Job Search Tips from Sarah Titus ‘09

PART I: Getting prepared!

Having all of your paperwork ready is the best way to relieve yourself of stress during this process:

- Portfolio!! (do NOT wait to get this done!)
- Create a small version of your portfolio to leave with interviewers
- Resume (on nice paper!)
- Cover letter (create a generic one and then personalize it for each school)
- TB test
- Clearances
- All necessary test scores (also save as a PDF)
- Transcript (get one for your records)
- Placeholder letter (request from Certification Officer to verify your favorable status for PA certification)
- Letters of Recommendation [all co-operating teachers, principal(s) of the schools where you have student taught, and your student-teacher advisor(s)]
- Contact information for advisors, co-operating teachers, and principals – they often ask for this in applications.
- Apply to online placement PA-Educator

This may not be an exhaustive list so be sure to ask Mrs. Snyder and the education office what other paperwork you will need. It is a good idea to scan all of these documents just to make sure that you have an electronic copy.

- Keep everything together in a folder because you will need to access all of these documents a lot throughout this process.
- Make multiple copies of some of these documents. Most schools have an online application process, so you will have to send in certain documents to them to put on file. It will be much faster if you already have extra copies on hand.
- Make sure you have a non-GCC email address where employers can contact you indefinitely. (Keep the address “non-descript” and “professional”).

Some mistakes I made that you can learn from (or things I did completely by accident that ended up helping me out later):

- Take a lot of pictures of your classroom/students when allowed. Many school districts love to actually see you in action.
- Get involved in some sort of after-school activity at your school.
- Try to gain experience with kids outside of the classroom, if possible.
Really connect with the people you worked with in your student teaching – develop those relationships. You never know who or what you might need later on (Secretaries, guidance counselors, other teachers, and administration). These people can serve as good references, a source of information, or connectors to other opportunities.

Stay ORGANIZED!
Do not wait until the last minute to take a test, renew your clearances, or anything else you might need – stay on top of everything.
Take advantage of having professors, an education office, and ECS that can help you and answer all of your questions.
Do a mock interview with Mrs. Snyder and have her review your resume and cover letter.
Network with alumni as much as possible (eCommunity is a great tool).

PART II: Where to Apply?
This might be one of the more difficult things to figure out. I will give you a few suggestions:

1. LOCATION: some people have a desire to work in a specific place. Research the schools in that area and figure out how the application process works in each district. Find people from that area who can tell you about the best places to live and work.

2. NETWORK: Contact people that you know in education who may help you in securing a job. Talk to parents of your friends, your friends’ parents, alumni, people your co-operating teacher knows, etc. When there are over 400 applications for a small number of jobs, any edge you can get is helpful.

3. ASK Mrs. Snyder: GCC has good relationships with many school districts. Mrs. Snyder and the education office can help you find school districts that are familiar with GCC-alums.

4. NO CLUE? Do a combination of all three. Pinpoint places you would like to live and do research on schools in that area. Maybe pick locations in the same area as close friends and relatives who would be able to give you advice about the area. Spend time developing your list of contacts. Do not feel uncomfortable contacting people – you would be surprised how much people would like to help you.

IMPORTANT: Different states have different licensure procedures. If you are looking to work outside of Pennsylvania, you will most likely have to take additional tests or complete applications for that state. Be sure to check their websites for information on this. In order to keep your options open, register to take additional tests for states you would like to work in. For Virginia (in secondary education), the only thing you need is a literacy test (VCLA) that you can take at computer sites throughout the country, but other states may require other tests. DO NOT WAIT to figure these things out – do it as soon as possible.
**Many Pennsylvania schools require that you apply on PA-Educator or PaREAP – make sure you submit all required documents and that your file is activated. Other schools and states have similar systems, so familiarize yourself with this process :)**

**PART III: Apply Away!**

Once you have researched the schools, it’s time to begin applying! As I mentioned earlier, most schools have an online application process. After you apply online, you need to send in a packet of information. Be sure to have all copies and mailing supplies ready!

