



SA career choices

Are you on the right path?

Career Planning

It's never too early to start thinking about career planning! It's a process of identifying your interests, skills and values while connecting them to appropriate career options.

Explore, Develop and Discover

Your time here as a college student provides a great opportunity to:

- ▶ Explore your interests
- ▶ Develop important skills
- ▶ Discover who you are as an individual

After all, here's your chance to take varied classes, get involved in multiple activities and try different jobs or internships. All can lead to a career that's a good fit for you.

Engaging in career planning is smart because it...

- ▶ Helps you learn about yourself
- ▶ May make picking a major easier
- ▶ Gets you thinking about how best build important skill sets
- ▶ Puts you in a position to make good choices about summer jobs and internships
- ▶ Allows you to focus your energy on finding the job that best utilizes your strengths and interests

It Takes Time

Career planning can be a rewarding experience, yet it doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and patience to ultimately determine a career path that will maximize your talents, satisfy your interests and incorporate your personal values.

Plus, career planning is an individual process. So, visit with the career office to learn about specific resources, meet with a career counselor and develop strategies that will be useful as you move through the process.



Step-by-Step

These steps don't necessarily need to be done in the order listed below. It's likely that you'll engage in activities within each of these areas at different times, or even simultaneously.

- ▶ Self-exploration
- ▶ Career exploration
- ▶ Gaining valuable experiences
- ▶ Making connections
- ▶ Finding a career that fits

Self-Exploration

Career planning begins with self-exploration. What are your interests? What's important to you? How do you like to spend your free time? These are *all* important questions to ask because, without really exploring them, it becomes difficult to select a major, choose an internship or proceed with a full-time job search. You can't sell yourself to others until you know what makes *you* tick.

Meet with a Career Counselor

A career counselor can help you explore your interests, skills and values, while also referring you to valuable resources to help with the process.

Contact your career services office to schedule an appointment today!

Get in Touch with Your Talents

- ▶ **Take a Variety of Classes.** Don't just stick with what you know. Instead, stretch your boundaries. Take classes that fall outside of what's required. You may be surprised at what you discover.
- ▶ **Try New Activities.** Diversify by getting involved with a wide range of activities. Choose those you find interesting. They don't have to be tied to your academic major or to anything you've tried in the past.
- ▶ **Consider Your Strengths.** Think about the skills you have developed through your classes, activities, volunteer experiences and work life, such as effective communication, team skills and problem solving.
- ▶ **Know What Friends and Family Think of You.** Your family and friends likely have a good perspective on your strengths.
- ▶ **Examine Your Experience.** Identify *why* you're involved with different activities. What do you like? Why do you continue to stay involved? How do they satisfy your interests? Knowing what motivates you can help when you have to make other decisions about how to spend your time.
- ▶ **Take Self-Assessments.** Most career offices offer some sort of self-assessment instrument that can be helpful in exploring your interests as they relate to majors or careers. Visit your career counselor to inquire about such tools.



Career Exploration

Most people have limited knowledge about the range of career possibilities that are available. It's not until you begin exploring the world of work that you start discovering opportunities.

Exploring Possibilities

- ▶ **Visit the Career Office.** Start your career exploration here. Professional staff members will help you navigate resources and coach you through the process.
- ▶ **Network with Professionals.** Networking is a great way to give you first-hand information about careers, such as the skills and backgrounds necessary for certain paths.
- ▶ **Talk with Faculty Members and Advisors.** Discussing your interests with these people will likely result in referrals to relevant resources, so talk about your goals with those in a position to offer advice.
- ▶ **Attend Career Panels.** Your career services office, student clubs or faculty members may organize career panels. Be sure to attend those of interest to you.
- ▶ **Browse Resources.** Take advantage of all the information available at your fingertips. Your career office can offer guidance regarding resources that will be most helpful.

It's Not Just for Seniors

First and second year students can *really* benefit from exploring career options early. By better understanding the world of work, you can be strategic about gaining skills that will prepare you for your future career.

- ▶ **Attend Campus Career Fairs.** Gaining exposure to companies can be helpful in learning about potential jobs so you can evaluate your options.
- ▶ **Tap Into Alumni.** Read profiles in your alumni magazine or online to discover what others have gone on to do. See what programs the alumni office offers, too.
- ▶ **Find a Mentor.** Mentors can help you learn about career options, connect you with professionals and give you practical advice related to your career interests.
- ▶ **Get Involved.** Activities on campus help you develop skills such as effective communication, leadership and teamwork that are useful in all work settings.
- ▶ **Check Out Programs and Lectures.** The more you expose yourself to, the more you'll be able to discover your true interests.

Gaining Experience

Summertime provides you with an opportunity to reflect on your college experiences, think about what you've learned and set goals for the coming year.

Spend Summers Wisely

Here are a few ways to spend your summer gaining valuable career experience...

