

University of Illinois at Chicago
Office of Career Services
Career Resource Guide for Students with
a Criminal Record

Created by Omega Styles Career Counselor Intern

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This resource guide is intended to assist students who have a criminal record navigate their career path as they transition and prepare for the world of work. The guide will provide you with resources that will assist in your career development and preparation. Furthermore, it will provide you with an understanding of several legal remedies that may be beneficial to you. It is important that you seek assistance from the Student Legal Services to address any legal concerns that you have.

The Office of Career Services offers numerous services to assist students with their career development and job search. The services that are offered will provide you with guidance as you transition from college to the world of work.

Overview of Services:

- Career Exploration
- Career Fairs
- Drop-in Advising
- Individual Advising
- Job and Internship Postings
- Mock Interviews
- On Campus Interviews
- Online Career Resources
- Resume and Cover Letter Services
- Workshops

Resume

A resume is a document that highlights your experience, education, skills, awards, professional memberships and affiliations. A resume can be utilized when applying for a position or graduate school. Typically, a resume is 1- 2 pages but can be longer depending on your experience. Your resume is an opportunity for an employer to consider you for their open position and is your first impression. Furthermore, it is unique to each individual and you must determine how to highlight your qualifications and experiences. When writing your resume it is helpful to reflect on your past and present experiences to determine what to emphasize. Remember that a resume is an opportunity for you to sell yourself and your accomplishments.

Components of a resume

- 1-2 pages in length
- 11pt-12pt black font
- Margins .75" to 1.0"
- Bold Headings (**Education, Experience, Awards**, etc...)

Standard Sections

- Contact Information
- Education
- Experience

Optional Sections

- Objective
- Summary of Qualifications or Profile
- Relevant Coursework
- Academic Projects
- Certifications/Endorsements/Licenses
- Service/Activities
- Affiliations/Memberships
- Skills-Computer, Language
- Awards/Honors
- References

Things to Remember

Visual Appearance - Make sure that your resume is easy to read. (Font should be 11-12 point)

Action Verbs - Use powerful verbs to describe your experiences. (managed, facilitated, coordinated, and analyzed) See Appendix E

Proof Read - Make sure that you check for any spelling errors, punctuation, and accuracy of resume. It is always good to have another person proof read your resume.

Quantify your Experience - Use numerical data and percentages when possible. (i.e. Provided educational and emotional support for 60 residents through program development and initiatives.)

Consistency - Be consistent with dates and headings throughout resume. (i.e. September vs. Sept., all job titles italicized)

Key Words - It is important to utilize key words that communicate your qualifications. Many employers use automated tracking systems to scan your resume to identify precise words that are required for a specific position. You can refer to the job descriptions of the positions you are applying for to assist you with choosing key words.

Multiple Resumes - It is a good practice to have several versions of your resume. Depending on the position that you are applying for you may want to emphasize certain qualifications.

Chronological Resume vs. Functional Resume: Which One to Use?

Chronological resume - is designed to focus on your relevant work experience. This type of resume will allow you to showcase your strengths that you have gained through your work experiences. Additionally, you can showcase your skills and qualifications indicating chronologically the positions that you have held. (See Appendix B)

Functional resume - is designed to focus on your skills and qualifications. A functional resume will provide you with the ability to emphasize your qualifications, achievements, transferable skills and competencies. A functional resume puts less emphasis on work history. (See Appendix A) There are several factors to consider when choosing the appropriate resume.

A chronological resume may be appropriate if the following applies:

- Strong and consistent work or internship experience
- Achievements and awards for educational or work performance
- Increased job responsibility

A functional resume may be appropriate if you have the following:

- Gaps in employment which may be lengthy
- No prior work history
- Incarceration - Long periods of time where you may not have held a job due to illegal activity.

Cover Letter

A cover letter is a one page document that accompanies your resume and provides an employer with an overview of your experience and qualifications. The purpose of a cover letter is to demonstrate how you will be a valuable asset to the specific position you are applying for. Furthermore, you should focus on what attributes you have and how they will be beneficial to the position and the company. Your cover letter should not be another copy of your resume however it should highlight key experiences that are pertinent to the position for which you are applying. When writing your cover letter it should be customized each time to fit a specific position and company. Additionally, it should be written in a business format. (See Appendix C)

Key Components of a Cover letter

- Heading
- Date
- Business Address
- Salutation

- Body of Letter (Typically 3-4 paragraphs)
- Closing
- Signature line
- Enclosure line

Things to Remember

- Proof Read – Make sure that you use correct grammar, punctuation, and that it is free of spelling errors.
- Do not just repeat your resume. Take the opportunity to highlight key experiences that are pertinent to the job which you are applying for.
- Keep the cover letter to one page and use proper font size and format.
- Use the same font for your cover letter that is used for your resume.
- In closing reiterate your interest and provide your contact information.
- If possible personalize the salutation.

