

**CAREER DEVELOPMENT**  
**A MANUAL FOR MELP STUDENTS**

**OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES**

**VERMONT LAW SCHOOL**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

This manual serves as a reference for the career development process. It includes both substantive information and sample documents. The substantive information is designed to provide an understanding of the law-related employment environment and the process for obtaining positions within it. The sample documents are examples of both the content and format of resumes, cover letters, thank you notes, etc. Personalize these documents as much as possible and review the additional tips provided on the pages preceding the samples.

Our experience has been that the MELP program attracts an extremely diverse group of individuals. You should therefore view this manual as a place to begin your professional education. You should also plan to spend time meeting with us and reviewing the materials in the Career Resource Room.

We hope that this manual will assist you as you prepare for your entry into the environmental law and policy field. The Office of Career Services stands ready to help you at each stage along the way.

## **BEGINNING THE PROCESS**

Review this manual. It will answer many of the basic questions you have about the process of finding internships and full-time employment. This will leave both you and the Office staff more time to focus on the strategies that are unique to your professional development and individual job search.

The process of identifying a position that will result in your first professional position after VLS will depend on a variety of factors, including your academic and non-academic interests, your pre-VLS education and experience, your grades, the geographic area in which you intend to settle, and the employers' needs for entry level positions. To begin, you may want to consult one of the many books available in the Career Resource Room that address job search strategies. One book that has been helpful to previous MELP students is Environmental Careers by David J. Warner. The book provides an overview of the different professional settings in which an environmental background is necessary. You may also want to spend a few minutes answering the questions contained on the **Keirsey Temperament Sorter**, available at <http://www.keirsey.com/sorter/register.aspx>, a career counseling tool that can be helpful in determining career direction. Lastly, the site <http://www.enviroeducation.com/careers-jobs/> contains information and links covering a range of environmental jobs.

## **THE OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES**

The Office of Career Services is here to assist you in every facet of your professional development -- from defining your career goals to drafting effective resumes and cover letters, from establishing a professional network to obtaining internships and post-graduate employment -- not only while you are a student at Vermont Law School but also during your post-graduate career changes. The Office is not, however, a "placement" office that simply distributes job offers to the students who appear in its doorway. The state of the employment market prevents that from being the case. Furthermore, we believe that we have a responsibility to teach you about the employment market so that you can be independent job seekers throughout your professional career.

Looking for a position requires energy, creativity, and a commitment to the process. Fortunately, opportunities for professional development occur in a variety of settings: in the classroom, in discussions with professionals, in internships, and in the process of learning about yourself as you progress through the Master's program. The Office of Career Services is committed to helping you during this process.

**OFFICE HOURS:** The Office is open on weekdays between 8:00 and 5:00.

**WHERE WE'RE LOCATED:** The Office, including a spacious and well-equipped Career Resource Room, is located on the second floor of Dearing House, above the Barrister's Bookshop on Chelsea Street. If you are unable to navigate the stairs, please call so that we can make alternative arrangements for your convenience.

**WHO WE ARE:**

**ABBY ARMSTRONG, Director of Career Services**  
x1208 / [aarmstrong@vermontlaw.edu](mailto:aarmstrong@vermontlaw.edu)

Abby has worked at VLS in various capacities since graduating with her JD from here in 1984. She has been in the Office of Career Services since 1991, serving as its Director since 1994. Prior to that, she taught Torts, was the Director of the Legal Writing Program, and served as a reference librarian.

**MATTHEW HOUDE, Associate Director of Career Services**  
x1241 / [mhoude@vermontlaw.edu](mailto:mhoude@vermontlaw.edu)

Matthew is a graduate of Dartmouth College and the University of Connecticut Law School. After working in private practice in Connecticut and New Hampshire, Matthew returned to the Upper Valley and joined the Career Services Office in 2003. Matthew also serves in the NH House of Representatives and is primarily focused on our employer outreach and on campus interviewing efforts.

**SHELLY PARKER, Assistant to the Director**  
x2249 / [sparker@vermontlaw.edu](mailto:sparker@vermontlaw.edu)

Shelly has worked in the Career Services Office since 1985. In addition to making sure that the Office runs smoothly, she is responsible for Symplicity, our online job listing database, and coordinates our on campus and employer relations programs.

**BARBARA LERNIHAN, Administrative Assistant**  
x1243 / [blernihan@vermontlaw.edu](mailto:blernihan@vermontlaw.edu)

Barbara has worked in legal education for a number of years and joined the VLS Office of Career Services in 2006. She is the point of first contact for most students in that she schedules appointments, answers questions about our services and helps students with job-related mail merges.

**SERVICES AND RESOURCES**

**1) Individual counseling and career planning** services are available to help MELP students define career goals, draft effective resumes and cover letters, develop job search strategies, improve interviewing techniques, plan course schedules, and to discuss all manner of school and work issues.

**2) Career workshops** are sponsored by Career Services staff on issues including job search strategies for the MELP student. **Panel discussions** on a number of different topics feature practicing attorneys and other professionals who provide insight and advice about entering their fields.

**3) Mock interview opportunities** are available with local environmental professionals and VLS faculty. Every effort is made to pair students with interviewers who have experience in an area of practice that matches the student's interest.

