

Career Planning

Is your plan in place?

Career planning is the process of identifying your interests, skills and values while tying them to appropriate career options. Your time as a college student provides a great opportunity to *explore* your own interests, *develop* important skills and *discover* who you are as an individual. Not many times in your life will you have the chance to take a variety of courses, get involved in different activities or try different jobs or internships. Now is an ideal time for you to begin thinking about your career.

Beginning the Process

Career planning can be intimidating for many students. The thought of looking into the future is more than some are ready for. However, career planning can be a very rewarding experience. It doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and patience to ultimately determine a career path that will utilize your talents, satisfy your interests and incorporate your own personal values.

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Steps to Career Planning

It's likely that you'll engage in activities within each of these steps at different times and in different sequence. The important thing is that you are thorough in identifying and utilizing the resources that are available to you.

- Self-Exploration
- Career Exploration
- Gaining Valuable Experiences
- Making Connections
- Finding a Career That Fits

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It's never too early to begin the process - even first-year students can benefit from engaging in career planning activities! Throughout this guide there are recommendations to help you make progress. However, career planning is somewhat individual and doesn't happen the same exact way for everyone. So visit with the Career Services office to learn about specific resources, meet with your career counselor and develop strategies that will be useful through the process.

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Why Plan?

Engaging in career planning is smart because it:

- Helps you learn about yourself
- May make picking a major easier
- Gets you thinking about how to best use your college years to build important skills
- 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's right for you

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Self-Exploration

Get in touch with your talents

Career planning begins with you. What are your interests? What is important to you? How do you like to spend your free time? These are *all* important questions to ask yourself as you begin the process. Without really exploring your interests, skills and values, it becomes difficult to select a major, choose a summer job or proceed with a full-time job search. You can't sell yourself to others until you know what makes *you* tick. Start thinking about ways to get in touch with your talents.

Take a variety of classes. Don't just stick with what you know. Instead, challenge yourself to stretch your boundaries. Take classes that fall outside of what's required. You may be surprised at what you discover.

Try new activities. Diversify your experience by getting involved with a wide range of activities. Choose activities that are interesting to you. They don't have to be tied to your major or to anything you've tried in the past.

Examine your experience. Identify why you've selected to get involved with different activities. What do you like about them? Why do you continue to stay involved? How do they satisfy your interests? Knowing what motivates you will be helpful when you have to make decisions about how to spend your time.

Consider your strengths. Think

about the skills that you have developed through your classes, activities, volunteer experiences and part-time or summer jobs. Surely you've developed skills that are useful in many career paths, such as effective communication, team skills and problem solving.

Know what your friends and family think of you. Your family and friends are probably more likely to sing your praises than you are and may have an interesting perspective on your strengths.

Take assessment instruments. Most Career Services 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 instruments.

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Make an Appointment with a Career Counselor

A career counselor can help you explore your interests, skills and values. He or she can also refer you to valuable resources to help you with the process. Contact your Career Services office to schedule an appointment.

Phone # _____
Location _____
Website _____

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Career Exploration

Discover the possibilities

Most people have limited knowledge about what kinds of careers exist. It's not until you begin to investigate the world of work that you'll start understanding the opportunities available. First and second year students can really benefit from taking time to explore 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.

Ideas for Exploring the Possibilities

- ❑ **Visit your Career Services office.** Start there. The professionals there will help you navigate your resources and coach you through the process.
- ❑ **Network with professionals.** This is a great way to gain first hand information about careers and the skills necessary for certain careers.
- ❑ **Talk to faculty and advisors.** Discussing your interests with advisors will likely result in referrals to relevant resources, so don't be afraid to talk about your goals with those in a position to give advice.
- ❑ **Find a mentor.** Mentors can help you learn about career options, connect you with professionals and give you practical career-related advice.
- ❑ **Look into print resources.** Peruse the career collection in your library.
- ❑ **Attend career panels.** Your Career Services office, student clubs or faculty members may organize career panels. Attend those of interest.
- ❑ **Tap into alumni.** Read profiles in your alumni magazine to discover what others from your school have gone on to do.
- ❑ **Attend campus Career Fairs.** Gaining exposure to companies can be helpful in learning about potential jobs so you can evaluate your options.
- ❑ **Get involved** with clubs and organizations. Activities on campus help you develop skills such as effective communication, leadership and teamwork. These skills are useful in all work settings.
- ❑ **Check out guest lectures.** The more you are exposed to, the more you'll be able to narrow your interests.
- ❑ **Browse web resources.** Take advantage of all the online information available at your fingertips.