Letter of Explanation

A letter of explanation is a letter to a potential employer that addresses your criminal record and employment gaps. The letter should disclose your criminal offense, show accountability, be remorseful, discuss how you have changed and have grown from your experience. The letter of explanation also should discuss the benefits of hiring you. You can inform them of the federal bonding program and the work opportunity tax credit program if it applies to your situation. At the end of the interview you can discuss your letter and provide the employer with a copy for your file. (See Appendix D)

Things to Remember

- Proof Read - Make sure that you use correct grammar, punctuation, and that it is free of spelling errors.
- Make sure you include your heading and it has the same font as your resume and cover letter.
- The letter should be sincere and honest.
- The letter should discuss your core values and beliefs.

Thank You Letters

Thank you letters are written once you have completed a prospective job interview. The letter is a personalized letter to express appreciation and to solidify your interest in the position and company for which you interviewed. Furthermore, it gives you a chance to emphasize important details or qualifications you may have forgotten during the interview. Also, you can respond to any objections that may have surfaced in the interview (for example, your criminal record, gap in employment, or GPA can be addressed).

Things to Remember

- Thank You letters should be sent within 24 - 48 hours of completing the interview.
- The letter should be addressed to the specific interviewer.
- If you have multiple interviews a letter should be written after each interview.
- If you were interviewed by more than one individual take the time to write a letter to each interviewer.

Application

When applying for a position not only will you need a resume and cover letter but you will also have to complete an application. The application may be filled out in person or online depending on the employer. The application may ask if you have been convicted of a crime. It is always best to be honest when answering that particular question or similar ones. Many companies conduct background checks prior to offering you a position or the position is contingent on a successful background check.

If a company is conducting a background check it is important that you disclose your background if asked on the application. If there is conflicting information and you have been dishonest this probably will affect your chances of employment. Please be aware that you are not obligated to disclose your background for the arrests and convictions on your record that have been expunged or sealed. If your records have been sealed or expunged you may answer no to the question. Be mindful of what the questions is asking you and only answer what is asked of you. There is a difference in the question have you been convicted of a felony and have you to been convicted of a crime. Make sure that you read the questions carefully. Note: For Illinois Applicants who are applying for state employment the state of Illinois does not ask questions regarding convictions.

Example Application Questions

1. Have you ever been convicted of a crime?
2. Have you ever been convicted of a felony?
3. Have you ever been convicted of a crime or felony? Applicants are not obligated to disclose sealed or expunged records of conviction or arrest.

Interview Tips & Preparation

The interview is the next progression once you have a resume, cover letter, filled out the application and have landed the interview. First congratulate yourself on a job well done. The next step is the interview preparation phase. There are several things to take into consideration in planning for the interview.

The first stage of preparation is research. Prior to attending the interview it is important that you research the company. Researching the company will allow you to understand the company's goal, mission, growth opportunity and whether or not you will fit into the company culture. You are not only just being interviewed but you are interviewing the company to determine if the company and the position align with your career goals. Another stage of preparation is attire. This may be your first time meeting the interviewer in person and there is an expectation that is part of the interviewing process. It is important that you are well groomed and look your best. Below you will find suggestions for proper interview attire for both men and women.

Men Interview Attire

- Blue, Black or Gray Suit
- White Dress Shirt
- White undershirt
- Tie with a simple design
- Polished black or brown wing tip or laced shoes
- Dark colored socks that match your suit

Women Interview Attire

- Conservative skirt or pants suit
- Skirt no higher than an inch above the knee
- Heels that are not too high
- Little makeup and simple jewelry
- Neutral and non-distracting nail polish

Interview Questions

It is important that you take time to prepare for the questions that may be asked in the interview phase. This will be an opportunity for you to articulate your experiences and the accomplishments that you have made. If you disclosed your criminal background during the application process, they are aware of your past and are interviewing you based on your education, skills and qualifications. During the interview it is important to demonstrate those qualifications.

As part of your interview a common question that may be asked is "Tell me about yourself?" It is important that you are truthful with your information but it is not necessary to discuss your criminal past at this juncture or possibly not all. If your past criminal record comes up in the interview it is important that you be truthful in a positive way. You can discuss the benefits of your sentence and how you have changed your life. Also, you can discuss any programs that you participated in that provided you with essential skills such as educational or vocational programs.