**4) Internships and permanent positions** are posted on Symplicity, our password protected online job posting system, which can be accessed at <http://www.vermontlaw.edu/x1415.xml>.

**5) Library resources** include periodicals posting job and internship openings around the world, directories of information about specific potential employers or employer types, and books that help students define their goals and be more effective in their job search.

**7) Employer outreach** by Office staff is conducted through personal visits, telephone conversations, and written surveys designed to determine the employment needs and concerns of prospective employers throughout the country and to educate them about VLS students.

### **RECOMMENDED TIMETABLE FOR MELP STUDENTS**

#### **August / October**

- Discuss academic schedule with ELC and/or Career Services staff member.
- Meet with a Career Services staff member to discuss and define career plan.
- Prepare or refine resume.
- Become familiar with resources in Career Services and Cornell libraries. Monitor Symplicity and scan employment newsletters (e.g., Environmental Career Opportunities, High Country News,) to learn about ways to use an environmental law and policy background. Your Symplicity password will be sent to your VLS email in August.
- Explore the possibility of doing an academic internship in the spring.
- Attend MELP Career Workshops.

#### **November**

- Meet with Career Services staff to identify potential internship sites. Set up internship by the end of November
- Using Directories and other resources in the Career Services and Cornell libraries, begin to identify potential employers in preparation for informational interviewing.
- Send cover letters and resumes seeking informational interviews during the winter break.

#### **December / January**

- Focus on exams. Enjoy the holiday break.
- Meet with alumni/ae or other informational contacts to learn more about the life of an environmental professional and how you can get to be one. Send thank you letters expressing interest in being considered for positions that might arise in the next six months. Keep record of individuals who expressed and interest in your professional development.

#### **February / March**

- Meet with Career Services to discuss status of job search efforts.
- If applicable, enjoy internship and get professional reference.
- If you haven't come in for an initial meeting to discuss future plans and to review your resume and draft cover letter, OR if you haven't prepared a resume and begun to identify potential employers, do so now.

#### **April**

- Send cover letters and resumes to potential employers requesting informational interviews in May.
- Follow up with telephone calls. Schedule informational interviews for the break between spring and summer semesters.

### **May**

- Interview with individuals who work in your area of interest and/or geographical area to learn more about the availability of positions and hiring practices, and to develop interviewing skills. Send thank you notes that express interest in being considered for positions that might arise during the summer.
- Enjoy break.

### **June**

- Meet with Career Services staff to discuss status of job search.
- Regularly scan employment newsletters. Apply to positions of interest listed in newsletters and to previously identified employers. Follow up with telephone calls. Schedule interviews for July 4th Break.
- Seek career advice from summer faculty who are environmental professionals.
- Consider pursuing a 4th semester MELP Internship.

### **July / August**

- Continue to scan newsletters, directories, etc. and apply to relevant employers.
- Meet with Career Services staff to discuss and define post-MELP plan in the event that you do not have a job by the time you leave South Royalton.
- Coordinate a 4th semester MELP Internship with the ELC and Career Services if you decide to pursue one. Register for credits with the Registrar's Office. Work with Financial Aid and the Business Office to take care of financial concerns, including health insurance.
- Confirm graduation status with Registrar's Office before the end of summer session.

### **September**

- Begin 4<sup>th</sup> semester internship.
- Notify Alumni Office of your post-MELP destination and address so we can locate you for job information.

## **NETWORK DEVELOPMENT**

Approximately 60-80% of all law-related jobs are part of the “hidden job market.” These jobs are never advertised and include vacancies that are about to occur. In order to find out about these jobs, you need to be in the information loop. How do you get into the loop? By contacting people you know *and people you are willing to meet*. We can help you identify contacts and can give you names of people we know but, ultimately, it's up to you to develop a professional network. Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams by Kimm Alayne Walton (although it is written for law students) is a good resource particularly if you feel that you do not know anyone who could possibly be a helpful contact or you feel that you do not have the necessary skills or the right personality to develop a network of your own. Here are a few tips to get you started:

### **IDENTIFY POTENTIAL RESOURCE PEOPLE**

Make a list of your current contacts and use them as a resource for additional contacts. Some potential contacts include:

- \* Family members
- \* Family friends
- \* Social/recreational contacts
- \* Current and previous work contacts
- \* Alumni/ae from your undergraduate institution and from VLS (both those who are known to you and those whom you discover are doing what you want to do and/or are where you want to be) - Contact your Alumni/ae and Career Services Offices for help
- \* Acquaintances from volunteer activities, professional associations, and religious/civic groups
- \* Current and former professors

### **RULES FOR NETWORKING**

\* **Ask your contact for information, not a job.** Your contact will be most helpful if you ask her/him things s/he can say “yes” to. Ask for information about career opportunities, advice, a critique of your resume, etc.

\* **State your purpose early.** Your contact may have been burned in the past by people who claimed to be seeking information but asked for a job when the contact's defenses were down. The contact is not hiding jobs from you. If s/he is favorably impressed, s/he will be certain to pass on information about potential jobs to you.

\* **Make sure your contact has all relevant information on you.** Provide her/him with a resume and update it as necessary.

\* **When you meet with a contact, focus on her/him, not on yourself and your needs.** You have chosen these people for a good reason - they are in the practice area you want to explore, they are employed by an organization you'd love to work for, they live in the area of the country where you want to practice . . . . Ask them questions about what they do and how they got there.

