Health care administration is an important part of the daily operations of any health care facility or practice. And to become a health care administrator, one will need a formal education in the field to secure a job in the industry. Depending on the position, a master's degree may also be required.

(Photo Courtesy of Stephanie Donovan)
Stephanie Donovan works both sides of the fence as an Registered Health Information Administrator and an Assistant Professor at Peirce College in Philadelphia. Donovan shares with us the role a health care administrator plays and discusses the importance education plays in this field.

Can you describe your duties as a health care administrator?

“Health care administrators focus on the planning and delivery of health care services rather than administering or providing those services. While the delivery of care focuses on prevention and achieving positive health outcomes, supporting and managing the delivery of this care is the primary work of the health care administrator.”

“In my role as faculty chair of health programs at Peirce College, I focus on the quality, accreditation and currency of our degree and certificate programs and the development of new health care programs that meet both industry and employer demands. I also work to support the advancement of our graduates.”

Where did you get your degree?

“I earned my bachelor of science degree in health information administration from Gwynedd-Mercy College and my master of business administration from LaSalle University.”

How has education prepared you for your career as a health care administrator?

“As an undergraduate, I completed a two-plus-two program where I first earned my associate’s degree, secured the Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) credential and then immediately continued on for my bachelor’s degree and earned the Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA) credential. These undergraduate degrees establish the technical and managerial foundation required in this field.”

What continuing education is required for your role?

“Personally, my graduate degree helped me further develop my management skills and appreciate the bigger picture. It is important to note that careers in these disciplines are expected to grow and the graduate degree is quickly becoming the entry-level degree for health care administrators.”

“Health care administrators who opt for specialized certifications or credentials should expect and be prepared to commit to ongoing professional development as required for credential maintenance. As a Registered Health Information Administrator, I am required to earn 30 continuing education units every two years in the following areas: performance improvement, technology, privacy and security, management, clinical data management, clinical foundations, ICD-10 and external forces.”

Christina Thompson is a freelance travel writer living in Philadelphia. Her work can be found at Examiner.com.
While most high school seniors are working hard to complete college applications, not every student is planning to head to campus next fall.

Taking a gap year after high school, common in many European countries, and the trend has become more popular with students in the U.S. as the cost of college continues to rise along with outstanding student loan debt.

“Students can use the year to refresh skills, gain experience, and learn of career opportunities that may ultimately direct their academic path,” says Rita Toliver-Roberts, vice president of Academic
Advancement at Peirce College. “Students can also utilize this time to search for additional financial support, such as scholarships or grants.”

Rather than jumping into college after high school, some experts argue that taking time off allows students to explore interests, gain valuable experience and in turn, perform stronger academically when they enter college.

Research conducted by Robert Clagett, former dean of admissions at Middlebury College, shows students who take a gap year tend to outperform those who don’t. Undergraduates at Middlebury College and the University of North Carolina who had taken a gap year before enrolling in college on average had a GPA 0.1 to 0.4 higher than predicted based on high school academic credentials.

“When students take this kind of time, they don’t forget how to learn--they’re much better students,” says Holly Bull, president of the Center for Interim Programs, LLC. “I’ve had parents tell me their child would probably have dropped out after first semester or year because they were so turned off by their classes in the academic experience, but a gap year helped them get excited and gave them a focus.”

Creating a Plan with Purpose

Students should ensure they are taking a gap year for the right reasons, such as feeling underprepared for the academic rigors of college, needing more time to find the right-fit school or wanting to seek out experiential opportunities and work/career experience, according to Toliver-Roberts.

“One of the bad reasons to take a gap year can be to just take a break--in our competitive society, taking a break, for the sake of simply ‘resting’ should not be an option,” she says.

Bull also warns students against taking time off only for the sake of reapplying to schools in the hopes of being admitted to a “better” college.

“It’s not a guarantee and it really defeats some of the core value of the gap year which is... really allowing somebody to say, who am I? What am I interested in? Let me go and follow up on these things and see where that goes and lead from that,” she says.