Here are a few pointers:

- **Create a manila folder for each district you apply to:** This will be especially helpful if you have to pick up your job search again in a year. All passwords and completed applications will help you in jumpstarting your search again.
- **Make all passwords and usernames the same:** Most of these applications require a username (normally your email address – use your non-GCC email address) and a password. Store your password electronically or in the folder with your other information.
- **Print completed applications:** Print your application and store it in your folder. This is a great reference for future applications. Most applications ask very similar questions. I just re-typed most of my answers right off of previous applications. It makes the process much easier and relatively pain-free.
- **Mail all at once:** Make one big trip down to the Post Office instead of multiple trips. Be sure to double check that you have the correct documents in each envelope and that they are addressed correctly.

**PART IV: Career Fairs**

Before a career fair, research the different schools that will be present. Make a list of schools that you **really** want to see and a list of schools that you will go to if there is time. If there is time, apply online – they will be impressed if you can tell them that you already applied. Plus, if they are eager to pursue your candidacy, they might look you up in their database at the fair or as a follow-up.

How to prepare:

- A few small portfolios to leave with school districts
- Resumes and Cover letters
- Information for schools on your ‘A List’
- Register ahead of time
- A 1” version of your portfolio just in case you get an interview
• RELAX: God will guide you through this process! Just seek Him and remember that He is sovereign over all things.

While I was at Grove City College, many of us went to one big career fair (PERC). You may also want to go to other career fairs in specific areas. Be sure to research these career fairs on the GCC Education Career Services website and prepare accordingly.

PART V: Other Options

Don’t be afraid to check out other options: private schools, independent schools, charter schools, etc. The GCC Education Career Services website has many helpful links to connect you with those schools. Again, each school will have a different application process – be sure to check those out earlier rather than later.

You may want to explore different things you can do with your education degree. Talk to ECS, the centralized CSO, and professors at GCC who can help point you in the right direction. You are surrounded by so many different people who want to help you take your first steps into the real world, make sure you tap into those resources. There are a number of one-year political fellowships and other similar programs – networking within GCC can help you find those opportunities. Check out the annual Unique Careers in Education Expo in the spring.

PART VI: Post-Graduation and Jobless?

First, remember that job opportunities and decisions happen at the last minute all the time. If you have networked well, people might think of you in the case of unexpected events. Keep in touch with your contacts in different areas throughout the summer to see if they know of any opportunities.

Be assertive. Many states have a list of public school districts and independent schools on their Department of Education website. Don’t be afraid to call their human resources departments to inquire about jobs or potential openings. They may not be incredibly helpful, but it never hurts to just give it a try (that’s what I did!).

Many southern states (like Virginia) post their openings on their website after a certain date. Once you have applied for the district, check their website regularly to see if they have posted openings – normally, they begin posting late June, but it differs depending on the school district.

Apply to be a substitute. The requirements are pretty standard, so gather all necessary paperwork together and send it off to different districts. I would recommend subbing at three districts. Choose districts in which you would like to work full-time.
PART VII: Day-to-day Substitute?

First, view this as an opportunity. Seriously, I credit most of what I learned about classroom dynamics and logistics to my time as a substitute teacher. You are given an opportunity to work across content and grade level lines. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Take Notes:**
   a. **School policies:** Listen to teacher discussions about different policies that the schools have – get a feel for what works and what does not. (Be careful – don’t enter into these conversations, just observe and take notes. Trust me, you really don’t know anything until you have at least five years under your belt as a full time teacher. The more experience I get, the more I begin to understand how much I don’t know.)
   b. **Classroom set-up:** Write down any interesting ideas you see in the classroom where you are substituting. Look for things like homework collection procedures, absent homework procedures, desk set-up, and organization.
   c. **Expert teachers:** Ask to observe “expert” teachers within your content area (if you are elementary, ask to observe different grade levels). Look for how teachers practically apply the theories you learned about at GCC.