Furthermore, when discussing your past you do not have to go into much detail. It is important that you are honest and show the employer that you are not a risky hire. Also, include what you have done to change your life and show your new pattern of behavior i.e. attend college, internships, honors, and campus involvement.

Behavioral Questions vs. Traditional Questions

Behavioral questions are designed to assess your past behaviors which may indicate future behavior.

Ex. Tell me about a time when you had collaborated with your classmates and you had conflicting goals? How did you handle it?

Ex. Describe a time when you had to meet a deadline and how you prioritized your work?

Traditional questions are designed to assess your thought process and personality.

Ex. What are your short term and long term goals?

Ex. What three words best describe you?

Legal Remedies

When a person has been arrested or convicted of a crime it may be more challenging to obtain a position. There are several legal remedies available to assist you with potentially rectifying this obstacle. There is no one remedy that works for everyone. What will work for you depend on your unique circumstances. Your record or criminal offense will determine if you qualify for a remedy. When determining what remedy will be beneficial to you it is important that you seek guidance from Student Legal Services located on campus. Student Legal Services is a law office on campus that assists students with legal matters. Additionally, the services provided through Student Legal Services are confidential. It is also important that you seek assistance in your home state. The legal remedies are listed in chronological order.

Deferred Prosecution Agreement - is the legal process where the prosecutor agrees for first time offenders who commit a non-violent offense to complete certain requirements through a diversion program. Once the requirements are fulfilled by the offender the charges will be dismissed. Please keep in mind that not all offenses will qualify for the deferred prosecution program. Additionally, entry into a deferred prosecution program is determined by the State's Attorney Office.

Expungement - is the process of seeking a legal remedy where you petition the court to have a record destroyed. A person can only expunge their criminal record if they have never been

convicted. For example, if you were found not guilty, it was a non-suit or you received supervision. There are other circumstances where you may have your record expunged if you were not convicted. There are waiting periods before your record is eligible for expungement. This petition is filed with the court.

Sealing - is the process of your record being made unavailable at the state level. If you were to complete a background check there would not be a record found. If you have been convicted, it may be possible to have your record sealed. You may be able to seal your record for misdemeanor acquittals and dismissals that you received. Furthermore, some felony convictions may be sealed depending on the conviction. Drug convictions will require a proof of a clean drug test taken within 30 days of filing the petition. Additionally, there are waiting periods before your record is eligible to be sealed. This petition is filed with the court.

Executive Clemency - Is also known as a pardon and this remedy forgives you of the criminal offense. A pardon can only be given by the President at the Federal level. At the state level the pardon is given by the Governor and the prison review board within your state. If a person chooses to seek a pardon it is a very extensive process and takes a few years to complete. If you are denied a pardon you must wait a year to reapply.

Certificates - is the process of waiving certain statutory barriers to employment and licensing requirements needed for specific positions. Certificates of Relief from Disability and Certificates of Good Conduct are two types for which you may be eligible. In order to obtain a Certificate you must have a rehabilitation hearing within the Circuit Court to demonstrate good conduct.

Waivers - a waiver provides individuals with certain disqualifying convictions the opportunity to work in the healthcare field. A waiver may be obtained from the Department of Public Health which may allow an individual to work within the field.

Juvenile Record - One has a juvenile record if they committed a crime and were convicted while they were under the age of 17 and was tried as a juvenile. Juvenile records are not automatically expunged but are protected by limited confidential rules. Even with limited confidentiality certain people can obtain your court and arrest records. It is best to petition the court to get your record expunged. Do keep in mind that depending on the offense you may not be able to get your record expunged. For example, sex offenses that would have been a felony if committed as an adult can't be expunged. Some states do not allow for your record to be expunged so it is important that you research the regulations in your state.

Federal Bonding Program - is a federal program designed to provide companies insurance for individuals who are considered risky hires in their first six months of employment. The program is to assist companies that hire individuals who may have a difficult time finding a job. Note: Check with the state you are applying in to determine if that particular state has a state bonding program as well.

Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program - is a federal program that provides employers with federal tax credit benefit for hiring an ex-offender within one year of their release or conviction date. The program is designed to give employers an incentive to hire individuals who consistently face employment barriers.