\* **Give positive feedback.** The contact has provided you with a valuable service. Make sure to acknowledge this both in person and in writing.

\* **Keep good records.** Know with whom you spoke, when, and the substance of the conversations. Then, when you contact them again, you will remember what you spoke about.

## **THE MELP JOB SEARCH**

### **MELP Internships**

An integral part of the MELP program and a key to your long-term career success is gaining real world experience through internships. Our students explore environmental law, science, and policy in a wide variety of settings both locally and worldwide. Activities may include counseling, drafting regulations and legislation, preparing legal memoranda, drafting or commenting on environmental or land use plans, and fieldwork related to wetlands, endangered species, and other natural resource management and preservation issues. To learn more about the process of obtaining a MELP internship, go to:

[www.vermontlaw.edu/Academics/Clinics\\_and\\_Experiential\\_Programs/MELP\\_and\\_LLM\\_Internships.htm](http://www.vermontlaw.edu/Academics/Clinics_and_Experiential_Programs/MELP_and_LLM_Internships.htm).

Career Services works closely with the ELC to help MELP students set up internships that are part of your overall career plan.

Having said that, most MELP students pursue one of three options after finishing 12 months of the degree program. They either:

1. pursue an additional graduate degree at VLS or another school;
2. seek part-time or full-time employment; or
3. complete the MELP degree via the 4<sup>th</sup> semester internship.

Review the following considerations and determine which option makes the most sense for you.

### **Pursue an additional graduate degree at VLS or another school:**

Make sure you earn at least 30 credits by the end of the summer session (as well as fulfill your distributional requirements) in order to finish the MELP degree. In addition, update your professional resume for future use – you never know when you might need it!

### **Seek part-time or full-time employment:**

Begin by considering the following career criteria:

1. the geographic location in which you want to live,
2. the type of employer for which you want to work (non-profit, government, etc.), and
3. the practice area that you want to pursue (water quality, land conservation, energy, etc.).

Once you have a general idea of your criteria, begin researching employers/jobs:

- Nonprofit sector, [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org), [www.ecojobs.com](http://www.ecojobs.com) (ask Shelly Parker for the password), [www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org), <http://www.enviroeducation.com/careers-jobs/> or monitor organization websites
- Federal government sector, [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov), [www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov)
- State/Local government sector, [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) + keywords, e.g. "Alaska", [www.nlc.org](http://www.nlc.org)
- Private sector, [www.ejobs.org](http://www.ejobs.org), [www.envirodirectory.com](http://www.envirodirectory.com), [www.enviroyellowpages.com](http://www.enviroyellowpages.com)

Most employers utilize a two- to three-month hiring timeframe, so you should begin applying to jobs between May and July. You will need a resume and cover letter to apply to appropriate job openings – see the following sections for advice on how to draft a resume and cover letter.

### **Complete the MELP degree via the 4<sup>th</sup> semester internship:**

The 4<sup>th</sup> semester is the shorthand name for the process of completing the MELP degree by doing an MELP internship during the 4<sup>th</sup> semester or the second fall semester. The process for completing the internship is no different than any other MELP internship; it is just the timing of it that is different. Begin by reviewing the career criteria above and researching potential internship sponsors. After identifying employers that meet your criteria, prioritize them and note why you want to intern with each – this will make your first contact with the employer a fruitful one. You will need a resume and cover letter to contact employers about the internship. Ideally, you need to secure your fall semester internship **by the end of summer session** as well as register for credits with the Registrar's Office and submit a signed contract to the ELC **by the beginning of the fall semester**.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Semester Checklist

If you would like to pursue the 4th semester, make sure you do the following:

1. Review the MELP Internship Guidelines at the link provided above.
1. Identify organizations with which you would like to intern during the 4th semester.
  - a. NOTE that you can set up the MELP internship with any organization, **regardless of whether they have an available internship listed**.
  - b. For help identifying an organization, see the resources available in Career Services.
2. See a Career Services counselor for resume review and/or potential internship organization ideas.
2. Contact organizations to request an internship by:
  - a. Calling a potential internship sponsor at the organization of your choice;
  - b. Explaining who you are and why you are calling;
  - c. Providing them with an overview of the MELP Internship Program;
  - d. Discussing your areas of interest and possible internship projects; and
  - e. If they are interested, identifying who would act as the internship sponsor.
3. Identify a faculty sponsor and discuss the journal requirements with them.
4. Draft the internship contract and submit to Anne Mansfield in the ELC for review.
5. Complete the final MELP Internship Contract, including signatures from your faculty sponsor and internship sponsor, and submit to the ELC and the Registrar's Office – **no later than the end of the fall drop/add period**.
6. Visit the Registrar's Office to register for the MELP Internship for the fall semester – **no later than the end of the fall drop/add period**.
  - a. NOTE that you must complete **45 hours** of work per internship credit.
  - b. NOTE that you must register for at least **3** credits to be considered enrolled, to defer your loans, and to apply for financial aid.
  - c. NOTE that you must register for at least **5** credits to keep health insurance.
  - d. NOTE that you may not register for more than **9** total internship credits.
  - e. NOTE that you may not register for more than **36** total MELP credits.
7. If you would like financial aid during the 4th semester, submit the following documents to the Financial Aid Office:
  - a. Vermont Law School Financial Aid Application
  - b. FAFSA
  - c. A copy of your Federal Tax Return

8. Visit the Business Office **after** you have registered to talk about administrative costs, including health insurance.
3. If you have questions, contact Anne Mansfield in the ELC or Abby Armstrong in Career Services.

