A GUIDE FOR EDUCATION MAJORS:
Writing Cover Letters, Resumes and the Online Application Process

WORKFORCE READINESS:

EXPLORE | EXPERIENCE | ENGAGE | EMERGE

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WRITING EFFECTIVE COVER LETTERS

What is a Cover Letter

The cover letter is one of the most important documents in the job search process. It communicates to the school district why you are the best candidate for the position. While the resume must be a concise, hard-hitting summary of all you have to offer, the cover letter offers you an opportunity to stand out as an individual and highlights and expands on the accomplishments/experiences listed in your resume.

Additionally, the cover letter provides the first written correspondence with a prospective employer or contact. Thus, it is critical that your cover letter communicate your skills and experiences in an articulate, well-organized way. In some cases, telling a compelling story that has influenced you to pursue a career in teaching or has made an impact on you can make you memorable and stand out from other candidates.

Goals of the Cover Letter

- To express your interest in the organization and purpose for writing.
- To show how your education, experience and accomplishments directly relate to the position/district.
- To demonstrate your interest in the school district and explain how you can add value.
- To suggest a possible meeting between you and the district to discuss your qualifications further.

Cover Letter Guidelines

- Type the letter; never send a hand written cover letter.
- Your cover letter must be error free. Check grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Display your contact information in the same way as is displayed on your resume so your documents appear consistent with your own letterhead.
- Always address your letter to a specific person, preferably, the person who is doing the hiring. If you are unsure of the appropriate name or title, call the district office to ask or visit the district’s website for the information. If you cannot find a name, use “Dear Administrator” or “Dear Hiring Manager.”
- Target your cover letter to the district to which you are applying; avoid generic letters. Do research on the district so you can address why you are interested in working there as well as how you will make a positive impact.
- Keep your letter short and concise—about 3 to 4 paragraphs. Do not exceed one page.
- Avoid clichés, slang and jargon.
- Always be positive by stressing past accomplishments and future value.
- Use good quality, bond paper – white, cream or gray if sending it through the mail. Match it with the color of your resume.
- Avoid passive voice. Use action verbs to describe your experience.
COVER LETTER FORMAT

Your contact information should be written in your own letterhead/brand style. Include:

- Name
- Address
- City, State, Zip
- Telephone Number
- Email

Date of Letter

Contact's Name, Title
School Name/Department
Street Address
City, State, and Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Contact's Last Name:

- Address to a specific person if possible. Be sure to use proper title.
- Always use a formal opening; never use a first name only

Opening Paragraph:

- Explain why you are writing
- Explain how you found out about the position (i.e. a personal contact, website listing)
- Provide some other information that will entice the reader to continue reading the letter
- If you were referred by someone in the district, include that person’s name in the first paragraph

Body Paragraph(s): could be two, three or four paragraphs

- Discuss academic background and/or training
- Emphasize accomplishments and recognition
- Discuss relevant skills, student teaching experience and other relevant experiences working with kids
- Demonstrate how your background/experiences are a match for the district and how you can add value
- If a career changer, communicate your motivation for becoming a teacher

Closing Paragraph:

- Politely request an interview
- Thank the contact for their time, consideration
- Express positive match
- Draw a connection between you and the district and explain why you want to work there

Sincerely, (leave 4 line spaces after sincerely)

Your signature/electronic signature here

Type Full Name
Enclosure if mailing letter
March 5, 2010

Dr. Rita Johnson, Director of Personnel
XYZ School District
375 Fullerton Street
Chicago, IL 60606

Dear Dr. Johnson,

I am writing in response to an advertisement on your district’s Web page for a 7th grade teaching position for the 2011-2012 academic year. I am particularly interested in your school district because I recently completed my student teaching in an academically and socioeconomically diverse school such as yours. I believe I excelled in this environment and desire to teach in a district with similar challenges where I am confident I can make a positive impact.

During my student teaching experience, I developed creative and engaging lesson plans and utilized a variety instructional strategies and different assessments to measure learning. One of the things I believe made me successful was that I strived to develop nurturing relationships with the students, which involved active listening, getting to know them as individuals inside and outside the classroom and treating them with dignity and respect. Additionally, I was successful in implementing a classroom management plan that was based on positive reinforcement and active learning. I believe these approaches utilized in the classroom contributed to creating an atmosphere of respect, discipline and joy in learning.

