

The foundation of a successful academic career begins with careful preparation, strategic positioning and focused planning. Here are 5 key steps designed to assist you as you contemplate a career in academia.

## STEP 1: SELF-AWARENESS

Take an inventory of your skills, training, experience, and qualifications. In addition, understand and be prepared to clearly articulate your—

- career target
- personal & lifestyle preferences
- technical & transferrable skills
- teaching & research interests

**TIP: Clarity around your interests and preferences is a key success factor for marketing the appropriateness of your candidacy to a potential employer during informal meetings, networking events, informational and job interviews as well as on your CV/resumé, blog or online discussion forums.**

## STEP 2: CAREER AWARENESS

Conduct preliminary research to obtain clarity about the academic career path as well as related and alternative careers. In addition to enabling you to understand where the current and emerging opportunities exist in your field and in related fields of interest, this information can assist you in identifying:

- Where you want to work
- What type of institution/employer
- Primarily undergrad vs. comprehensive university
- Teaching vs. research focused position
- Working internationally
- Working in a college
- Working in a private vs. public institution
- Rural vs. urban setting
- Small, mid-size or large institution
- Working in private industry or for the government

**TIP: Accurate knowledge of the job market can help you determine how and where to focus your academic, research and job search efforts in the short and long term.**

## STEP 3: CAREER IMMERSION

Conduct in-depth research with potential target institutions and understand their focus (research, teaching, undergraduate programming etc.). Familiarize yourself with—

- the institution's short and long range plans (e.g. are they planning on expanding a department or program? Are they attempting to recruit more international students?)
- the student population and local community
- the department focus and faculty composition
- the trends and process of hiring for roles in your field (e.g. adjunct, part-time, post-doc etc.)

**TIP: Informational interviews with relevant people in your field or at target institutions are a great way to introduce yourself and your interest in future opportunities.**

## STEP 4: CAREER REFLECTION

Having completed steps 1, 2 and 3, now is a good time to ask yourself whether a career in academia is really the right choice for you. What type of career might that be? Is it time to focus on a singular career path, or to cast a career beacon out that will focus on using your transferrable skills in alternative settings (e.g. research institutes, government training departments, college institution, administrative roles, training positions etc.)

Once you decide that academia is truly for you, then the earlier you begin your planning, the better your chances of success.

**TIP: Now is the time to begin building your academic portfolio and personal brand. Consider expanding your network and your reputation by publishing, poster presentations, conference attendance, and participation in relevant online discussion groups and blogs.**

## STEP 5: CAREER PLANNING

Now that you understand the realities of an academic career and what you are able to contribute within academia, you are ready to pursue finding a position within your field.

**TIP: Refer to the [Overview of the Academic Job Search Timeline](#) handout.**

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