

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And we want to leave you with this final though by John C. Maxwell:

“Success is...knowing your purpose in life, growing to reach your maximum potential, and sowing seeds that benefit others.”