I would be very excited at the chance to discuss my qualifications further in a personal interview. I believe I am an excellent match for your district having been exposed to a similar school environment in student teaching. I would bring an awareness of the types of challenges and issues that your students and school face and insight into how to resolve these issues.

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

Respectfully Yours,

Julie Smith

Julie Smith
Enclosure (1)
CREATING A STRONG RESUME

What is a Resume
A resume is a professional advertisement of who you are in terms of your competencies, accomplishments, and future capabilities. It is your chief marketing tool for opening the doors of prospective employers.

From the applicant's perspective, the goal of a resume is to help get interviews, which in turn, lead to job offers.

From the employer's perspective, resumes should communicate potential value, i.e. what applicants can offer the employer. In addition, resumes are mechanisms for screening candidates. Employers spend approximately 30 seconds reviewing each resume so the most pertinent information should appear in the first 1/3 of the document and the formatting should be such that the resume is easily read and well-organized.

Remember, employers are not seeking to hire your history - they want to know your capabilities and competencies.

When writing a resume, always remember that you are advertising yourself for an interview and not for a job. Job offers only come after interviews. An effective resume should make a prospective employer want to meet you in person to discuss your qualifications and possible contributions and potential to solve their problems. It should clearly and factually communicate to the employer what it is you can do for them. Above all, it should be honest, positive, concise, easily read, and truly reflect you.

You should write your own resume; you should not imitate or plagiarize someone else's resume and letters. You must begin from your own ground of experience in developing a resume and letters which clearly communicate who you are, what you want to do, and what you are most likely to do in the future for an employer. This takes time, effort, care, and professionalism on your part. No one should do this for you. However, after doing a resume draft, you should get feedback from at least four others. We invite you to make an appointment with one of our professionals for a resume review.

What a Resume can do

- Review your experience and communicate your potential value to employers.
- Provide information as part of your file in any placement service you use.
- Accompany your application letters in response to vacancy announcements.
- Be an integral part of the informational interview and/or networking process.
- Focus and communicate your job objective and qualifications.
- Serve as supplemental information to employment applications and letters of inquiry about possible job openings.

Resume Guidelines – Do’s and Don’ts

Do's
- Make sure that 90% to 100% of your content relates to your objective, directly or indirectly.
- Be sure the action verbs maintain consistency in tense – present tense for what you are doing now, past tense for what you did.
- Use simple, concise terms rather than complex expressions that say the same thing.
• Use quantities, amounts, dollar values where they enhance the description of what you did (“increased sales by $100,000 per year”).
• Have someone with good English skills check for spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Avoid use of “I” or “me”.
• Do not include hobbies, avocational or social interests unless they clearly contribute to your work abilities or your uniqueness.
• Avoid purely personal evaluations, e.g., “I am an intelligent and diligent researcher” – is to be avoided. “Have finished three major research projects” – would be included.

Don'ts
• Don’t include pictures.
• Don’t list references.
• Don’t put resume in fancy binders or folders.
• Don’t forget phone number, area code, or zip code.
• Don’t list sex, weight, health, or personal irrelevancies.
• Don’t highlight problems (divorce, hospitalization, handicaps).
• Don’t include addresses of prior employers (city and state are all that’s necessary).
• Don’t include salary information in your resume.

Final Reminder:
Remember that your resume is a demonstration of your writing ability and communicates your potential as a candidate. Plan to revise your resume several times before you have a final product.

Resume Components
Educator resumes have some of the same information as other resumes, but also contain additional information that is germane to the teaching field. For example, resumes will typically include student teaching and clinical experiences, certification information and activities/hobbies. Educator resumes will frequently go beyond one page to incorporate relevant experience working with children. It is recommended not to exceed two pages. Resume components/headings should be prioritized in order of the strongest selling point for the type of job to which you are applying.

Heading/Contact Information: Consider creating your own personal letterhead/brand with your name, address, phone number and email address. Be sure your email address and outgoing voice mail message is professional.

