

Making the Transition: Ashley Keiser

By Nicole Bell

With the eyes of a freshly graduated professional, Ashley Keiser ('22) achieved a successful college to workplace transition in just one month.

The James Madison University alum graduated with a degree in Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication and a minor in Political Science. She left academia well-equipped with the skills needed for the workplace but found it hard to market herself in a competitive market.

Prior to graduation, she began applying to over 50 jobs on LinkedIn and Handshake. Ashley gives this advice: "Take every interview, even if you're not necessarily interested in the job." She admits that she landed her current job directly through a recruiter on one of these sites.

"Remember to be personable in your interviews. Anyone can have the skill to do the job, but no one wants to hire someone who is miserable to work with. Personality matters!"

Keiser began working at her current job in June of 2022 in Arlington, Virginia. She works for an architecture/engineering (A/E) consulting firm in marketing. She admits it wasn't the field she thought she would go into.

"I knew I wanted to work at a big company and do something with writing/marketing. I didn't know I would go into the A/E industry exactly, but it ended up being a good fit for me!"

She explains that while the workplace transition was easier than expected, there were variables she wasn't prepared for. The 9 to 5 schedule was a big adjustment. Keiser admits that the flexibility of college left her ill-prepared for the structure of corporate work. After putting in the effort to adjust her sleep schedule, she says she naturally wakes up on 7am on weekends. "Funny how things change!" She recommends creating a healthy work and life balance.

Keiser explains that while she felt scared going into her first day; no one else knew she just graduated. While this might have helped her integrate better, it meant that she was held to the same standards as everyone. This can be hard, but confidence helped her succeed at the tasks she does now.

She explains the primary role she plays in her company: "the main proponent of my job is submitting proposals. A client will release an RFP (request for proposals), and consultant firms must submit and adhere to all the requirements in the RFP. This can be page counts, photos, experience, resumes, org charts, schedules, etc. I work with the engineers and architects to put together a high quality and hopefully winning proposal."

When asked which WRTC skills she uses every day in the workplace, she states:

“I do a lot of writing, editing, and research. I even get to do some graphic design things too which is fun. WRTC gave me great copywriting, technical writing/editing, and document design skills. Sometimes our proposals are shortlisted and moved to an interview, where I prepare PowerPoints and help the engineers prepare for their presentations.”

She finished the interview providing a few tips and expectations for new graduates.

“You may be super clueless at your job at first, but it will get better with time.” Keiser explains that she was given extensive training and was not put on her own until 2 months after she started. She advises that a great organizational system keeps new professionals on top of things: “everything must be put on your calendar and/or someone else’s calendar.”

Finally, Keiser advises new graduates to communicate with their superiors. She says that her job provides weekly on-on-one meetings where she is given feedback on her performance; communication is key.

While the transition seems scary, Ashley Keiser was able to adjust and succeed in the face of professionalism. She is continuing her time at her firm and will be continuing to grow.