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Hello UMW students!

My name is Caitriona- Cait for short and I graduated from UMW with a major in International Affairs and a minor in Linguistics in 2017. I attended Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and graduated with an MA in International Affairs and International Economics last May. I now have a job at a government contracting company called Tesla Government Inc. (no connection to Elon Musk Tesla!) doing research and writing on countries in Africa.

Here are some general tips about finding a job and applying to/attending graduate school from my personal experience:

**Job Search:**

1. Network
   1. I’m sure you’ve heard this many times, but I can’t stress enough how important it is to ask for advice and information about available opportunities. The UMW alumni network is very strong and people are almost always willing to help because we’ve all been helped by so many others. I heard about my current job from a Johns Hopkins SAIS alum who posted in a Facebook group.
2. Interview Prep
   1. Practice, Practice, Practice. Most interviews ask similar types of questions so be prepared to answer those questions! In graduate school, we were advised to prepare a short pitch about our background, why we wanted to work in a certain field, and why we should be hired. The more efficiently you can get the bottom line across, the better.
3. Consider Working Abroad
   1. I went to grad school right after UMW, but if I hadn’t, I would have gone to work abroad. This is a great way to get some travel in before you settle into a career. It can also help you gain perspective on what you want to study in graduate school or what kind of job you want to pursue. Working abroad is especially important if you’re looking to improve language skills. I am still considering applying to jobs abroad after a couple years in my current position to improve my Arabic.
4. Patience
   1. It can take a really long time to find a job, usually at least 6 months if not more. Start looking as early as you can and don’t be discouraged when you don’t hear back from most of the places you apply to. This is normal! This is especially true if you’re applying for government jobs. Bureaucracy is slow and clearances take time.

**Graduate School:**

1. Application
   1. Applications are never fun to do, but take care when you do them, especially when writing your essays. The head of my program in graduate school mentioned my application essay the first time I met him so they can definitely make an impression! As some graduate programs move away from focusing on GRE scores, the other parts of the application become increasingly important.
2. Attending
   1. It’s going to be difficult and you’re going to read more than you ever have in your life. Still, it’s an immensely rewarding experience to be surrounded by people who are excited by the same things you are. I had so many of my ideas challenged and turned around at Johns Hopkins SAIS. There’s also no denying the added bonus of having a prestigious graduate school on your resume.
3. Price
   1. Grad school is EXTREMELY expensive. There’s no getting around that fact. Definitely apply for as many scholarships as you can, but there’s reduced funding assistance at this level of education for many of us. When I was deciding whether or not I should attend right out of undergrad, a professor told me “Well it’s not going to get any cheaper if you wait and go in one or two years.” So if you know what you want to study and it’s going to help you in the long run for your career, I say go, even if you have to take out more loans to make it happen.

**General:**

1. Technical/Quantitative Skills
   1. Since you’re a Poly Sci/International Affairs major, you may be like me and not inclined towards math. However, I urge you to consider trying out coding and/or pursuing data analytic skills. Looking back, I wish I had explored more in undergraduate/graduate. In combination with the research and writing skills you’ve obtained from Mary Wash, technical skills makes you all the more valuable to a company/workplace and have the added bonus of increasing your earning potential.

Lastly, I know things are uncertain after leaving college, especially in these circumstances, but you will get a job or get into graduate school. It may take time, but it will happen!

Please feel free to reach out with any specific questions! My email address is [caitcobb7@gmail.com](mailto:caitcobb7@gmail.com).

All the best,

Cait