2. **Clean the classroom:** Nothing is more stressful for a teacher then returning to the classroom after being absent. Straighten up chairs and desks, throw away loose papers, gather together student belongings that were left behind, and leave the teacher’s desk as organized as possible.

3. **Leave detailed notes:** Leave a detailed explanation of what occurred when the teacher was away. A teacher wants to know that they can trust you to get their assigned work done and keep the classroom together. The only way a teacher can ensure that there is order while they are gone is if they can assign a consequence for misbehavior in their absence. You are the only one that can tell the teacher exactly what happened while they were absent (and you were in charge)!

4. **Provide your contact information:** Leave any information that the teacher might need to contact you and encourage them to share this with their colleagues. If you did a good job, that teacher will spread the word about you. At my school, we have a “trusted” substitute list.

5. **Develop relationships with students:** Invest in your relationships with the students. If you substitute in the same building multiple times, you will more than likely experience a large number of students. Remember, you are the authority teacher, not their friend – you want their respect first. But, as the substitute, do not take yourself too seriously; be willing to crack a few jokes to get the kids comfortable but make sure you have a presence in the room. Keep them focused and working on assignments the teacher left, and make sure they understand that you will inform the teacher of misbehavior.
6. **Develop relationships with staff:** Typically, there is a secretary that organizes all the substitutes. You need to become that secretary’s “best friend.” At the school where I substituted the most, this secretary’s name was Carolyn. If Carolyn “appreciated” you as a substitute for her building, you, you would be booked solid for two to three weeks in advance because she would just plug you in when a teacher turned in an absence form. Find out who the “Carolyn” is at your school(s) and be intentional. And, of course, make sure you talk frequently with the other teachers – get to know them and network with them.

7. **Learn to think on your feet:** You will have to be quick on your feet, flexible, and willing to improvise. This is a skill you will develop over time. I quickly earned the reputation for being good with the “tough” kids at one of the school districts. Every time a teacher with difficult students took a day off (special education teachers take a lot of days off to write IEP’s, preserve their mental health, and attend professional development seminars), I was requested. Although it was not always a favorable situation, I learned *so much* from the time I spent in these challenging situations.

8. **Be prepared:**
   a. It is always a good idea to have a newspaper or a book with interesting facts that students may find interesting. If you need to capture their attention, can pose a question to start a class discussion. Bring current events into whatever the students are learning in class.
   b. **Arrive early:** Arrive early to make sure you can find the classroom and figure out the teacher’s lesson plans.
   c. **Ask question:** If you do not understand something, **ASK SOMEONE.** Find a teacher nearby that can help you.

9. **Enrich yourself:** Sign up to take a class at your local community college. I took a world history class because I hadn’t had world history since my freshman year of college. Or, you could take class in a field close to your content area (psychology, sociology, economics, etc.) to expand your knowledge base. Again, this shows schools that you are proactive and seek self-improvement.

In these sorts of situations, the unexpected can happen very quickly. In my experience, I ended up getting hired in November as a long-term substitute for the rest of the school year. I wish I would have reviewed history/social studies or studied different methods of instruction more closely. These months give you time to expand your knowledge on educational methods and your content area. If you have down time, use it effectively to improve yourself as an educator.
Part IX: New Beginnings

Begin your job search around December. Many overseas programs and organizations like Teach For America have early due dates. Ask teachers you’ve worked closely with over the year for recommendations. Schools will like to see that you have really tried to learn something from your time in the classroom. Update your resume and cover letter appropriately and update your online applications at schools that you are still interested in.

Part X: Overwhelmed?

Whatever you do, DO NOT PANIC. Remember, God has a plan for your life. You can do all of the things I have said above and STILL not get a job. You may do nothing that I recommend and you will wind up with a job before the school year ends. God moves according to His perfect timing – immerse yourself in that truth.

If you have questions/concerns or want some guidance, I would be happy to help. Feel free to email me: sarah.renee.titus@gmail.com. If you have questions about Fairfax County Public Schools, I would be happy to answer as many of them as I can 😊.