It’s vital for students to create a plan and identify specific goals for their gap year to avoid wasting time and money, says Robin Pendoley, founder and CEO of Thinking Beyond Borders.

“A gap year should be well structured to fill that specific need of finding that sense of direction and purpose for college,” he says. “It’s an important investment for them to be making of time, money and energy so that when they go on to college, they’re going to be well-prepared to do that and to dive in passionately and effectively for those four years.”

Finding the Right Gap Year Options

Depending on their goals and financial abilities, students have a plethora of options available to fill their gap year, from organized gap year programs, volunteer and service opportunities, internships, part-time jobs and specialized certifications.
“You have a whole pile of programs where there’s more structured support and they’re hooked in with peers and they’re doing service work, adventure travel sightseeing, language immersion,” says Bull.

Exploring different fields of interest can help students decide what major to pursue in college and gain valuable skills at the same time to later quantify to a future employer, says Liz Kuenstner, a former gap year student through Thinking Beyond Borders and a graduate of Columbia University.

“It can give you concrete experience towards what you think that you’re looking for but it also might reveal that what you think you’re really interested in, you don’t actually want to do for the next four years of your life,” she says. “If you’re doing something pre-professional, it’s really valuable just to get inside the office and see what day to day life is like and how people adjust.”

Gaining gap year work experience not only helps students become more acquainted with the ins and outs of a professional atmosphere, Pendoley explains it can also lead to additional resume-building opportunities.

“After having four different internships over two semesters, going to college and applying for internships, fellowships, jobs during their college experience, [students are] being offered almost everything they apply for specifically because they have four different experiences and employers really value that,” he says.

Because students can customize gap year plans to fit their financial, social and professional needs, finding a sense of direction for college rather than floundering from major to major is an invaluable investment, says Kuenstner.

“Having very small group cohesion in travelling with 15 other students for a year provided me something that Columbia certainly never did—it was a more intimate, personalized experience,” she says. “I wouldn’t say that I came out at the end knowing exactly what I wanted to do, but it gave me the tools to think about how I wanted to do college.”
A guide for working students: How to find valuable work experience

BY MELISSA A. VENABLE / SEP 23, 2013 9:14AM / (1)
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Enrolled college students who also maintain part- or full-time employment are a common part of today's academic climate. According to a recent report from the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 70% of U.S. students held down jobs during their four years of undergraduate study, and roughly one in five logged 35 hours or more per week throughout the school year. Similar trends exist within the online learning community. A 2006-09 survey of nearly 70,000 online students from 87 different institutions found that most were employed full-time while they earned their degree; additionally, half were married and 35% had children.

Clearly, a routine that effectively balances school, work, and family life is crucial for the success of online higher education. However, it's also important for web learners to gain experience in the professional field they are studying while their program is in progress — and for many, their current occupation does not match their long-term professional goals.

This article will provide some tips and ideas for online students who wish to gain valuable skills and experience that is vital to their prospective career without sacrificing that much-needed paycheck.

THE LIFE OF A WORKING STUDENT

Before pursuing professional opportunities related to their degree path, online students should ensure they are able to make such a commitment. For this reason, University of Pennsylvania Professor Laura Perna recommends that students curtail their weekly work schedules. "While working more than 15 hours per week may be financially necessary," she told U.S. News & World Report, "I suggest that students first be sure that they have taken full advantage of all available sources of financial aid, especially financial aid in the form of grants."

However, it's important to note that some employment options are more beneficial to students than others. Robin Dizes, manager of career development services at Peirce College, tells Fox Business that certain opportunities — such as paid internships and temporary positions in the student's chosen field — often lead to promising career leads after graduation. "If you choose employment that meets your needs, you will be more likely to continue to work there long-term, and long-term employment is attractive to employers, builds your resume and allows you to have stability in your career," she said.