University of Illinois at Chicago Resources

Office of Career Services
 Student Services Building, Suite 3050
 1200 W. Harrison
 312-996-2300
<http://careers.ocs.uic.edu>

Student Legal Services, Suite 3030
 Student Services Building
 1200 W. Harrison St
 312-996-9214
<http://www.uic.edu/uic/studentlife/studentservices/legal.shtml>

Government Resources

Bureau of Consumer Protection
<http://business.ftc.gov/documents/bus08-using-consumer-reports-what-employers-need-know>

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/arrest_conviction.cfm

<http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/convict1.html>
http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/arrest_records.html

<http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/race-color.html#VIB2conviction>

Federal Credit Reporting Act (FRCA)
<http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0157-employment-background-checks>

United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration
http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax/eta_default.cfm

Organization Resources

America's CareerInfoNet www.acinet.org

America's Service Locator www.servicelocator.org

Break through urban ministries <http://www.breakthrough.org/>

Good Will Industries

www.goodwill.org/find-jobs-and-services/?gclid=CMvNlu7y4J4CFVw55QodnTEAKg

Legal Action Center www.lac.org

National H.I.R.E. Network <http://www.hirenetwork.org>

National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers <http://www.nacdl.org/rightsrestoration/>

National Reentry Resource Center www.csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/

One-Stop Career Centers www.careeronestop.org

Open, INC www.openinc.org

Safer Foundation www.saferfoundation.org

The Federal Bonding Program <http://bonds4jobs.com/>

The Wiley Resource Center <http://www.WRC.vpweb.com>

Appendix A Functional Resume

Michelle Storm

773-789-6543

765 W. Chicago Ave Chicago, Illinois 60606

mstorm@gmail.com

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

- Professional with five years of experience in coordination, customer service and administrative support.
- Communicate with internal and external customers while providing services that increase their knowledge and awareness.
- Customer service-focused while embracing diversity within a higher education and corporation environment.

EXPIERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Coordination

- Coordinated and scheduled student advising appointment for Advisors. Managed student database and ensured accuracy of data entered. Demonstrated multitask and organizational skills.
- Registered student participants for special events and services. Utilized technology to create marketing tools and web based registration forms.

Customer Service

- Communicated and used conflict resolution skills with customers who were dissatisfied with their experience.
- Accepted and made professional calls to customers to inform them of the services that the organization offered.

Administrative Support

- Performed administrative support functions for the President of a large housewares manufacturer.
- Coordinated and planned award recognition events for over 100 employees. Communicated with outside vendors in regards to contracts and services.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Student Coordinator , University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago IL	August 2013 – May 2014
Administrative Assistant , Logins Corporation, Chicago IL	April 2010 – March 2011
Customer Representative , Fancy Auto Works, Oakbrook IL	May 2008 – June 2009

SKILLS

Bilingual French/English: proficient in oral and written

EDUCATION

University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago IL May 2017
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, Cumulative GPA 3.3/4.0

Appendix B Chronological Resume

Charles Dell

1234 W. Harrison Ave. Apt. 301, Chicago, Illinois 60614
773-456-7890 charlesdell@hotmail.com

EDUCATION

University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Chicago, IL

Bachelor of Arts in Communication

May 2016

Minor in Managerial Skills Cumulative GPA 3.5/4.0

RELEVANT COURSEWORK

Interpersonal Communication, Communication Technology, Media and Communication, Organizational Behavior, Human Resource Management

INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

Communications Intern

Little Communications, Chicago IL, May 2013 – August 2013

- Utilized social media skills to create and manage company's Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest pages to increase product awareness to current and prospective clients.
- Prepared and created written correspondence, presentations and articles for clients that were published in industry related magazines.
- Coordinated and planned department team building programs for a team of 20 which led to increased team cohesion.

Business Intern

Masters Holding Corporation, Chicago IL, May 2012 – August 2012

- Analyzed and compiled customer data to determine spending behaviors in regards to new product.
- Conducted a SWOT analyzed on 3 competitors to create new marketing strategies that was implemented throughout the corporation.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Bank Teller

National Bank of Chicago, Chicago IL, and January 2009 – May 2012

- Received and processed accurate cash, checking, and savings transactions while verifying proper identification and issuing customer receipts.
- Enforced bank regulations to all customers and maintained database of all transactions processed.
- Provided timely and efficient customer service to internal and external customers.

MEMBERSHIPS & ACTIVITIES

UIC Management Leadership Association, Secretary, September 2012 – Present

National Communication Association, Student Member, August 2012 – Present

Dream for Kids, Volunteer, March 2009 – Present

Appendix C Cover Letter

Charles Dell

1234 W. Harrison Ave.
Apt. 301
Chicago, IL 60614

February 7, 2014

Chicago Management Company
Recruiting and Staffing
123 S. Michigan Street
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Human Resources Department,

This letter is to express my interest in the Communications Specialist position with Chicago Management Company. My experiences, professionalism and leadership at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Little Communications, and Masters Holding Corporation demonstrate that I am well rounded and can be an asset to Chicago Management Company.