### PREPARING YOUR RESUME

#### GUIDELINES

A resume is a brief, organized statement of your education, skills, abilities, and accomplishments **as they relate to the job you are seeking**. It is not an exhaustive listing of everything that you have done. Rather, it should give the employer a concise, honest, and positive impression and should be aesthetically pleasing. It should make the employer want to meet you.

The resume should be brief because employers initially spend only moments reviewing it. If you do not capture the reader's attention in seconds, you will be rejected before you are interviewed. **The general rule is no more than one page of resume for each ten years of relevant and substantive work experience.**

#### CONTENTS OF A LAW-RELATED RESUME

##### **1) Name, Full Current Address, and Telephone Number**

- \* Always put these at the top for easy reference.
- \* Include your **Home/Permanent Address** in another state if, for example, you want to return to that state after graduation.

##### **2) Educational Background**

- \* List the name, city and state, dates of attendance and degree conferred/to be conferred in reverse chronological order.
- \* List all academic honors received and significant activities in which you participated.
- \* Honors such as *cum laude* should appear in lower case letters and be italicized.
- \* Include your rank and/or GPA if you are in the top 1/3 of the class (this is a general rule; there are exceptions in both directions).
- \* Consider listing some or all of the environmental courses you have taken.
- \* **The education section should almost always come first unless you have 5 or more years of experience directly related to the job you are seeking.**
- \* List your high school only if you are seeking employment in that area and you want to convey strong ties to the community, if the school has a regional or national reputation, or if you are writing to an alumnus/a of the school.

##### **3) Work Experience**

- \* List name of employer, city and state, job title and dates of employment.
- \* Usually list in **reverse chronological order**, but exceptions can occasionally be made if earlier job was significantly more impressive, professional, or relevant.
- \* **A job does not need to be paid to qualify as relevant experience. Include internships, etc.**
- \* Use active verbs to describe duties (i.e. say "Researched and analyzed . . ." rather than "My duties included researching and analyzing . . .")
- \* List significant activities/duties that demonstrate research, writing, analytical, managerial, communication, leadership, regulatory, etc. skills.
- \* If possible, list your job description as a series of bulleted phrases or a very short paragraph (full sentences are not necessary). It is much simpler for an employer to digest information in a short amount of time in these formats than if the description is written in a large paragraph of full sentences. Remember, if reading your resume is too much work -- (if you don't capture the employer's attention in

less than a minute) -- then the employer will not read all of the things you have done and you will not be invited for an interview.

- \* It is not necessary to list every duty performed. Give the employer a snapshot of your most significant tasks and make her/him want to ask for more.

- \* It is not always necessary to include a description of every work experience, although you generally should not leave large blocks of time unaccounted for. You may want to label this section "Relevant Work Experience" to indicate that you have omitted some work experiences.

- \* It's okay to label the section "Employment," "Experience," "Relevant Experience," etc.

#### **4) Awards and Honors**

- \* Although these can occur under a separate heading, it is generally clearer and more concise to put those awards that are directly related to a particular school or employer directly underneath that school/employer rather than in a separate section.

#### **5) Publications**

- \* Because most of the jobs that MELP graduates obtain require solid written communication skills, evidence that you write well is invaluable. Nearly any publication is impressive enough to be included in your resume.

#### **6) Military Service**

- \* Military service can be a positive addition to your resume, particularly if it occurred within the last 4 or 5 years and if you had a position of leadership or authority or received special awards or commendations.

#### **7) Special Abilities and Skills/Community Involvement/Personal Interests/Hobbies**

- \* Being a good employee requires more than a thorough grounding in academic principles. If you have special skills that enhance your marketability, then list them.

- \* For example, you may want to include proficiency in a foreign language, professional certifications or licenses, etc.

- \* List significant community involvement/volunteer activities

- \* List personal interests/activities that are important to you, especially if they are slightly unusual and may spark an employer's interest (e.g., private pilot's license, adobe mason, etc.). This gives the employer a sense of who you are as a person.

- \* **CAVEAT:** While it is valuable to show that you take an interest in the world around you and to give the employer a glimpse into the things that are personally important to you, your goal in submitting a resume is to survive the initial selection process. Therefore, involvement with political or religious organizations and controversial groups can be a two-edged sword since it may have an effect on your "fit" with the potential employer. You may well want to include these organizations on your resume, but think about your audience and make sure that inclusion on or exclusion from the resume is a very conscious decision.

#### **8) DO NOT INCLUDE**

- \* **"Objective"** or **"Goal"** statements.

- \* **Earnings.** Don't include salary history or demands unless the employer specifically requests it.

- \* **"References Available on Request."** Including this line on a resume is a waste of space and is unnecessary (you will provide references if they request them!)

- \* **"Resume."** There is no need to put this label at top of page.