The reality, however, is that many students are required to take on jobs unrelated to their field just to finance their tuition payments, pay rent and bills, and provide for extracurricular activities. Rather than jeopardizing their primary means of support, academic experts urge online students to seek out opportunities that will assist their career plans without consuming large amounts of time or energy.

INTERNSHIPS

Internships are highly coveted among college students for several reasons. First, they enable students to experience firsthand the working environment they plan to enter once they have obtained a degree. Additionally, these positions allow students to network with professionals in their field, learn practical skills not taught in the classroom, and collaborate with other interns to hone their teamwork skills. And in many cases, internships lead to entry-level positions for students once they graduate.
However, there are also some drawbacks to internships. Time commitment is a major factor; most internships require 20 hours or more per week — and since the majority of these opportunities do not award any monetary compensation, students must forego paid work to satisfy their demands as an intern. However, even paid interns often encounter another problem: the work they perform is vastly different from hired employees. Interns often assist with housekeeping, office logistics, and other menial tasks that may have little (if anything) to do with their prospective career. Finally, the quality of the internship is important; some companies seek interns with the genuine desire to train them and expose them to working conditions in their future field, while others simply view them as free laborers.

Online students can learn about different internship opportunities by reaching out to their professors and corresponding with officials at their institution's web-based career center; information is also available through nationally based websites like InternMatch and Indeed.com. However, Forbes contributor Frances Bridges says the key to landing a desirable internship is through thorough research of the industry as a whole. Students should look into hiring practices and business philosophies of all the major companies and organizations in their field, as well as stock market performance, popular products, and other constantly changing variables. Students who can intelligently discuss the current state of their prospective profession fare best during intern interviews.

FREELANCING

Depending on a student's chosen major, there may be opportunities to earn experience — as well as a little supplemental income — by pursuing gigs as a freelancer. Fields where freelancing is common include writing and journalism, web development and marketing, computer programming, business consulting, and graphic design, as well as burgeoning industries like medical billing and coding and project management. Freelancing allows students to demonstrate their skills and passion for their field of study outside the classroom. This option is particularly attractive to students with part- or full-time jobs, since they often get to decide how many (or few) freelance assignments to take on at once.

Students are encouraged to check out established sites that cater to freelancers, such as Elance, oDesk, and Guru.com. Molly Merez, executive director of Ticket Summit, also recommends reaching out to local businesses and organizations. "Oftentimes companies don't have the budget for a full time employee but do have the money to pay on a project by project basis," she tells Fox Business.

One word of caution about freelancing opportunities: like internships, they are not all created equal. Stephen Fishman, J.D., notes in Nolo Law for All that regulations governing fair treatment and compensation of employees may not extend to freelancers. "Some [independent contractors] have great difficulty getting their clients to pay on time or at all," Fishman notes. "When you're an IC, you bear the risk of loss from deadbeat clients." This may not be a major issue for students who obtain these jobs solely for the professional experience, but it certainly affects those who freelance to support themselves.

TUTORING
Many online students opt to tutor children and adults in their local community, as well as their collegiate peers; some specialize in group classes, while others tutor clients one-on-one. Like freelancers, tutors pursue independent gigs (based on the demands of their individual schedule) that allow them to gain experience in their field and earn a little money on the side. Most tutors focus on core subjects like mathematics and literacy, while others teach skills like personal finance, computer programming, or foreign languages. Regardless of the subject, the key components to being a successful tutor are identifying the educational demands within one’s local community, creating a viable lesson plan, and delivering satisfactory services that generate positive word-of-mouth.

Most college career centers provide resources for students who wish to tutor; additionally, web users can register with online tutor referral agencies like TutorGeek and Tutor Match to locate potential clients. Community outreach is also crucial; tutors should create a website with information about their services, post fliers on job boards advertising their services, and print business cards. Home-based tutoring is somewhat frowned upon. For this reason, students are urged to contact their local library or community center to inquire about reserving conference rooms on a regular basis. Digital tutoring is also a popular alternative to face-to-face sessions.

