

## Elena Meeker



**First Work Experience:**  
**Fred G. Acosta Job Corps**  
**Position Title:**  
**Career Transition Specialist**

### What did you do at Fred G. Acosta Job Corps?

After graduation, I started working as a Career Transition Specialist at Fred G. Acosta Job Corps Center here in Tucson, AZ. The Mission of Fred G. Acosta Job Corps Center is to teach eligible young people the skills they need to become employable and independent and place them in meaningful jobs or further education.

### Favorite Part of the Position:

My job was to work with trainees as they completed their career/technical training and help them with job skills such as resume writing, interview skills, job searching, and case management for 12 months after their separation from their training program. I had a caseload of about 100 separated (graduated) students and 125 students I started working with before they completed the program. It is an extremely fast-paced and highly social position, which I loved. I was able to speak with local employers about our graduates and set up partnerships and opportunities for many of my students. Much of my day was spent managing my caseload of students who had already graduated, transporting students to/from interviews and job fairs, meeting with potential employer partners, and maintaining my case files. There are often open positions at this organization, and it can be a great way for an FSHD graduate to get their foot in the door working in career counseling and transition.

### How Did FSHD Classes & Internships Prepare You for this Work?

The FSHD program prepared me for my position with Fred G. Acosta because so much of the coursework is based on self-initiative. Working in social work and

transition services means you have to expect a fast pace and always be willing to go the extra mile. This was definitely instilled in my work ethic through the FSHD program - especially my work as a preceptor for FSHD 487 - Advanced Family Relations.

The FSHD program also helped me have a more holistic approach when working with students. Often, students at Fred G. Acosta come from difficult or traumatic life situations, and understanding how to work with these experiences in mind helped me be highly effective. My FSHD internship at Juvenile Court also helped me learn the importance of attention to detail and organization. I had to maintain highly organized and specific case files, so getting experience with this prepared me to be thorough and precise in my documentation and case management at Fred G. Acosta Job Corps.

### What was the Application Process or Interview Process Like?

The application and interview process with Fred G. Acosta was pretty simple. I saw the opening on a job site - Indeed.com. I applied and then was called for an interview. The interview process began with the HR representative and then the person who became my supervisor joined the interview. After I was hired, he told me it was my attention to detail, organization, and tenacity that made me the right fit for the position. Throughout my time there, I was involved in the hiring process for other transition specialists, and we mostly looked for candidates that were highly motivated to perform, enthusiastic, and had an understanding of how to work with underprivileged youth.

The Job Corps transition position requires candidates to be motivated to meet and exceed placement outcomes, help students obtain jobs in their training areas, and push for compensation above minimum wage. This position is driven by placements (obtaining full-time job training matches for students upon graduation), which can be an exciting challenge and require a lot of commitment.

After working at Fred G. Acosta, I moved into another position as a Transition Specialist for Vail Unified School District.

**Current Work Experience:**  
**Vail Unified School District**

**Position Title:**  
**Transition Specialist**

## **What do you do at Vail Unified School District?**

My current position is as a Transition Specialist with the Vail Unified School District (VUSD). I have between 20-30 students ranging in age from freshmen to seniors, who qualify for services through a state Department of Economic Security (DES) agency called Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). All of my students either have an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) or 504 accommodation plans in the classroom and qualify for services due to some form of disability.

Some aspects of this position are similar to my previous position as a Transition Specialist with Fred G. Acosta Job Corps, in that I work with students on job readiness and independent living skills, interview preparation, college preparation, going to job fairs, etc.

Working for VUSD, my typical day looks different than my time as a transition specialist at Job Corps. I work at one high school, and my day usually involves pulling students from study hall classes, or non-core classes to discuss transition activities. Some of my students have a clear idea of what they want to do, so our meetings involve planning next steps which may include applying for FAFSA, registering with the Disability Resource Center at Pima Community College, transporting students to/from Pima to take assessment tests, or touring local businesses for career exploration. When students don't have a clear picture of what they'd like to do, we do career-aptitude assessments to help them learn more about their strengths and job interests. About 5-7 times per month, I facilitate meetings between my students and their Vocational Rehabilitation counselors. The students and VR counselors discuss their progress toward postsecondary plans, which vary for every student. Students on Vocational Rehabilitation contracts often get tuition assistance, job coaching, work adjustment trainings, and more, so when students meet with their VR counselors, much of that time is spent setting that up.

My work is different from a Special Education teacher because I'm not classroom-based. I have 20-30 students

who vary in age from freshmen to seniors, and I work with them until graduation. I don't have specific curriculum that I teach, but mostly assist those students with setting up their postsecondary plans and accomplishing tasks required by VR. My work is probably closest to that of a high school guidance counselor because I help students with career exploration, job skills, and college preparedness. However, I have a much smaller caseload because my students are all students with IEP/504 plans who are also on a contract with Vocational Rehabilitation. I don't work with the whole school, but I do many of the same job tasks as a guidance counselor. The biggest difference about this position from that of a year-round transition specialist or guidance counselor is that I work on the high school schedule. So, I have the entire month of June off, and two weeks off every quarter, but still get paid every two weeks, which is really nice.

I think my FSHD courses better prepared me for this type of Transition position because it more closely involves the students' families and their various dynamics. I absolutely love what I am doing.

## **Tips for Students Interested in Pursuing a Position Like This:**

My advice for FSHD graduates is to network as much as possible, and start searching for transition-specific jobs if interested in career counseling. My experience as a Career Transition Specialist at Fred G. Acosta Job Corps really paved the way for me to become a Transition Specialist within a school district.

Ultimately, I am so happy I learned about transition services and career counseling as an option for an FSHD graduate. I had no idea these kinds of positions existed, but I have learned so much about the world of transition. Both of my jobs since graduating FSHD have helped me develop relationships with employers, learn how to network, and learn how to work within education systems to help students accomplish postsecondary goals.

FSHD students interested in transition services should look for those kinds of positions with school districts and employment agencies to get their foot in the door, and then can start exploring new positions within the field.