**PROOFREAD! PROOFREAD! PROOFREAD!**

## **SAMPLE MELP RESUME**

### **AMOS HORN**

P.O. Box 3  
South Royalton, VT 05068  
(802) 763-3333

[ahorn@vermontlaw.edu](mailto:ahorn@vermontlaw.edu)

(NOTE: If your permanent address is in an area of the country where you intend to return after graduation, included that address as well, and label them, e.g., School Address and Permanent Address)

### **EDUCATION**

**Vermont Law School**, South Royalton, VT

Master of Environmental Law and Policy Candidate August 2008

- GPA 3.4/4.0
- Member, Environmental Law Society
- Environmental course work includes: Water Law, Environmental Law, Environmental Health Law, Risk Assessment, CERCLA, and Toxic Torts

**Boston University**, Boston, MA

B.A., *cum laude*, Political Science, May 2006

- Minor: Ecology
- 36 credits in Natural Sciences
- Teaching Assistant, Chemistry, 2005-2006

**University of York**, York, England

Spent Fall 2004 studying English literature and comparative economics

### **RELEVANT EMPLOYMENT**

**U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Inspection Service**, Pittsburgh, PA

Quarantine Aid, August 2006-July 2007

- Served as environmental monitor on federal pesticide spray projects throughout PA
- Wrote "Environmental Monitor's Field Guide"
- Wrote environmental assessments, which included NEPA and ESA research

**South Shore Natural Science Center**, Norwell, MA

Intern, Summer 2005

- Researched and wrote articles for environmental organization's quarterly newsletter
- Assisted executive director in areas of scenic protection and land acquisition

**Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group**, Boston, MA

Intern, Spring 2006

- Researched proposed legislation on solid waste management
- Wrote fact sheets on recycling for legislative and community groups

### **INTERESTS**

- Member, Habitat for Humanity, Vermont Law School Chapter
- Member, Big Brother/Big Sister Program, 2007-Present
- Volunteer, SMART, an organization promoting Aids Awareness, 2003-2005
- Interests include Cross Country Skiing, Hiking, and Photography

**ANNE MANSFIELD**  
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## **EDUCATION**

**Vermont Law School**, South Royalton, VT

*Master of Environmental Law and Policy Candidate*, August 2009

- Emphasis on Energy Law and Policy and Climate Change
- Researching and writing a paper on carbon sequestration

**Middlebury College**, Middlebury, VT

*B.A. summa cum laude, Chemistry and Physics, May 2005*

- GPA: 3.99
- Studied language and history of Spain at the University of Granada, Spain (Fall 2004)

## **WORK EXPERIENCE**

**Environmental Defense**, Boulder, CO

Program Assistant, August, 2007 – June 2009

- Gave presentations about the health impacts of air pollution
- Assisted with state legislative work including lobbying legislators on energy efficiency and clean energy alternatives
- Coordinated 2008 biannual conference on energy, which brought together legislators, business leaders, municipal officials, educators, and environmental professionals
- Assisted in development of organizational strategic plan and annual operating plan, and prepared monthly board reports for program staff
- Managed and edited quarterly newsletter and monthly e-newsletter for members
- Implemented sustainable practices in the office and wrote monthly articles on sustainability

**Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG)**, Montpelier, VT

Field Manager,

- Fundraised and expanded membership in Vermont's largest grassroots organization
- Worked on campaigns involving energy, health care and affordable housing

## **SKILLS AND INTERESTS**

*Foreign Languages*

- Fluent in Spanish; Basic comprehension of Portuguese and French

*Independent Travel*

- Visited Latin America, Europe, and South America

*Outdoor Activities*

- Enjoy hiking, camping and kayaking
- Currently training for an "Ironman" triathlon

## **PREPARING YOUR COVER LETTERS**

### **GUIDELINES**

The cover letter is in many ways the most important component of your application materials. It introduces you to the prospective employer, it explains your interest in the organization, it highlights why you would be an asset to the organization, and it serves as the first sample the employer sees of your writing. The cover letter should reflect a considerable degree of thought regarding why you are writing this particular employer. It should also spark the reader's interest so that s/he wants to review your resume. There is no one perfect cover letter. The sample cover letters included in this manual should be used only as guides; yours should be better. Keep the following in mind as you draft and re-draft yours:

#### **ADDRESS THE LETTER TO A REAL PERSON**

- \* Always find the name of the person to whom you should write.
- \* Avoid using "Dear Hiring Partner" or "Dear Madam/Sir."

#### **IF POSSIBLE, USE THE FIRST PARAGRAPH TO GRAB THE READER'S ATTENTION**

- \* If you are writing at the recommendation of someone known to the reader, say so.
- \* If you are contacting the employer because, for example, you have recently read an article about their involvement in a certain area of interest to you, let them know it.
- \* It is generally a good idea to let the reader know (briefly) who you are and why you are writing, so it is okay to begin the letter this way as well.
- \* Let the reader know if you are responding to an announcement, asking for an informational interview, etc.
- \* This first paragraph can be very brief (1-2 sentences).

#### **LET THEM KNOW WHY YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THEM**

- \* Employers want to know why you are writing to them. Be as specific as possible.
- \* A basic recitation that you know what the employer does and how it relates to your interest is generally sufficient. The more you demonstrate your awareness and relate it to your goals, the better.
- \* If possible, show, and support, your interest in the area where the employer is located.

