Finding A Career After A General Degree

“Pursuing an interest can make finding a career to fit that interest challenging.”

KRISTY’S STORY

Kristy completed a double degree in visual arts and Arabic in 2010. In deciding to do this degree, Kristy followed her interests rather than worrying too much about a career. Kristy discovered that career options are not as obvious for graduates of general degrees than those of professional degrees. Universities may give students a list of potential jobs they can pursue after their general degree, but getting one of these jobs may not be easy or the pathway to it may not be obvious.

As she progressed through her degree, Kristy became increasingly concerned about what she would do when she finished. She spoke to one of the university’s career’s advisers about options: what she expected was a list of jobs that she would be qualified for and would be able to apply for when she finished. She got that, but found it wasn’t that helpful. There was no clear pathway from her degree into any of the jobs on the list. As Kristy said, that:

“The fact that I was doing a general degree meant I didn’t fit into any box or career path... you feel like you are on your own when it comes to finding a job.”

Kristy’s response was to seek more advice, including from older trusted friends, her parents, and from academic staff at her university. From academics she learned that the most reliable income for people working in visual arts was from education and doing visual arts on the side.

During her studies Kristy got extra experience through studying in Jordan for eight weeks. This helped her enormously with her Arabic language skills, which proved important for her employability, as she subsequently did an internship with a publisher in Dubai. The internship turned out to be useful in showing what she wasn’t interested in. She was involved in page lay-out in the internship, something she didn’t much enjoy.

Kristy was advised to get more experience through doing voluntary work - she visited an elderly lady once a week. She found the experience profound and it helped her decide what direction her career should take.

When Kristy graduated, she applied to do a Master of Art Therapy, but was told at her interview to get at least a year’s more experience in working with people, so she did voluntary work for MS Australia.

She worked with a 97 year-old-woman, an experience she found profound: “One of the most beautiful things I have done.” But again Kristy found that the experience showed her what she didn’t want to do: she decided against doing art therapy.

Kristy has taken opportunities as they arose. This has taken her a long way from her original degree. Even though she doesn’t have a background in science, she took a position in science outreach to schools, and enjoyed the work immensely.

Kristy has had a couple of positions since graduating, including working in science outreach for school-aged children in metropolitan and country Victoria. This was unexpected, as she didn’t have a background in science, but she enjoyed it and learned a lot.
She now works three days a week in educational assessment and spends two days a week in self-directed study of Arabic. She likes the balance, saying that the paid work exercises a different part of her brain to the creative work she does by herself.

People have been essential to Kristy's career. Her opportunities usually came by word of mouth. And the advice of people she respects has helped her find her direction.

In terms of developing her career and finding jobs, Kristy says that people have been important. All of her opportunities have come through suggestions by people she knows. Her volunteering and her work and study in the Middle East were also crucial in developing her skills relevant to employment.

And when going for a position, Kristy thinks the most important thing a candidate can take to an interview is stories. Anecdotes and explanations will demonstrate a candidate's ability, experience, and character.