

College Counselors' Top Tips for Students Applying for Federal Jobs

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Many students and new grads are interested in federal employment.

About one-fourth of US college students list government as one of their three major targeted employers, according to the 2013 Student Survey. Yet just 8.5% of all federal workers are younger than 30.

In a recent **Washington Post** article, Tom Fox of the Partnership for Public Service wrote that a crucial strategy for bringing more young people in is strengthening their understanding of the fed's application process.

However, as the recent **Washington Post** article noted, they need to be better informed about how to apply. The Resume Place, publisher of the [Student's Federal Career Guide, 3rd Edition](#) and a certifying trainer on the federal hiring process, recently interviewed career counselors at two colleges. Tamara Golden at the University of California, San Diego and Emily Gomez, MS at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill shared tips for getting the inside edge in the federal job market. The counselors emphasized learning how to write the longer, more detailed federal resume and offered other important tips.

Tip #1: Learn how to cast a wider net on www.usajobs.gov (the US government's official job site)

Both Gomez and Golden agree that many students make the mistake of searching for openings on USAJOBS by the limited number of federal agencies they know. “They don’t realize that there are a lot of similar positions and similar agencies,” says Gomez. Instead the counselors recommend searching by “occupational series.” The Student’s Federal Career Guide walks you through determining which occupational series would fit you best. “By searching by occupational series, you can find those hidden gems,” advises Golden.

Tip #2: Be sure you’re actually qualified before applying.

“The vacancy announcements will literally describe who will be eligible to apply,” observes Golden. And the Student’s Federal Career Guide explains how to understand the complicated announcements, adding that they must be looked at carefully. Golden recommends that you also spend time reviewing the “Occupational Questionnaire” linked to the announcement. If you can’t score yourself at the highest level across most skill areas, then you won’t be qualified, she says. Avoid “status” positions only open to current or recent federal employees. And students interested in “Recent Graduate” positions need to note how close to graduation they need to be to apply.

Tip #3: Know that federal resumes are longer, and different, than private industry resumes.

You can’t just attach a private industry resume if you want to land a government position. Fed resumes must be longer (3 to 5 pages) and more detailed. “Just this afternoon, one of my students expressed frustration at repeatedly being designated ‘best qualified,’ but never getting an interview,” says Golden. “The student had been using a one-page resume, which is a big no-no.” She told him to change to a multi-page resume at the least and also steered him to using USAJOBS’ online resume builder. Many USAJOBS announcements even require applicants to utilize the resume builder option only.

Tip #4: Draw on your student experiences to demonstrate your skills and knowledge. Academic activities can play an important role in showing that you have what fed HR wants.

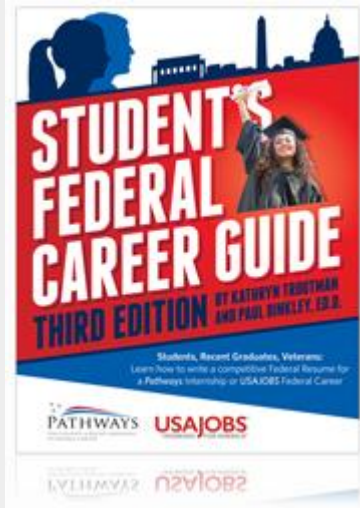
Class projects, presentations, papers and other academic accomplishments can be highlighted on your resume, along with internships and community activities. Golden has her applicants include this info in the work section of the resume builder. The Student’s Federal Career Guide includes 8 sample resumes showing how college classwork and accomplishments can be addressed.

Tip #5: Play the card you hold in terms of veteran’s preference.

Vets get preferential scoring for their applications for many positions. If that’s you, make sure you supply all the needed paperwork. One exception to vet’s preference is for Scientific and Professional positions at the GS-9 level or higher. The Student’s Guide includes a helpful chart that lists these exempt positions. Golden has found these exemptions to be helpful for her non-vet students’ applications.

Tip #6: Start to prepare your federal resume now before you need it.

More and more often, fed job announcements only allow a limited amount of time to apply. Gomez says it would be difficult to create an outstanding federal resume if you only have a week before the deadline. "Start to build that fed resume today," she advises, "and then you'll just have to make minimal changes based on the specific requirements."



Gomez agrees that many times students have no idea what it entails to apply for a federal position when working on their own. "The federal government is not going to hire you because you're a college student or new grad," she points out. "They want to see that you've done what's required as described in the job description. That's why your resume needs to be so thorough."

The new [Student's Federal Career Guide, 3rd edition](#), by Kathryn Troutman and Paul Binkley, EdD, was just selected as a finalist in Career for the Book of the Year Awards! This informative 178-page guide is available in paperback, Kindle and PDF, and it's sold at [The Resume Place website](#) and [Amazon.com](#).

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