#### **EXPLAIN WHY YOU ARE QUALIFIED FOR THE JOB**

- \* Include a paragraph that highlights the reasons (academic and experiential) that you are qualified for the position.
- \* Use this paragraph to entice the reader to look at your resume. It should not be a mere recitation of the resume. Rather, it should emphasize and develop those areas of the resume that make you a desirable candidate.
- \* **Don't draw attention to your weaknesses** by trying to apologize or explain them away. Put your best foot forward and state your strengths in a positive, concise manner.
- \* Blow your own horn, but do so in a professional manner. Don't be cocky.
- \* Don't be conclusory. For example, if you want to let the employer know that you are a self-starter who needs little supervision, don't just say it -- back up the statement with obvious examples.

#### **PROPOSE THE NEXT STEP**

- \* Let the reader know if you intend to be in the area during a certain time period.
- \* If you are not responding to a specific job announcement, you can indicate that you will call within a certain time frame to set up an appointment, to determine a convenient time for a telephone interview, or to confirm your plans to visit when you are in town. Don't presume that the reader will contact you.

#### **MAKE YOUR WRITING LIVELY BUT AVOID BEING CUTE/AVANT-GARDE/GIMMICKY**

**PROOFREAD! PROOFREAD! PROOFREAD!**

## SAMPLE COVER LETTER FORMAT

Return Address

Date

Name  
Title  
Address

Dear Name of Person:

Paragraph #1 Explain why you are writing and include a sentence or two about your strengths and interests. For example: Please accept my application for a position as an intern with Vermont Natural Resources Council for the summer of 2008. I am a Master's candidate at Vermont Law School with strong research and writing skills and a keen interest in gaining experience in environmental advocacy and community education.

Paragraph #2 Explain in greater detail why you want to work with this employer. Make sure to explain what is appealing to you about the organization. In order for this paragraph to be effective, you must first learn something about the organization. The closer you match your interests with their needs, the more interested they will be in you. It is important to address the organization's location, particularly if it is a place to which you plan to move after school.

Paragraph #3 Address why you are the person for the job by focusing on your academic and experiential background. Include your academic strengths (solid grades, solid writing skills, course work in a specific area, etc.). The goal is to demonstrate to the audience that you have the necessary preparation to perform the responsibilities of the job. To the extent that you have relevant experience, this is the place to discuss it. Avoid conclusory statements ("I am a self starter") without also providing specific examples that substantiate the statement. In addition, try to avoid simply repeating what is on your resume. Rather, take the opportunity to "spin" your education and experience so it is clear why and how your background has prepared you for this job.

Paragraph #4 This is usually boilerplate. You may want to mention here that you will contact them "during the week of . . ." (usually 2-3 weeks) -- and then make sure to do so! It can also serve as the best place to let them know that you will be in the area on a certain date and would be available to interview with them.

Sincerely (or Very truly yours),

*[sign your name here]*

Type Your Name Here

(NOTE: You may wish to combine paragraphs 3 & 4, especially if your opening paragraph highlights the reasons you are interested in the employer)

**SAMPLE MELP COVER LETTER**

P.O. Box 3  
South Royalton, VT 05068  
(802) 763-3333

November 11, 2008

Matthew Hollar, Esq.  
Hollar & Evans, PC  
One William Penn Square  
Pittsburgh, PA 15241

Dear Mr. Hollar:

I am writing at the recommendation of Elizabeth Tait, a former colleague from the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Pittsburgh. I am currently pursuing a Master of Environmental Law and Policy at Vermont Law School and am interested in obtaining an internship with Hollar & Evans.

I am intrigued by the possibility of working with your firm because of its focus on environmental compliance and litigation. Your work in Miller v. EcoDynamics coincides with my own concern that Pennsylvania's waters be protected from pesticides and other toxins. In addition, after working on environmental issues as they arise in the public sector, I am particularly interested in experiencing an environmental practice in a private law firm setting. I believe that Hollar & Evans will provide me with excellent exposure to this area of environmental law.

As the enclosed resume indicates, I am well qualified to assume the responsibilities of an intern position with Hollar & Evans. In addition to my work with the Animal and Plant Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, I have completed environmental internships with the South Shore Natural Science Center and the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group. While at Vermont Law School, I have taken many of the specialized environmental law offerings, including Water Law and Risk Assessment, which have earned the school the reputation of providing one of the finest environmental legal educations in the nation.

I appreciate your consideration of the enclosed resume and would welcome the opportunity to learn more about your firm. I will be in the Pittsburgh area on January 2-6 and would be available to meet with you at that time. If another date is more convenient, please contact me and I will change my schedule accordingly. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

*Sign name here*

Amos Horn

**SAMPLE MELP COVER LETTER 2**

P O Box 101  
South Royalton, VT 05068

May 23, 2008

The Office of Molly Hyde  
Landscape Architects and Planners  
P O Box 316  
Montpelier, VT 05055

Dear Ms Hyde:

Please accept my application for the part-time planning position available in your office. I am a graduate of Vermont Law School's Master of Environmental Law and Policy program, with strong writing skills and an interest in socially responsible design and community planning.

My study of land use law at Vermont Law School illustrated, among other things, the necessity of balancing land use and resource preservation. Through smart growth initiatives and socially responsible design, I believe environmental planning is effective in achieving that balance. I have recently been involved with a local brownfields project as a voluntary environmental consultant, and have enjoyed the collaboration between interested parties as well as the complex process involved in reclaiming a degraded landscape. As a result, I look forward to continuing my professional development with an office committed to the complexity of environmental planning.