VOLUNTEERING

In lieu of paid opportunities, many students obtain skills and experience through unpaid volunteer work. Accounting students assist community members at their local library during tax season; aspiring nurses donate their time to blood banks and other medical establishments; and student teachers spend their time assisting educators in the classroom. Volunteering is especially useful for students in any major who don’t have any professional experience and are hoping to bolster their resume — particularly opportunities that allow the student to travel abroad.

Huffington Post contributors Steven Weddle and Billy Beltz urge prospective overseas volunteers to thoroughly research all potential opportunities before signing up. "You’re about to make a very serious commitment in terms of time, money and impact on others," they note. "Questions to ask include: Is your program fee going to good use? Will you actually add meaningful value to your project? Will you be safe?" They recommend visiting reputable sites like Volunteer Forever to learn more about viable international opportunities.

For those who wish to volunteer stateside, the University of New Hampshire encourages college students to contact different organizations within their local communities; websites like www.volunteer.gov provide detailed, area-specific information about different opportunities. And while all volunteer work is inherently rewarding on a karmic level, students should prioritize opportunities that help them build the skills they need to succeed and gain insight into the industry they’ll enter upon graduation.

OTHER WAYS TO GAIN EXPERIENCE

In addition to internships, freelance work, tutoring services, and volunteer projects, online students can prepare themselves for the workforce by attending seminars, conferences, and other events associated
with their future career. These gatherings often provide outlets for attendees to learn new skills, network with professionals in their field, and learn more about the current state of their industry. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) may also be useful; these free web classes typically don't award credit, but they do impart valuable skills and proficiencies to students who complete the coursework. Coursera, edX, and Udacity are some of today's leading MOOC providers.

But even with all of these options, students should seek out as much wisdom as they can from their current job, even if that job isn't related to their degree or career path. Every position carries transferable duties and responsibilities; restaurant workers must excel at customer service, office assistants gain a good grasp on the inner-workings of business operations and corporate culture, and employees in retail learn about sales, marketing, and financial management. And regardless of the position itself, every place of employment offers the chance for students to network with co-workers, clients, and customers.

Juggling academic responsibilities and work obligations can be frustrating, and these demands ostensibly leave little time for other pursuits. However, there are plenty of professionally oriented opportunities available to today's online students that require minimal time commitment, but still manage to reward them with the skills, experience, and expertise required to excel in their field once they've earned their degree. The trick is knowing where — and how — to find them.
Top 5 Benefits to Look for in Today's Job Market

BY Kathryn Tuggle | 09/25/13 - 07:30 AM EDT

See what Jim Cramer and Stephanie Link are trading today.

BOSTON (TheStreet) -- A comprehensive benefits package can turn a good job into a great one, but with a changing health care landscape and complex retirement picture, how do you know what your benefits bundle should look like?

Although any job with a steady paycheck may look tempting, experts say you should do plenty of research before you sign on the dotted line, because not all benefits are created equal. Check out our rundown on the top five you should look for at your next job and why they matter.

1. Health Care

"There is a lot of confusion around health care benefits because of the new laws," says Uva Coles, vice president, student services for Peirce College in Philadelphia. "People are confused about what it means for them and unsure what their health care package should look like."

While there's no doubt the health care market is changing, it continues to be the biggest benefit to employees -- from both an overall wellness and a cost savings perspective, says Mary Jo Davis, vice president of benefits at Ceridian, a human capital management company.

"With health care reform and the 'coming soon' of health care marketplaces, the way employees will access and purchase insurance is going to be quite different," Davis says. "But even so, most employees will continue to access health care through their employer."

In the coming years, small and large employers will have different options for health care than they do today, Davis explains, but companies know that the better the benefits offered, the happier the employee. There is a strong correlation between overall satisfaction of benefits packages and employee loyalty, she says. The majority of employees who say they are "very satisfied" with their benefits -- 61% - - also have a strong sense of loyalty to their employer, according to a Metlife (MET) employee benefits trend study last year.