As a Communications Intern I increased the client base by 10 % within 3 months through implementation of social media within the company structure. Also, I provided support to internal and external customers and managed the customer database. As the Business Intern I worked independently to develop a system that led to \$10,000 in new sales that increased the company's profit margin. As a Teller I had the opportunity to work with and provide customer service to a diverse clientele. Additionally, I worked with internal auditors to ensure proper record keeping of the bank's financial transactions.

I am highly interested in the Communications Specialist position with Chicago Management Company. I know that my enthusiasm and leadership skills will have a positive impact on both internal and external customers. I look forward to hearing from you soon. I can be reached at 773-456-7890 or charlesdell@hotmail.com.

Sincerely,

Charles Dell
Enclosure

Appendix D Letter of Explanation

Michelle Storm

765 W. Chicago Ave
Chicago IL, 60606

February 17, 2014

Ms. Mary Jane
ABC Corporation
789 W. Madison
Oak Forest IL, 60452

Dear Ms. Mary Jane,

I have applied for the Customer Service Representative position with ABC Corporation. The things that I value most are honesty, integrity and directness. Therefore, I anticipate that you may have some concerns about my criminal history upon completing a background check.

I have obtained a copy of my official criminal history from the Illinois Department of State Police, Bureau of Identification and I am willing to provide you with a copy. I was arrested in 2011 for two misdemeanor charges. The charges were Giving False Name and Willful Obstruction. Both charges were nolle prossed, which means that the charges were dismissed. I am in the process of having this charge expunged (restricted) from my record.

I regret this period in my life and I take full responsibility for my actions. I made a mistake, but I have moved forward with my life. Currently, I am pursuing my Bachelor of Arts in Sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Through my experiences I have gained professional and customer service skills that can be a valuable asset to ABC Corporation. I am reliable, team oriented professional who can make an immediate impact at your company. In addition your company may be eligible for a tax credit through the Federal Bonding Program for hiring me. Thank your for considering this information and I would be happy to supply you with more information at your request.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my qualifications further. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached at 773-789-6543.

Sincerely,

Michelle Storm

Letter Generated by

http://www.gjp.org/wp-content/uploads/Sample_1-Explanation-Letters.pdf

<http://www.wfdc.org/job/documents/LetterofExplan.website.pdf>

Appendix E Action Verbs

Technical Skills	Teaching Skills	Research Skills	Helping Skills	Creative Skills
adapted assembled built calculated computed constructed converted designed determined developed engineered fabricated installed maintained operated overhauled programmed regulated remodeled replaced restored specialized studied utilized	Adapted advised clarified coached critiqued demonstrated developed enabled evaluated encouraged explained facilitated focused guided individualized instructed motivated persuaded set goals simulated taught tested trained tutored	clarified collected compared conducted critiqued detected determined examined experimented explored formulated gathered identified interpreted investigated located measured organized researched searched solved summarized surveyed tested	advocated advised clarified coached communicated demonstrated developed enabled encouraged evaluated explained facilitated focused guided individualized informed motivated persuaded set goals simulated taught tested trained tutored	acted combined conceptualized created customized designed developed directed displayed established fashioned formulated founded illustrated integrated introduced modeled modified originated performed planned revised revitalized shaped

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Management/Leadership Skills	Financial/Data Skills	Organization/Detail Skills	Communication/People Skills
administered analyzed chaired coordinated consolidated directed enforced enhanced handled hired improved increased led managed motivated organized oversaw planned produced recommended reviewed scheduled supervised strengthened	administered adjusted allocated assessed appraised audited balanced calculated computed corrected determined estimated forecasted managed marketed measured planned programmed projected reconciled researched retrieved	arranged categorized classified collected distributed executed filed generated implemented incorporated logged maintained monitored obtained ordered prepared processed recorded responded screened submitted updated validated verified	addressed arranged clarified communicated composed described developed elicited explained interacted interpreted joined listened marketed mediated observed participated persuaded reconciled responded solicited suggested translated wrote

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References

http://www.gjp.org/wp-content/uploads/Sample_1-Explanation-Letters.pdf

<http://www.wfdc.org/job/documents/LetterofExplan.website.pdf>

The University of Illinois at Chicago Career Planning Guide