I have developed strong writing skills, which complement my professional experience and academic successes. I graduated from VLS with cum laude honors and received the highest grade in my Environmental Research and Writing class. During the spring of 2007, I interned as a freelance reporter with the Vermont Environmental Monitor, covering Vermont regulatory issues including interstate interchange protection, storm water permitting, basin planning in the White River Watershed, and sustainable energy initiatives in the 2007 legislature. In addition, I have extensive experience writing and publishing newsletters, outreach materials, and online bulletins through my employment at the Wolf River Conservancy. As a result, my education and experience would enable me to make a substantial contribution in a planning position for your office.

I appreciate your consideration of the attached résumé and would welcome the opportunity to learn more about your office. I will contact you during the week of June 6 in this regard. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sign your name here

John Baxter

**SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW REQUEST LETTER**

P.O. Box 4  
South Royalton, VT 05068  
(802) 763-4444

November 11, 2007

Erin R. Hall, Esq.  
Colby, Robinson & Hall  
365 Alpine Boulevard, Suite 476  
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Ms. Hall:

Professor Kate Bosley suggested that I contact you regarding employment opportunities for environmental professionals in Denver. As a lifelong resident of Colorado, I intend to return to the Denver upon receiving my Master's degree from Vermont Law School in August 2008.

As an undergraduate at the University of Denver, I had the opportunity to serve as an intern with the Office of the Colorado Attorney General, Environmental Enforcement Division. In addition, during my second semester at Vermont Law School, I completed an internship with the Natural Resources Board, where I honed my research and writing skills. While these experiences have heightened my interest in environmental enforcement issues and the role of non-lawyer professionals in such offices, I am also interested in any information you can provide about potential positions in the private sector.

I have enclosed a copy of my resume to give you a better sense of my background and will call your office on Friday, November 18 to discuss this request further. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Sign name here*

George Higgin

## APPLICATION MATERIALS CHECKLIST

A complete application may include a resume, cover letter, transcript, writing sample, and reference list or letters of recommendation.

1. Your **resume**:

- should be printed single-sided on bond paper; and
- should not exceed one page in length.

2. Your **cover letter**:

- should be printed on bond paper;
- should include the employer's complete address:  
John Doe, Esq. (name, title)  
Doe Law Firm (organization name)  
123 Main Street (street address)  
Lyme, NH 03768 (city, state zip code)
- should be signed in blue or black ink; and
- should not exceed one page.

3. Your **transcript**:

- is a copy of your grade report, which you may obtain from the Registrar's Office; and
- should be copied on plain, copy paper.

4. Your **writing sample**:

- should be no more than 10 pages long, ideally 3 – 5 pages; and
- should be printed on plain, copy paper.

If your writing sample is longer than 10 pages, you should:

- excerpt a section of the writing sample that highlights your legal analysis skills; and
- include a cover sheet, describing your sample so the reader can quickly understand the issue being discussed. Include your name at the top of the cover sheet.

5. Your **references list**:

- should be printed on bond paper;
- should list three references, including their name, title, mailing address, phone number, and email address. Include your resume heading at the top of your references list.

6. **Letters of recommendation** (which may be required for some job applications):

- should be requested well in advance of the deadline date.
- provide your recommenders with the job description, contact information, and the deadline date.

7. **Mailing applications**

- Completed applications may be mailed directly in a business or manila envelope. The address should be typed on the outside or typed on a label affixed to the outside of the envelope. Unless otherwise noted, the **deadline date** is the "received by" date, not the postmarked date.

## THANK YOU LETTERS

Thank you letters should be timely and tailored to each interviewer. Tailor your letters by including a specific reference of your discussion with each person you met during the interview and send that letter in a timely manner. Handwritten notes are generally viewed as a more personal form of written communication. Send thank you notes to all the people with whom you met or spoke with by telephone

for advice or referrals as part of the networking/informational interviewing process. Use the following sample thank you letters as a guide to draft your own thank you letters:

**SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER**

P.O. Box 999  
South Royalton, VT 05068  
(802) 555-1212  
akane@vermontlaw.edu

November 2, 2008

Ms. Linda Smith  
Vermont Natural Resources Council  
333 State Street  
Montpelier, Vermont 22222

Dear Ms. Smith:

It was a pleasure meeting you today to discuss the possibility of becoming an intern with the Vermont Natural Resources Council. I genuinely appreciated and enjoyed the opportunity to discuss my background and goals with someone whose career path has so closely paralleled my own aspirations.

I would like to reaffirm my interest in this position. My extended undergraduate internship with the New Jersey PIRG gave me a solid grounding in one form of public interest practice, and helped pique my interest in energy issues. You can be confident that the commitment you seek is matched in my established and active desire to succeed as a legal professional.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,

Sign name here

Adam Kane

**SAMPLE HANDWRITTEN THANK YOU NOTE**

January 5, 2009

*Dear Ms. Smith,*

*Thank you for taking the time as a Vermont Law School alumnus to speak with me today concerning my employment search in the Washington, DC area. I followed your advice immediately with a telephone call to Mary Washington at the EPA and have an appointment for next week.*

*Professor Longhorn sends his regards and would like to hear from you: (802) 831-3333. I look forward to meeting you in person and will contact you when I reach Washington, DC to arrange a time that is convenient for you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Adam Kane*

## THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

You applied for a job and were selected for an interview. What do you do now? How do you prepare? What should you expect? If you are offered an interview, the employer has already determined that you have met the threshold requirements for the position to which you are applying. The interviewer's objective then is to assess: (1) whether you are the most qualified applicant for the position, and (2) whether you would "fit" into a particular work environment. Thus, you must persuade the interviewer that you are the applicant most qualified and best suited for the position.

