



# Choosing Your College Major and Career

For some, selecting a college major or career is fairly easy. They know what they want to be and what academic program they must pursue to achieve it. But others are drawn to a number of fields and don't have any idea what they want to do. Research suggests that up to 80% of entering college students admit they're not certain what they want to major in. Career Planning is the process of identifying your interests, skills and job values while tying them to college majors and career options best suited for you. It might be more than you are ready for, but planning your career and self-discovery can be a very rewarding experience! In fact, by following the three steps listed below, you will be on your way to feeling more focused and confident about your educational and career journey.

## Three steps to career planning:

1. Self assessment
2. Career exploration
3. Gaining valuable experience

### 1. Self Assessment

Career planning begins with you. What are you interested in? What are you good at? What's important to you in your career? (e.g. do you want to help people? make a difference? work outside? be creative?) Career counselors in the Career Center can administer career assessment instruments that will help you to explore your interests as they relate to college majors and careers. You can't sell yourself to others until you know who you are and what makes you tick! Ask what your family and friends think they are more likely to sing your praises than you are, and may have an interesting perspective on your strengths.

*Other questions to ask yourself:*

- What do I like to do? What motivates me?
- Do I prefer to work with people, things or ideas?
- Where would I like to live?
- What is important to me?
- What type of environment would I like to work in?
- What classes have I liked the best?
- How much education am I willing to pursue?
- Would I have to relocate for training? for employment?

If you'd like to get a jumpstart on self-assessment, here are a few links to explore on your own. **It's best to have your results interpreted by a career counselor.** If possible, print your results and bring them with you when you schedule an appointment:

<http://career.missouri.edu/students/explore/thecareerinterestsgame.php>

[http://ilcis.intocareers.org/onet\\_ip/onet\\_ip\\_intro.aspx](http://ilcis.intocareers.org/onet_ip/onet_ip_intro.aspx)

[http://ilcis.intocareers.org/onet\\_work/onetwork\\_intro.aspx](http://ilcis.intocareers.org/onet_work/onetwork_intro.aspx)

<http://resources.monster.com/tools/quizzes/perfectcareer/>

## 2. Career Exploration

Once you have identified occupational *fields* best suited for you, you can start to research occupations within those fields. Talk to your instructors, network with professionals, attend career fairs and browse web resources. Some of our favorite links are listed below:

<http://www.bls.gov/search/oooh.asp?ct=OOH>

<http://ilcis.intocareers.org/index.aspx?FileID=Occ&TitleLetter=A>

<http://www.wcc.cc.il.us/counseling/default.html>

<http://www.niu.edu/careerservices/weblinks/index.html>

<http://6steps.monster.com/step1/careerconverter/>

*Networking* is important to learn about careers and make valuable contacts. One way to network is by arranging **informational interviews**. These are meetings that you set up to interview a professional about their career path and experiences. Start with people you know. You might also get contacts through your instructors or advisers. When calling for an interview, make it clear that you are not asking for a job—you would like to get information and advice about a career field that you are considering. Take notes, thank them for their time, ask for a business card and write a thank you note. If someone has taken the time to offer you advice, they will look forward to receiving occasional updates from you.

Questions to ask during informational interviews:

- How did you get into this field?
- Could you describe a typical day or week for me?
- What do you find most rewarding about your work? most challenging?
- What skills are most important to succeed in your work?
- What educational preparation would you recommend?
- If you could start over in this field, would you have done anything differently?
- Can you suggest other people I might talk with? When I call, may I use your name?

## 3. Gain experience

Explore career options and gain experience through internships, volunteering, or part-time work related to your major. It's an excellent way to learn about the field, develop marketable skills and see if that line of work would be a good fit for you. Volunteering gives you a different perspective on things and provides an opportunity to contribute in meaningful ways. Potential employers will be looking at your major and your coursework but they will also be very interested in what you did *outside* of class.

### A few more words....

*Do what you feel passionate about.* Friends and family with good intentions may tell you what you should do but *your* voice is the one that ultimately matters. By taking the time now to discover who you are, research occupations and make informed decisions, you will be more likely to enjoy a *career* (not just a job) and wake up each morning motivated to go to work. So gather the facts, do some soul searching, make your decision, and then *trust it*. Best wishes on your journey!

For additional guidance, contact the Parkland College Career Center, Rm. A175  
217/351-2536

Office hours 8-6 M,TH; 8-5 Tu,W,F

[www.parkland.edu/careercenter](http://www.parkland.edu/careercenter)