Objective Statement: For many resumes, including an objective is optional. However, for educators, a teaching objective is often included because it identifies what areas you wish and are qualified to teach. In addition, if you are interested in coaching any extracurricular activities, you can include it in the objective or in the cover letter.

Summary/Qualifications/Profile: An alternate option to having an objective statement is to have a section such as a profile or summary where you communicate who you are in terms of your strongest talents, skills and or experiences. This can be formatted as a short paragraph or a series of bulleted statements.

Education: Include the name of the school with city and state, date of graduation or anticipated date, degree title, major, minor, concentration if applicable and G.P.A. (i.e. 3.6/4.0) As a general rule, do not include high school information or colleges/universities where you did not receive a degree.
License and Endorsements: License and endorsement information should be included on your resume with date or anticipated date received. This information can be combined with the education section or included in a separate category.

Student Teaching: Especially true for new educators, the student teaching component is one of the most important areas of the resume and thus should be located as the first employment experience following your education and certification sections. Content in this section should be thoughtful and reflect your accomplishments, instructional strategies used; lesson plans developed, and school involvement.

Pre-Clinical Experience: This information may be included in the resume especially if the preclinical experience involved more hands-on teaching.

Employment Experience: As a prospective teacher, you should include in your work history any experiences that involve working with students grades K-12. Relevant experiences include but are not limited to teacher’s aide, camp counselor, troop leader or tutor. Other unrelated work experience may be included; however, generally this information is limited to allow for more emphasis on teaching-related experience.

Interests/Activities: While this section is generally considered a “filler” on most resumes, for educators, this component is recommended as it shows your versatility as a teacher and the potential extracurricular activities you could be involved in at the district.

Other resume components/headings that can appear on the resume include:

- Community Service
- Volunteer Work
- Professional Preparation
- Teaching Experience
- Relevant Experience/Related experience
- Study Abroad
- Additional Training
- Additional Experience
- Professional Experience
- Prior Work History
- Leadership Experience
- Awards
- Honors Publications
- Professional Development
- Professional Affiliations or Memberships
- Activities
- Computer Skills
- Languages
- Professional Presentation
- Career Goal
Key Resume Words

The following list should help you best describe your work history/skills. With your current position, be sure to use verbs in the present tense. With your past employment, use the past tense of verbs.

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Teacher Resume Sample #1

TOM SCIENCE

220 College Road Lisle, IL 60532-0900 PH: 102.555.0001 toms@123.com

OBJECTIVE: Seeking a teaching position in middle school or high school science.

EDUCATION: Benedictine University, Lisle, IL December 2014
Bachelor of Science in Biology
Minors: Secondary Education and Math
Major G.P.A.: 3.9/4.0; Cumulative G.P.A.: 3.6/4.0

LICENSURE: Illinois Professional Educator License December 2014
Endorsements:
Secondary Education (6-12), Biology, General Science, Math and Middle School

STUDENT TEACHING: John Smith High School, Genoa City, IL Fall 2014
Student Teacher (Science Department)
• Developed and implemented lesson plans for two sections of biology, and one section of general science and Geometry
• Created and taught units on solar energy incorporating learning stations and technology applications including Smart Board
• Participated in professional learning community and contributed to curriculum ideas and lessons for an AP Biology section.
• Coordinated school science fair involving sophomore science students and served as a judge
• Utilized performance and skill-based assessments to measure learning
• Instructed a diverse student population and promoted a sense of inclusion among all students

PRECLINICAL EXPERIENCE: Northbrook Middle School, Northbrook, IL Spring 2014
Eighth Grade Science Program Observation
Roosevelt Middle School, Lyons, IL Fall 2013
Middle School Math

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE: Olive Youth Services, Frankfort, IL Summer 2012 & 2013
Youth Mentor
• Provided support services to youth and served as positive role model
• Tutored children ages 8-12 in math and science, utilizing a caring encouraging approach to increase confidence and success

AFFILIATIONS: Benedictine University, Lisle, IL Fall 2013 - present
President, UNICEF
Treasurer, Science Educators Association (local chapter)

HONORS AND AWARDS: St. Benedict Scholarship recipient
“Great Minds Think Alike” award, given by Lisle HS Science Department
Teacher Resume Sample #2

Julie English
1111 College Street • Lisle, IL 60532 • 630-829-0000 • jdaniel@yahoo.com

CAREER OBJECTIVE
Seeking a career as a High School English Teacher where I can motivate all students and provide innovative, creative lessons that engage and promote lifelong learners.