- a. **Preparing for an Interview:** The key to successful interviewing is thorough preparation. Thorough preparation involves both self-assessment and research. Self-assessment means understanding yourself so that you can effectively articulate your goals (personal and professional) and your skills. Research in this context means learning about the employer so that you understand the employer's needs and objectives.
- b. **Assessing Your Preferences, Values, Interests and Skills:** In order to determine if a particular employment opportunity will be a good fit for you, you must have a clear understanding of your goals, preferred work style, the type of environment in which you feel comfortable working, the values you consider important in your work, the type of work in which you are interested, and your strengths and weaknesses. In addition, many of the questions which you are asked in an interview will focus on your preferences, values, interests and skills. Therefore, to present yourself effectively in an interview, you must be able to articulate your personal and professional goals, why you are interested in the employer and its work, and why you are qualified for the position for which you are interviewing.
- c. **Developing A Personal Marketing Plan:** An interview provides you with an opportunity to demonstrate to the employer that you are the best applicant for the position. However, depending upon the nature of the interview, you may only have a limited amount of time to sell yourself to the interviewer. It is essential, therefore, that you develop a marketing strategy which will enable you to effectively "put your best foot forward" within the given time constraints. You will present yourself most effectively to an employer if you use the interview to tell the employer why, based on your skills and experiences, you are the best applicant for the position. Before the interview, you should go through your background and highlight your major relevant accomplishments and transferable skills. Be prepared to deal with any negative aspects of your application, such as poor grades or major gaps in your professional backgrounds. Practice stating the points you want to make about yourself to the interviewer, whether or not they specifically ask about these things. The interview is a discussion, not an oral presentation where you are allotted a certain amount of uninterrupted time to present your case. Do not assume that the interviewer will ask you questions to elicit the information that is most important for you to communicate.
- d. **Researching Employers:** Before you interview with an employer, you must do your research so that you understand the nature of the employer's work and the qualities and skills which it seeks in an applicant. Researching an employer thoroughly will enable you to feel more confident and at ease during the interview. By obtaining general information about an employer's practice, policies, philosophies and clients, you will be able to ask educated questions during the interview. Moreover, an interviewer will be impressed by your knowledge of, and interest in, the employer. Just as employers screen résumés and interview only a select number of applicants, you too should carefully review materials on employers and target those whose goals are similar to yours.
- e. **Items to Bring to an Interview:**
  - i. **Résumé**

- ii. **References**
  - iii. **Transcripts**
  - iv. **Writing Sample:** Bring a writing sample that was derived either (1) through the school's writing program or other legal courses or (2) in the course of employment. Before submitting work derived from a job, such as a memorandum, you must request the employer's permission to use the sample. Your writing sample should be approximately five pages in length. If the sample is an excerpt from a longer paper, place at the top of the first page the origin of the excerpt.
- f. **The Interview:** The first five minutes set the tone for the remainder of the interview. Therefore in these five minutes you should complete the following:
- i. **Greet the Interviewer by Name**
  - ii. **Firmly Shake the Interviewer's Hand**
  - iii. **Make Good Eye Contact**
  - iv. **Following the Hand Shake, Begin the Conversation with a Discussion of a Current Event or an Item of Commonality Between You and the Interviewer:** The rest of the interview should be an active dialogue between you and the interviewer(s). Below is a sample list of questions that interviewers generally pose during the interview:
    - a. What interests you most about our organization?
    - b. Have you made a decision about the city where you ultimately wish to work? Why?
    - c. How would you describe yourself? Tell me about yourself.
    - d. What qualities do you have that will make you a successful intern? Why would you be a good fit for our organization?
    - e. What would you consider to be your greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses? Why should I hire you?
    - f. If I called your most recent employer, what three things would they most likely say about you?
    - g. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Are the most significant? Why? What did you learn most from a particular experience?
    - h. What is the greatest obstacle that you have overcome in school/your life/career? What is the most difficult decision you have ever had to make?
    - i. With what other kinds of employers are you interviewing? Do you have any pending job offers? If so, where?
    - j. Is there anything I should know about you that we have not covered? Is there anything about yourself you want to add?
    - k. What persuaded you to pursue the Master's program?
    - l. What areas of environmental law particularly interest you? Why?
    - m. What is your basic career objective?
    - n. Where do you plan to be and what will you be doing five years after graduation? Ten years?
    - o. In what kinds of permanent employment are you interested? What are you looking for in a summer job?
    - p. Under what conditions do you work most effectively? (Do you prefer to work independently or with others? How do you respond to guidance and supervision?)

### **CONCLUSION**

We hope you find the information in this manual helpful as you approach your MELP job search. Please contact Abby Armstrong in Career Services if you have suggestions as to how we can improve it.