2. Retirement

"When Social Security was conceived, life expectancy after 65 was only an additional five years, but today people are living well into their 90s," Davis says. "People know that investments are important for what their life looks like in the 10, 15 or 30 years after retirement."

"Although perks like free food, flexible dress codes and pet-friendly offices are great, when seeking a new employee or creating a new business, it is essential that businesses -- whether small or large -- offer
a comprehensive 401(k) and competitive retirement and pension plans," says Jennifer Friedman, chief marketing officer of small-business legal solutions at CT Corp.

3. Wellness programs

Still relatively new, wellness programs might be more commonly known as employee assistance programs, or EAPs. These programs can help employees with everything from smoking cessation and substance abuse to stress management and weight loss.

"They help employees stay engaged and stay productive, and help them with all of the things going on in their life -- even building a budget," Davis says.

Most EAPs are available for the employee as well as the employee's immediate family -- meaning spouse and children and sometimes parents and brothers and sisters.

For some employers, wellness programs extend to all forms of health care -- even exercise.

"Some companies offer a comprehensive wellness package that provides for reimbursement to gyms or exercise classes," Coles says. "This is especially common at companies that may not have the best health insurance. They try to balance it out by offering a little bit where they can, and sometimes that's of incredible value to employees."

4. Stability and flexibility

"Stability, while certainly not sexy, eventually becomes really important," Davis says. "If you get into a situation where you have to take time off due to some kind of illness, or an illness in your family, you need to know you have quality disability insurance and that your employer has a program to protect you."

No one wants to have to take time off and lose income, or work through an illness. A stable job will provide disability insurance. On the flip side, today's job-seekers also know that a good job will also provide a great deal of flexibility.

According to a recent survey by Mom Corps, a national talent acquisition and career development firm, 73% of working adults agree flexibility is one of the most important factors they consider when looking for a job or deciding what company to work for, says Allison O'Kelly, founder/CEO of the company.

"The pros of flexibility as a benefit are multifaceted. Not only are employees better able to work when they are most productive, depending on what kind of flexible options are implemented, flexibility also offers the potential to save money and energy on a commute and gives employees more leverage to lead a less frenzied life."

5. Ancillary benefits: Tuition reimbursement, additional vacation days

Job-seekers shouldn't lose sight of everything a company has to offer by focusing on a single benefit offering, says Harry Gottlieb, CEO of Jellyvision, the creator of Alex, a benefits education software.
While a generous health benefit or retirement savings plan can seem awfully attractive, if it's not part of an overall package you can live with, you might find it's not enough to make you happy in the long term, Gottlieb says.

"You're not just a worker who has health care needs. You're not just an employee who wants to retire someday. You're a whole person, and you'll want to find an organization that meets as many of your needs as possible."

Today, people are looking more creatively at their job offers to make certain they're getting everything that's important to them, Coles says.

"I always insist that you negotiate, see if there is room. We encourage people to consider negotiating for added vacation days, and creating a list of things that matter to them. Come to the table prepared to negotiate, to throw the questions out."

Tuition reimbursement packages are another benefit that demonstrates an "investment in each employee's growth, future and success," Friedman says. "Not only do these benefits exhibit an organization's authentic interest in the well-being of its employees, they also prove most valuable to the corporation, as well as the employee, in the long-term."
NEW YORK (TheStreet) -- Although most of us would love to work in an isolated corner office or at a quiet desk free from distraction, the modern office environment leaves little room for privacy. While open office plans and thin cubicle walls may allow for more camaraderie and collaboration during the workday, it only takes one noisy employee to ruin everyone's focus.

When a loud co-worker is interfering with your capacity to meet deadlines or have a discreet talk with clients, it's time to speak up. Experts weigh in here on the best ways to approach the problem, and how to ensure your working relationship stays strong after things have quieted down.