EDUCATION AND CREDENTIALS

Benedictine University, Lisle, IL
Bachelor of Arts in English Anticipated: May 2012
Minor: Secondary Education
  • G.P.A.: 3.8/4.0
  • Studied abroad at University of Salamanca, Madrid Spain; Improved fluency in language

License and Endorsements:
Illinois Professional Educator License Anticipated: May 2015
Secondary Education (6-12), English, Language Arts and Middle School Anticipated: May 2015

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

Wheaton North High School, Wheaton, IL August 2014- Present
Student Teacher, English
  • Developed and taught curriculum for American Literature and English Composition
  • Created thematic unit on professional communication integrating activities and skill development in social media, blogging and business writing
  • Incorporated a variety of instructional strategies to meet the IL Teaching Standards including cooperative groups, CRISS strategies and direct instruction
  • Differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all learners including students with IEP’s
  • Actively promoted partnerships with parents through frequent phone contact, creation of parent newsletter and meaningful interaction at parent-teacher conferences.

Bolingbrook Middle School, Bolingbrook, IL January 2014 – May 2014
Preclinical Experience, Middle School Language Arts
  • Taught units on Greek mythology, creative writing and poetry.
  • Volunteered to assist Cooperating teacher with Drama Club activities

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Student Success Center, Benedictine University, Lisle, IL August 2013 – June 2014
Writing Tutor
  • Review and edit student papers and make recommendations for improvement
  • Establish good rapport with students and help to empower their success

Candor, (Student Newspaper) Benedictine University, Lisle, IL September 2012- June 2013
Staff Writer
  • Strengthened writing ability by writing and editing a variety of articles and news features
  • Learned to work effectively with team of 10 people to meet tight deadlines

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

  • Elected by student body to be Student Senator/Leader for College of Education
  • Served as VP for Student Chapter of Illinois Education Association at Benedictine
  • Attended National Education Association Conference in Chicago in June 2009
Teacher Resume sample #3

RACHEL READ
(815) 555-1212
Rrachelread@yahoo.com
100 Main St.
Lisle, IL 60532

EDUCATION

Benedictine University, Lisle, IL
Master in Education, Reading and Literacy
May 2010

Illinois State University, Normal, IL
Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education
Type 03 Illinois certificate; endorsements in Social Sciences and Language Arts
May 2008

EXPERIENCE

CANDLESTICK PRESCHOOL, Naperville, IL
Introduction to Kindergarten Ideas Head Teacher
September 2007 - Present
- Teach a blended program for typically developing and special needs students between the ages three and a half to five years old
- Institute The Wright Skills and Break Through to Literacy reading programs into the daily curriculum
- Design center activities for independent work based on leveled options and multiple intelligences
- Create differentiated assessments to test each student’s knowledge of subject, to set goals, and to highlight achievements
- Administer formal and informal assessments to identify student strengths and weaknesses
- Create weekly newsletters providing important information and curriculum updates to families
- Implement quarterly parent teacher conferences, addressing individual student progress and perceived learning style
- Maintain constant contact with speech language pathologists and therapeutic providers to enhance the performance of special needs students

Junior Kindergarten Head Teacher
September 2006 – June 2007
- Developed a hands-on, theme-based, child-centered curriculum for children ages four to five
- Collaborated with staff to produce a school curriculum that would expand core knowledge
- Created a curriculum that focused on integrating different content areas into thematic units
- Produced original Language Arts lessons, incorporating a balanced literacy approach including phonemic awareness, phonics, literature, word wall, vocabulary concepts, and spelling
- Organized classroom meetings to foster positive student discipline and creative problem solving
- Maintained contact with parents through daily letters and parent teacher conferences
- Created an in-depth assessment presentation that logged student achievements and methods applied to improve skill areas

Assistant Teacher
- Assisted Speech Language Pathologists in therapeutic classes with children 18 months to 5 years
- Planned adaptive curriculum for therapeutic students, individualizing projects to specific abilities

