Developing Skills Employers Look For
As parents, two main goals for your student during his or her UT career likely involve succeeding academically, and finding a job after graduation. While success inside the classroom is extremely important, one equally important facet to measuring success (and landing that first job after graduation) involves building skills outside the classroom. These “soft skills” (the cluster of personal qualities, traits, habits, and attitudes that make a good employee) can sometimes be less obvious, and definitely depend on the determination and initiative of your student. Traits that are important to employers such as your student’s overall maturity level and readiness for occupational success can set him or her apart from others in a job search.

One popular way to develop many of these “out-of-the-classroom” traits is through participating in internships. The traditional definition of an internship involves getting experience complimentary to an academic field while still in school. While many employers look for at least one internship experience on a resume, many of today’s top employers expect two or more.

In addition to internships, there is a wide range of other experiences to develop the skills necessary to succeed outside the classroom. The staff at UT’s Career Services looks at skill development as the entire body of a student’s out of classroom experiences, and it is even more important that your student can to translate those experiences to prospective employers.

In other words, how will your student’s experiences help him or her succeed in the future? Volunteering, service learning, study abroad experiences, and campus leadership positions can help your student develop many of these necessary and desired skills. But these experiences are only as powerful as your student’s ability to relate how those experiences are important in the employer’s industry. Many of these types of experiences assist students in building the softer, transferrable skills that serve as foundations for building other vital, more advanced skills.

Skills and Strengths Employers Look for Most*:
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Problem Solving
- Obtain and process information
- Plan, organize and prioritize work
- Analyze quantitative data
- Technical knowledge related to job
- Proficiency with computer software
- Create and edit written reports
- Ability to sell or influence other


The First Year: Identifying Interests
So how does a student make sense of all the opportunities available to develop these desirable skills? The answer often depends heavily on when your student plans to start looking – and the earlier, the better! First-year students can get a good start building a foundation of skills by pursuing opportunities such as Welcome Leader or Greek Life. However, keep in mind, the first year is primarily about your student adjusting to the college experience, finding an academic home and preparing for the future. Students might want to save the summer following their first year for employment, working with summer camps, or volunteering to assist in teambuilding, supervisory, and organization to develop other marketable skills.
The Sophomore Year: Getting Involved
Encourage your student to set the sophomore year as a time to start identifying with his or her major and some possible employment outcomes. Your student should critically think about what types of skills will improve his or her credibility as a budding professional in the field and identify student clubs or organizations and professional associations that will help get started. In addition, the beginning of the sophomore year is a perfect time to examine study abroad opportunities or to further on-campus leadership experiences (consider Resident Assistant, First-Year Studies Peer Mentor, or Ignite Team Leader positions; working with RecSports; or being a Student Ambassador). The summer between the sophomore and junior year is a great time to work in that first internship or to gain employment in field (or in a related field) in any way possible through a part-time job.

The Junior Year: Fine-Tuning and Preparation
Your student’s junior year is all about fine-tuning their direction after graduation. Many students will determine that graduate or professional school is right for their career choice and will begin applying for and gaining acceptance into a program. Others will look at their junior year as a way to prepare for that vital internship in the summer before their senior year. Many juniors will start identifying more closely with their profession through leadership roles in a professional organization or club. Students should also continue to develop skills through programs such as LeaderShape, the Pepsi Diversity Leadership Development Program, the Clifton M. Jones Student Leadership Conference and other programs designed for intense but shorter-term skill building.

Without a doubt, the out-of-class experience that most closely aligns your student with his or her profession is the professional internship. The summer between the junior and senior years is a critical time for students, as many employers look at that period to see how your student has prepared for their job search. It is important for your student to align an internship with post-graduation plans as closely as possible. In fact, internships can often lead to a direct full-time job offer from an employer.

Your student will develop a wide range of skills throughout his or her UT career. It is always a good idea for your student to work with UT’s Career Services staff to piece those experiences together in a clear concise manner for resumes, cover letters, and interviews. All students can utilize Career Services to gauge where they are in the skill-building process, what campus opportunities are available to them, and most importantly to start learning how to merchandise these experiences in a way that will impress employers. Visit http://career.utk.edu for more information about UT Career Services.

Helpful Campus Resources
Center for Leadership and Service (leadershipandservice.utk.edu)
Center for Impact Careers (impactcareers.utk.edu)
Multicultural Student Life (multicultural.utk.edu)
New Student & Family Programs (nsfp.utk.edu)
Student Success Center (studentsuccess.utk.edu)
Student Activities (activities.utk.edu)