MVCC CAREER DEVELOPMENT
RESOURCE GUIDE FOR

UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

✦MVCC | Career Development Center

in
www.linkedin.com/groups/8933355/

◉
@mvcc_careerdevelopment

▶
MVCC Career Development Center

careerdevelopment@mvcc.edu | 315-731-5847 | mvcc.edu/career

MVCC CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE GUIDE FOR UNDERREPRESENTED AND UNDERSERVED STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

Students and alumni of color and other racially minoritized or underrepresented groups often experience unique challenges in the job market and within different work cultures. These situations could include being the only racially minoritized person on a team, difficulty finding mentors, or determining how to connect with diversity pipelines in your field.

As an underrepresented or racially minoritized potential employee, your collective experiences bring unique assets and strengths into the work culture. How have challenges you've overcome or your nuanced understanding of your identity resulted in skills or qualities you can offer to your future employer?

*This guide is not meant to substantiate or refute bias; it is meant as a guide if you are a person of color (POC) or racially minoritized person actively involved in a job search.

The Career Development Center provides support through:
- one-one-one career counseling
- curated resources for navigating the workplace
- an alumni network to connect with other POC or underrepresented people in the workplace

Some unique concerns that underrepresented students and alumni have conveyed include:
- how to deal with unconscious bias and stereotyping (implicit bias) throughout their career journey
- expectations with respect to hair and presentation at work
- being the only or one of a few POC
- shifting the language you use or the way you express yourself in your conversations (codeswitching)

EVALUATE THE CULTURE AND FIT OF A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER

The job and internship search are often thought of as being one way; employers evaluate you and your skills for a position at their company. However, it is just as important for you, as a potential employee of an organization, to evaluate the culture and fit of the organization.

When it comes to the workplace, culture refers to the character of an organization, which is the sum of its values, traditions, interactions, and beliefs. The culture of an organization is as important as the product or services being offered. It speaks to the organization's retention, engagement, performance, and levels of employee satisfaction in the workplace.

As you start to explore your fields of interest, take time to research the company culture by visiting the company website and conduct informational interviews with professionals working in your field of interest.
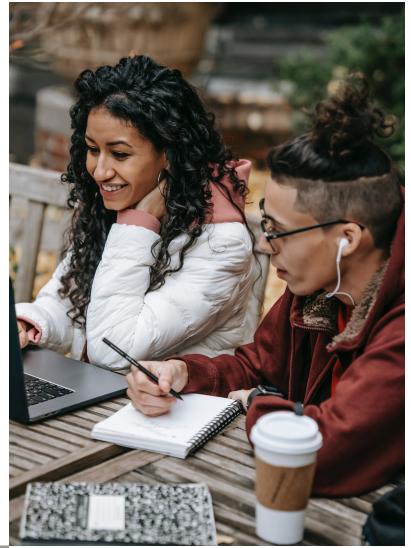
Consider When Evaluating a Future Employer

- Leadership/Management
  - Who is in leadership and management positions within an organization and what are the values they espouse?
- Mission/Vision
  - Is the mission/vision of a company/organization in line with your work values?
  - How clearly is the mission/vision reflected and communicated throughout the organization?
- Workplace Policies
  - What are the organization/company's workplace policies, including dress code, code of conduct, wellness, and compensation? Look at company website to see how racially minoritized people are represented.
- Workplace Practices
  - What are recruiting and selection practices?
- Are there diversity pipeline programs?
  - What are the practices in place for promotion/advancement?
  - What are the workplace traditions?
- People
  - Is the staff diverse?
  - Are there mentorship programs or affinity groups and how active are they?
  - How can you talk to someone about what the day-to-day is like in the office?
  - How do employees interact with each other?
  - How do managers/supervisors interact with employees?
- Communications
  - What does communication look and sound like?
  - How is information communicated?
  - What expectations are explicit?
  - How much transparency is there in communications?
  - Who are the decision makers and how do they communicate how and why decisions are made?

Thoughtful questions that students might ask during interviews or other interactions to assess their organizations' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) priorities and commitment:

- How does your organization define diversity? What lenses of diversity has your organization made a direct commitment toward?
- Does your organization have a chief diversity officer (CDO) or a designated leader to drive DEI and engage internal and external stakeholders?
- What social causes does your organization support?
- Does your organization actively support diverse suppliers, contractors, and small businesses?
- Has your organization made any formal commitments in support of racial equity?
- How does your organization center diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging?
- Does your organization offer any formal employee training around biases, anti-racism, or general DEI?