STUDENT TEACHING

Gaston Elementary School, Downers Grove, IL
Winter 2006
- Taught 25 students in a self-contained second grade classroom
- Generated and enforced a specialized behavior management plan
Teacher Resume Sample #4

Robert B. Business

888 College Road, Lisle, IL 60532 630-829-1111 630-829-1112 (Cell) robertbusiness@ben.edu

Secondary Business Educator

Enthusiastic, passionate and versatile individual eager to bring real world business knowledge and college teaching experience into the classroom to create meaningful learning. Demonstrated ability to develop and implement creative and engaging lessons that meet the IL Teaching standards and the needs of students’ diverse learning style. Strong desire to positively impact students outside the classroom through involvement in extracurricular activities.

EDUCATION AND CREDENTIALS

Master of Arts in Teaching, Benedictine University, Lisle, IL Anticipated: December 2014
IL Professional Educator License
Endorsements in Secondary Education, Business Education and Math

Bachelor of Science in Business, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL May 2004
Minor: Math, Concentration in Business Technology

STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Student Teacher, Downers Grove South High School, Downers Grove, IL January - May 2014
• Develop and implement lessons for Intro to Business and Business Ethics integrating real case studies, technology and speakers from the business community.
• Created a unit on developing a social media presence for individuals and businesses 12
• Partnered with Professional Learning Team to develop a new course in Web Page Design
• Volunteered to assist with a district-wide project to revamp technology branding

PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Faculty, College of Dupage, Glen Ellyn, IL August 2013 – present
• Taught courses in Business Technology and Business Math to undergraduate students

Operations Manager, Target Corporation, Hinsdale, IL September 2004 – August 2008
• Accountable for $100M of retail business, 6 stores, and 2000 employees.
• Improved productivity, efficiency, and quality of operations via staffing, training, customer service, inventory and cost savings initiatives
• Managed and analyzed P & L to maximize financial performance of 6 retail locations
• Progressively moved up within the organization with increasing responsibility beginning in a Financial Analyst role, then Operations Analyst and then a Management role

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PTO Board Member, Naperville School District 203, August 2011 – June 2012
Conference Presenter, Small Business Association Convention, May 2005

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/INTERESTS

Youth Football League, Lisle Park District, Summers 2008-2010
Brothers/Big Sisters, January 2003-December 2005
Interests include: Baseball, Football, Art, Music and Tutoring
References for Julie Smith

111 College Road, Lisle, IL • 60532 • 630-829-0000 • jsmith@ben.edu

Dr. Terry Smith, Professor of Education
Benedictine University
5700 College Road
Lisle, IL 60532
630/829-6000
Current Professor

Ms. Mary Mitchell, 5th Grade Teacher
XYZ School District
2766 West 95th Street
Evergreen Park, IL 60372
630/769-2451
Cooperating Teacher for Student Teaching

Mr. Mike Bill, Assistant Principal
XYZ School District
2766 West 95th Street
Evergreen Park, IL 60372
630/769-2458

Dr. Susan Breaton, Professor of Education
Benedictine University
5700 College Road
Lisle, IL 60532
630/829-5555
Site Supervisor for Student Teaching

Guidelines for References

The reference page should be prepared to bring to an interview and should be on the same paper as your resume and cover letter. If possible, make the font, type quality and letterhead consistent with that of your resume. Information should include the references name, current job title, organization name, address and phone and your relationship to the reference. In the online application process, there will be a section for you to include this reference information. Often with these sections on the application, you will have the option of uploading a letter of recommendation from that individual.

It is imperative that you obtain an individual’s permission before using them as a reference. It is helpful to your references to give them your resume or a bulleted list of your strengths and accomplishments so address these points in the letter. Generally, three to five references will be adequate. For educators, the best references are those individuals who have observed your teaching. Examples are professors, student teacher supervisors, cooperating teachers, principals, and other school personnel. In many cases, these references will also be the same individuals that write letters of recommendation for you. Other references that can be included are former supervisors, colleagues and individuals from volunteer and related experiences.
ASSEMBLING YOUR CREDENTIALS FOR THE ONLINE APPLICATION PROCESS

What Credentials Will You Need

It used to be that education majors would establish a credential file with their Career office at their college/university and then the Career Office would send off the credential packet to districts upon the candidate’s request. However, in today’s job market for education majors, nearly all school districts have an online application process in which the candidate can self-manage his or her own credentials. What this means is that you will have copies of your own credentials and can upload them to each online application.