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Useful Websites



www.wetfeet.com

VAULT

www.vault.com



online.onetcenter.org



www.quintcareers.com

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Gaining Valuable Experience

Spend summers wisely

Summertime provides you with some time to reflect on your college experiences, think about what you've learned and set goals for the coming year. There are a number of really great ways to use your summer wisely. Here are just a few:

Shadow a professional. Shadowing is spending a day or two with a professional in a work setting. Use your networking skills to identify professionals who would be willing to have you shadow them. You might attend meetings, observe them at work and gain exposure to the industry culture. These experiences can open your eyes to possibilities as well as give you a good sense of how your skills fit into the world of work.

Volunteer in the community.

There are countless organizations that would welcome volunteers. Volunteering allows you to develop and practice skills, it gives you a different perspective on things and it provides the opportunity to contribute in meaningful ways.

Travel. Take advantage of any opportunity to travel. Traveling gives you the chance to spread your wings, try new things and challenge your beliefs. It shows flexibility, independence and the ability to adapt.

Find an internship. Internships are a great way to develop marketable skills, learn more about specific industries and prepare yourself for the work world. Internships often include a project or assignment that allows you to make positive contributions in a work setting.

Participate in a research project.

Ask a faculty member who is conducting research that is of interest to you if you can assist her over the summer. If graduate school is a consideration for you, this is a great way to determine if you'll enjoy the research necessary to earn an advanced degree.

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"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 even considered."

- Shelby '07, English Major,
Duke University (NC)

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Making Connections

Networking and informational interviews

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 that you set up to interview a professional about her career path, experiences and recommendations she has for young people interested in the profession. You can really get to know the ins and outs of a career field through informational interviews.

Tips for Conducting Great Informational Interviews

- **Start with the people you know.** Ask your family members and friends to refer you to people they know who are doing work that you are interested in learning more about.
- **Talk to professors** who may have colleagues or former students for you to contact.
- **Tap into alumni** from your college. Alumni are often happy to talk with students from their alma mater.
- 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 may want to share

about breaking into the industry. While they *might* be able to get you in touch with the right people, they most likely *won't* be able to give you a job. It's not wise to ask for a job lead until you've built a rapport.

- **Make a good first impression.** If you present yourself well, your contact will be more likely to refer you to additional contacts.
- If you are meeting the person in his or her office, **dress appropriately.** You should be dressed like the people who work there. If you don't know what to wear, ask.
- **Prepare a list of questions** prior to your meeting. Your questions should allow you to gain information that will help in your career development.



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Maintain the Connection

Always send a thank you letter 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.

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Making Connections

Networking and informational interviews

Questions to Ask During Networking/Informational Interviews

Career Specific

☛ Describe your career path. How did each job lead you to the next? 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? What do you find most enjoyable?

Responsibilities

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

Industry Questions

What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities? Why do people leave this field or company? Who are the most important people in the industry today?

Salary and Advancement

Opportunities

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

Training and Preparation

What educational preparation would you recommend for someone who wants to advance in this field? What qualifications do you seek in a new hire? How do people enter this profession? For what types of positions would it qualify me?

Do you have feedback on my resume? Do you have any suggestions for change? What companies might be interested in hiring someone with my qualifications? How can students find summer opportunities in this field? What advice do you have for students who are preparing to enter this field? Do you know of other professionals with whom I might speak for more information about this field? When I call, may I use your name? Where can I get up-to-date information on salaries, employers and industry issues? What professional journals and organizations should I tap into?

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Pick & Choose

Chances are that you won't be able to ask ALL of these questions during an informational interview. Pick and choose so you can gain the information you need most.

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Finding the Right Career

Living happily ever after

It's not very common for recent college graduates to stay with their first employer for their entire career. Many people 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.

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. It's important to point out that not every industry recruits in the same way. Some industries like to recruit on college campuses. Some count on professional organizations to attract new employees. Others will advertise their vacancies on job boards and websites or hire from their summer intern program. Don't get frustrated if your roommate is having success using a strategy that isn't working for you. Change your strategy instead.

About the Author

Kara Lombardi has been working with students on career-related issues for more than ten years. She is currently the Senior Associate Director of the Career Center at Duke University (NC).

Do What You Love

You'll spend a lot of your time at work so picking a career that allows you to do what you love is important. If you have a passion for what you do, you'll wake up each morning excited to go to work. In addition, you should consider:

- appropriate geographic locations for your preferences
- hours you'll be required to work
- professional development opportunities available
- supervision and communication structures
- how much you'll be working alone versus with other people
- if the company values the same things that you do

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

Best wishes as you venture out and begin the career planning journey. 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 you along the way by providing you with advice and support. Happy planning.

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

~ Katharine Graham

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