- How has your organization prioritized executive accountability toward DEI advancement?
- Does your organization have any affinity groups or committees to support diverse populations? If so, how do these groups contribute to the culture of the organization?
- Does your organization complete annual compensation equity analysis?
- What resources has your organization provided to its employees in support of COVID-19 and racial injustices?
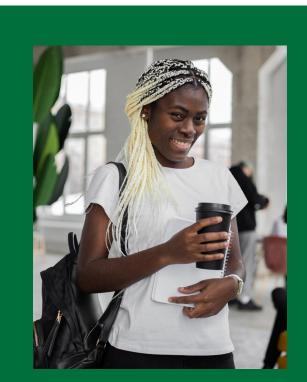
Increase the number of applications.
Studies show there could be a difference of as much as 50% between interviews offered to non-POC students vs. POC students. If that's true, one option is to apply to more positions. Playing "the numbers" means understanding them and how many applications it will take to yield the results you want. Eventually, your number will come up.

Look for Affinity/Employee Resource Groups (ERG).
A way to increase the odds (beat the numbers) is to apply to organizations known for appreciating diversity. Looking for companies that have affinity groups for underrepresented people or diversity-appreciation statements might increase the odds of an interview. Affinity groups or employee resource groups are groups of people formed around shared interests or common goals. They most often relate to diversity and inclusion programs, and include race and ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, social or economic causes, and military status. They offer support, resources, and mentorship with the goal of improving job satisfaction and business.

Remove racial indicators from your application materials.
This is sometimes referred to as "whitening" your resume and involves the removal of things like groups, clubs, and organizations that potentially identify you or your ethnicity. Names are a little tougher to deal with because they must be included in your application materials. Some students have substituted ethnically identifiable names with western names (for example, Sean or John for Cheng), while others have shortened their moniker to one or two initials and a last name (J.J. Walker for Jamal Jordan Walker). The goal behind this idea is not to hide ethnicity, but to remove the implicit bias that people may or may not even know they have when selecting candidates for interviews.

Own it.
President Barack Hussein Obama once said he was named by someone who obviously never thought he would run for president. Owning it means being outright with it. For example, one can state in their cover letter that "As an African American (or ChicanX/LatinX, LGBT, individual with a disability…), I am aware of and sensitive to issues of diversity. With my experience and background, I can present a unique perspective to your organization." This approach shows employers that your diversity is an asset, and you will enhance their company.

Make sure your application materials are competitive.

Given the implicit bias of the job search process, your application materials should not only be good, they should be better than good—the absolute best. Make sure your resume and all supporting materials are competitive. How do you achieve this?

- **Have your materials reviewed by the Career Development Center before submitting them.**
- **Tailor your application to each position.** Let the employer know that you have thought about starting your career at their organization and think there is a place for you to contribute.
- **Find your people!** Network and meet people related to the organization before applying so you can name-drop in your cover letter. Having an ally in the organization can be powerful. Also, use your current network as efficiently as possible: professors, current/past supervisors, fellow club members, professional associations, etc. Using your network will increase the odds of getting an interview.
- **Attend career fairs and other recruiting events that allow you to interact directly with employers.** Interactions that put you directly in contact with recruiters should be considered interviews because they give you opportunities to impress them and let them ask qualifying questions. Those interactions also will give you insight into what they seek in competitive applicants, which allows you to enhance your application materials with specific knowledge.
- **Be a competitive candidate.** Make sure you take the steps to stand out as competitive. Show that your experience is varied and will be an asset to any company or organization. How do you achieve this?
- **Do internships, job shadowing, and related extracurricular experiences in your field.** This not only increases your knowledge and skill base, but also your marketability by connecting you with industry professionals. The more you increase your skills and connections, the higher the probability you have of landing interviews. That's a significant edge.

Resources
- **Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal?**
- **Do Job-seekers with 'White' Names Get More Callbacks than 'Black' Names?**
- **Minorities Who 'Whiten' Job Resumes Get More Interviews**
- **Employers' Replies to Racial Names**
- **Questions Students May Ask to Assess Your Organization's Commitment to DEI**

Sources:
- Columbia University, Center for Career Education
- National Association of Colleges and Employers
- UC Davis, Center for African Diaspora Student Success