Start by asking yourself how bad the problem really is, says Robyn Dizes, manager of Career Development Services at Peirce College in Philadelphia. It's important that your managers know you're a team player, and coexisting in the workplace with people who might occasionally be too loud is just part of the job.

"It's the workplace. Not everyone is going to talk and act the way you want them to," Dizes says. "We all have to live together in harmony, and more than likely you're going to have to find a way to compromise."

It's important to try to solve the problem yourself before taking your concerns to management, she explains, and how you approach the initial conversation is crucial.

It's best to start with a friendly but direct one-on-one chat, says Joe Utecht, crisis response manager with Ceridian LifeWorks. When you start the conversation, Utecht recommends favoring the word "I" over the word "you," so as not to seem accusatory.

"Say to them, 'I just want to mention this concern that I have had. I was speaking to someone on the phone the other day, and they could hear some background noise when we were talking, and I think that's coming through in my conversations. I just wanted to let you know.'"

Another way to approach the issue is to ask them if they've noticed your noise level as a problem.

"You might want to start with something like, 'We're all sitting in this cube environment, and I know there are times when I might be loud and bothering you.' Depending on their response, you can follow that up by letting them know that you've experienced an issue," Utecht says.
It's important not to focus on the person, Dizes says, because it's the behavior that's really the issue. At no point do you want the conversation to seem like an attack.

"Try letting them know, 'I don't know if you're aware, but your voice really carries, and I have a deadline and I'm having a hard time concentrating.'" While Dizes admits this might hurt the person's feelings for a moment, they may not even be aware that they are being loud and they may be happy to have some constructive criticism. After your chat, if they tone down their noise level, Dizes says it's a good idea to thank them for their effort.

"On your way out of the office or in the next couple of days, just stop and say something like, 'Thank you for your receptiveness to our conversation, it really helped me out," she says.

Unfortunately, if your colleague doesn't have that positive reinforcement, they may be more likely to start back up again the next day. If the problem persists or you feel that your co-worker is being intentionally disrespectful, it's time to raise the issue with a manager, Utecht says -- especially if it's not just a loud speaking voice that has you upset. There are lots of things employees can do to make unnecessary noise: grinding coffee, playing music or using an app on their phone that makes sounds. All of those are valid concerns to raise with a supervisor.

If you do raise the issue with your supervisor, Dizes says it's a good idea to see if the three of you -- you, your manager, and your noisy colleague -- can meet at the same time to find a solution.

"Request a meeting with everyone. It's not a confidential matter," she says. "The manager can mediate a little bit. If it happens behind closed doors people sometimes get upset because they start wondering what was said, but if it's all done together, with everyone on the same page, then it's easier to see that no one is trying to hurt your feelings -- they just have deadlines to meet."

All managers want to foster a positive and healthy work environment, Utecht says. Because they want their employees to be as productive and stress-free as possible, most will try to deal with the matter in a manner that will be satisfactory to all employees. This is assuming, of course, they have the resources and space to do so.

"It would be ideal if your manager could find your noisy colleague their own little private nook, but most offices don't have extra space for people," Dizes says. "You may find that old-fashioned earplugs might be your best friend, or if you're on deadline for a project that requires total concentration, you may be able to find a conference room and go in there and work."

Companies with deeper pockets may want to look into things such as sound machines -- machines that produce "white noise" that help louder noises blend into the background, Utecht says. Additionally, headsets that are noise canceling can be used when you're making important calls.

At the very least, your manager should be able to send out a generic email to the staff asking people to be mindful of their noise level, Utecht says. Sometimes a broad reminder is all they need, especially if others around them quiet down as a result.
Because the vast majority of employees want to have good working relationships with their co-workers, most will make an effort to adjust their noise level when asked, he says.

"If they are doing something that is bothering someone else, they will want to deal with that," he says. "When you have your conversation, remind them that your relationship is more valuable to them than your getting your way on this particular issue, and they'll most likely do what they can to keep that rapport at its best."