

Advice From an Alumna About B.A. Level Research Jobs

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Finding a job as a research assistant after graduating from college with a BA in psychology is not difficult, but it can take a lot of persistence. The first job I had was extremely easy to get—my advisor knew I was looking for a research job and recommended me to several people she knew, one of whom happened to be hiring. I was lucky to have a job before I graduated. After a year of working at that job, the funding ended (it's always good to know how long the job is expected to last or be funded for). The next job search was not as easy but it paid off, and I am now happily working at my second research job.

I found that the best place to look for BA-level jobs was on university websites, as most research is done in connection with universities. Depending on the school you can either upload your resume and a general cover letter so that professors who are hiring can search your information, or you can apply for specific jobs where you can write more tailored cover letters. I found the latter case to be more common. I searched for new postings nearly every day—once you know which websites are likely to have productive postings it's easy to get into a routine and spend 15 or 20 minutes every day applying for any new jobs. At my current job I was told that I was the first person to apply; while I don't think this affected my hiring decision I think that the sooner you apply, the sooner you can be interviewed. Be creative in where you think to apply. Explore various websites to find out if different jobs are listed in different locations. For example, Northwestern University and Northwestern Hospital have job listings on different sites; at University of Chicago they are listed in the same place.

Apply for every job you are qualified for and think you would be able to do. I spent my first week of job searching being picky and only applying to jobs where I thought the research would be really interesting. That is why you go to graduate school. Although being interested in the research is an added bonus, it is not the main point of the job. What I also found was that the job descriptions posted on websites are not very descriptive; a lot more detail is given during the interview. And (as psychology majors know) the more you are around something, the more you like it. I've found that in learning about the research while doing my job, I've become much more interested in the research. But just keep in mind that you are applying for a research job, not a place that will exactly match your research interests.

Technology is extremely useful, but you should never forget the people (often referred to as “networking”). My undergraduate advisor was responsible for me getting my first job, and during my second job search I freely let people know I was looking. It is easier when you are leaving your job because a grant is ending—there was no awkwardness in asking for recommendations or telling people at my former job that I was looking for a new one—but you should not be shy about talking to people who would know of job openings, such as professors in the psychology department. You will need these same professors to write you letters of recommendation (three letters is the norm) if

your interview was successful, so it's good to try to keep the lines of communication open during undergrad and afterward. Also, when people know you are job searching they are likely to tell you what worked for them (and what didn't). A coworker told me he got his current job by emailing the chairs of psychology departments at Chicago universities; his email was forwarded until it got to the person who hired him. I tried the same tactic, and while it did not result in a job I did receive positive feedback.

I would recommend writing thank-you notes to your recommenders (and late is better than never) because it's often the only time they hear the end-result of your application and it's a good way to stay in touch with people who may write future letters for jobs or grad school.

The most useful websites in my job search:

University of Chicago

<https://jobopportunities.uchicago.edu/applicants/jsp/shared/frameset/Frameset.jsp?time=1220935322051>

Northwestern

https://nuhr.northwestern.edu/psc/hr91prod_er/EMPLOYEE/HRMS/c/HRS_HRAM.HRS_CE.GBL?FolderPath=PORTAL_ROOT_OBJECT.HC_HRS_CE_GBL2&IsFolder=false&NAVSTACK=Clear

npo.net (Chicago non-profit jobs—I found some research listings but they are not as common as direct-service jobs)

<http://npo.net/>

UIC

<http://www.hr.uillinois.edu/cms/One.aspx?portalId=964839&pageId=1073969>

Research jobs were less commonly listed at places like careerbuilder.com (Chicago Tribune) and monster.com; these sites cater more toward corporate jobs.