- ▶ **Shadow a Professional.** Use your networking skills to identify professionals who would be willing to have you shadow them for a day or two — alumni can be a good place to start! You might attend meetings, observe them at work and gain exposure to the industry culture. These experiences can open your eyes to possibilities and give you a sense for how your skills fit into the world of work.
- ▶ **Volunteer in the Community.** Community service provides the opportunity to contribute in meaningful ways and develop and practice skills, plus it gives you a different perspective on things.
- ▶ **Travel.** Take advantage of any opportunity to travel! It gives you the chance to spread your wings, try new things and challenge your beliefs. It shows flexibility, independence and the ability to adapt. Learning another language is an additional benefit.
- ▶ **Find an Internship.** Develop marketable skills and learn about specific industries through internships. They often include projects or assignments that allow you to make positive contributions in a work setting. And you'll network with and learn from professionals along the way.
- ▶ **Participate in a Research Project.** Ask a faculty member who is conducting research if you can assist her over the summer. If graduate school is a consideration, this is a great way to determine if you'll enjoy the research necessary to earn an advanced degree.



"I was surprised that my internship truly altered the course I had expected my career to take. While I began the summer expecting to learn more about the nonprofit industry, I found that I learned the most about myself and my own work preferences; that knowledge opened up an exciting number of career possibilities I had not yet considered."

~ Shelby, English Major, Duke University (NC)

Making Connections

Networking is important in learning about careers and making valuable contacts. It's also the most effective method for finding a job or internship.

One way to network is to conduct informational interviews. These are meetings where you interview professionals about their career paths, experiences and recommendations. You can really get to know the ins and outs of a career field through informational interviews.

How to Conduct Informational Interviews

- ▶ **Determine Your Starting Point.** Pinpoint some areas that you'd really like to learn more about as you explore various careers.
- ▶ **Begin with People You Know.** Ask friends and family members to refer you to people they know who are doing the work that you are interested in.
- ▶ **Talk with Instructors.** They may have colleagues or former students for you to contact.
- ▶ **Tap into Campus Alumni.** Alums are often more than happy to talk with students from their alma mater.
- ▶ **Dress Appropriately.** If you are meeting someone in her office, dress like the people who work there. If you don't know what to wear, ask.



- ▶ **Make a Good First Impression.** If you present yourself well, your contact will be more likely to refer you to additional contacts.
- ▶ **Build a Rapport.** When approaching people, explain that you are a student interested in learning more about their profession, training necessary to enter the field and tips they have about breaking into the industry. It's not wise to ask for a job lead, however, until you've built a rapport.
- ▶ **Prepare Questions.** Your questions should allow you to gain valuable information that will help in your career development.

Maintain the Connection

Always send a thank you note or email after an informational interview. It's also important to keep in touch with your new contact. If he referred you to additional professionals or resources, send him an update from time to time to keep him posted on your progress.

Asking Questions

Here are some questions to ask during networking events and informational interviews...

Career Specific

- ▶ Could you describe your career path?
- ▶ How did you decide to pursue this path?
- ▶ Where can someone in an entry-level position expect to be in two years?
- ▶ What is the employment outlook in your field?
- ▶ Could you describe a typical day for me?
- ▶ What parts of your job do you find most challenging? Most enjoyable?
- ▶ Is there a season when your work is busiest?



Responsibilities

- ▶ What are your responsibilities?
- ▶ Describe your work environment.
- ▶ What are the responsibilities and titles of others with whom you work?

Salary and Advancement Opportunities

- ▶ What would my earning potential be if I entered this field?
- ▶ What is the typical timeline/path to promotion?
- ▶ What is the background of senior-level executives?

Training and Preparation

- ▶ What educational preparation would you recommend to advance in this field?
- ▶ What qualifications do you seek in a new hire?
- ▶ How do most people enter this profession?
- ▶ Do you have feedback on my resume?
- ▶ What companies might be interested in hiring someone with my qualifications?
- ▶ How can I find summer opportunities in this field?
- ▶ What advice do you have for those preparing to enter this field?
- ▶ Do you know others I might speak with for more information about this field? May I use your name?
- ▶ Where can I get up-to-date information on salaries, employers and industry issues?

Finding Your Fit



*“To love what you do and feel that it matters...
how could anything be more fun?”*

~ Katharine Graham

Most college grads don't stay with their first employer forever. They change jobs and careers several times throughout their lives. Participating in intentional career planning will allow *you* to make good decisions about your first job and those that follow.

Your Strategy

Through the process of exploring careers and making connections, you'll learn the best way to conduct a job search within your industry of interest. However, not every industry recruits in the same way.

Some like to recruit on college campuses while others count on professional organizations to attract new employees. Others will advertise vacancies on job boards and websites or hire from their summer intern program. Don't get frustrated if a friend is having success using a strategy that isn't working for you. Instead, change your strategy.

Do What You Love

With all the time you'll spend at work, it's important to pick a career that allows you to do what you love. In addition, consider...

- ▶ If the company values the same things that you do
- ▶ Supervision and communication structures
- ▶ Hours you'll be required to work
- ▶ Available professional development opportunities
- ▶ How much you'll be working alone versus with other people
- ▶ Appropriate geographic locations for your preferences

All of these things will factor into your happiness with your career choice.

Remember, you are unique and should approach the process in a way that works for you. And keep in mind that there are people on your campus who are *more* than willing to help along the way by providing you with guidance and support. Best wishes as you begin the career planning journey.

Adapted from a brochure by Kara Lombardi, PhD, a higher education expert who has worked with students on career-related issues for many years.