The following items are typical documents that are requested to be uploaded by candidates as part of the online application process. Please be advised to read instructions carefully for each application completed to clearly understand what supplemental materials to submit and any special guidelines to submit them.

Cover letter/Letter of Introduction: The cover letter or sometimes called a letter of introduction should be crafted for each particular school district to which you are applying. As is emphasized in the cover letter guidelines section of this packet, be sure to do research on the district so you can address why you are interested in working there and how you will add value.

Resume: Your resume should be tailored to the position/district to which you are applying.

Letters of Recommendation: You will be requested to upload 3-5 letters of recommendation to your application. In many cases, this will take place in the reference section of the application where you list your references and then have the opportunity to upload a letter for each reference. As stated in the reference section, the strongest references are from those individuals who have had the opportunity to observe you teach and can speak specifically to your capabilities and accomplishments. Such individuals include cooperating teacher, site supervisor, principal/assistant principal if they have had the opportunity to observe you teach, college professors or other individuals who have observed you in roles interacting with kids.

Transcripts: You will be asked to upload transcripts from all schools attended. Be sure to request transcripts from all schools attended to be issued to you so you have all of them in your possession. Transcripts need not be official for the online application; in most cases, photocopies will suffice. On some applications, there is a size limit for each transcript, which is typically 1 MB so photocopies work better to scan and upload because they are smaller in size.

Copy of Certificate: When you obtain your certificate, you can scan and upload it to your application.

Tips for Completing the Online Application

- Take enough time to complete each application. Review it thoroughly for grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. It should be 100% error free! Keep in mind that districts can still review your application before you have actually submitted it so review your work for accuracy as you go along.

- Read all directions thoroughly because applications do vary from school to school. If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to contact the Human Resources office at the school.

- Make sure your responses to essay questions are thoughtful, thorough and student-centered. Often the questions asked give you insight into what the school sees as important. Convey in your answers that you have a passion for educating young people and possess a thorough knowledge of your field.

- Refresh your application about once a month so that your application appears in the first section of applications searched by a school. Applications are viewed by most recently submitted. Additional tips for the application process can be found in the “Job Search Handbook for Educators – 2014”
Job Search Sites for Educators

REGIONAL OFFICES OF EDUCATION

www.cescook.org  
Cook County ROE

dekalbcounty.org/ROE/  
DeKalb County ROE

www.dupage.k12.il.us  
DuPage County ROE

roe24.org/  
Grundy/Kendall County ROE

www.i-kan.org/  
Iroquois-Kankakee County ROE

www.teachinkane.org/about.html  
Kane County ROE

www.lake.k12.il.us  
Lake County ROE

www.mchenry.k12.il.us  
McHenry County ROE

www.willroe.org  
Will County ROE

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

www.isbe.state.il.us  
IL State Board of Education

OTHER JOB SEARCH SITES

www.indeed.com  
Aggregator site to tap into job openings. Plug in keyword title(s), city

www.k12jobspot.com  
Search teaching vacancies

www.teachers-teachers.com  
View vacancies, create/post application online, apply directly to schools

cps.edu/careers  
Chicago Public Schools-Careers

www.applitrack.com/archchicago/onlineapp/  
Archdiocese of Chicago Vacancies

www.applitrack.com/UNO/onlineapp/default.aspx  
UNO Charter School Network Vacancies in Chicago

www.linkedin.com  
Professional networking site. Build connections, join groups and search for job openings.

VIRTUAL CAREER CENTERS

www.ben.edu/career  
Benedictine Virtual Career Center. (BVCC) Register profile, search job openings (part-time, full-time, internships, volunteer, seasonal,) and upload your resume.

www.collegecentral.com/iscpa  
Illinois Small College Placement Association. (ISCPA) Register profile, view full-time jobs and internships and register for CareerFest 2015 on Jan. 30th, a job fair which will feature approximately 25 school districts in attendance.