



## Engaging Students in Career Exploration

This resource has been developed to assist faculty and student services professionals with supporting students with the career exploration process. This information is designed to be a supplement to a full day training program has been developed by the Center for Student Success and a team of career experts.

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## Defining a Career Practitioner

A career practitioner is a professional who assists students with exploring career options and engaging in career-decision making. The specific role of the career practitioner will vary based on the expectations of the employer.

Career practitioners listen, ask guiding questions, provide resources to students, encourage students to take advantage of opportunities that can develop career skills, and assist students with developing educational and career plans.

## Career Practitioner Competencies

Knowledgeable about:

- the career exploration process
- career and job market resources and skills
- goal setting and decision-making processes
- resources and when referrals are needed

Skills:

- Relationship skills
- Ability to work with diverse populations
- Motivational and engagement skills

For a list of career competencies outlined by NACE, visit <http://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/>

## Referral Process

As a career practitioner, it is important to provide services and assistance aligned to your training and expertise and to refer the student to other resources when needed. There are other professionals on campus that can provide more specialized assistance as appropriate. Because you have developed a relationship with the student, you can increase the likelihood that a student pursues another support service when needed by personally connecting the student to another professional. Becoming familiar with campus and community resources and the professionals in these offices will help you make good referrals. Better understanding how these resources can provide more in-depth, specialized support will make it easier for you to make referrals aligned to student needs.

Here is a list of times when a referral would be appropriate:

- Whenever you feel uncomfortable and are being asked to assist in a way that is beyond your training and expertise
- When non-career issues such as mental health, disability, or financial concerns are discussed
- When a student needs academic assistance such as tutoring
- When a student would like to complete a formal career assessment
- When a student wants in-depth assistance with developing job search skills

## **The Career Exploration Process**

Career exploration is an ongoing, iterative process. There is no one perfect career and many individuals will have several careers. In fact, the average number of jobs a person will hold over the course of their lifetime is 11.9 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Many of the careers that our students will be in do not even exist today. It is therefore not critical for students to identify a specific career but identifying a career pathway or field can be very helpful, especially in terms of educational and career planning.

The traditional career exploration process, based on the work of Parsons and Holland, involves the following three steps:

1. Engaging in self-assessment of values/passion, skills/abilities, and interests
2. Discovering information about careers
3. Selecting a career where the career tasks and responsibilities align with values, skills, and interests.

Although this is a helpful framework for assisting students with career exploration, it is important to note that career experts such as Krumboltz believe that this is only part of the process. He believes that people enter careers based on a series of planned and unplanned experiences. By engaging in self-assessment and researching careers, students are involved in the planning part of the process. However, often times, people enter careers they did not expect to or perhaps didn't even know about. This is often the result of individuals being open to experiences and taking advantage of opportunities that come their way. These are the unplanned events that impact career decisions and paths.

Most students will make career decisions based on conversations with friends and family. Not surprisingly, students will also choose career paths that they know about from personal experiences or because a friend or family member works in that field. Although family and

friends know us well and can serve as a great resource during the career-decision making process, this approach may be limiting. It is important to help students see beyond the limits of their current situation, discover the many career opportunities that exist, and see what is possible.

As students set goals, it's really important for students to challenge themselves and to be specific. Researchers have found that the higher you aim, the higher you achieve (Locke & Latham, 2002). In addition, specific goals make it easier to monitor progress, make adjustments as needed, and most importantly, know when goals have been achieved.

The following frameworks can be helpful in this process:

The ABCS goal setting approach (Harrington, 2019):

- Aim high
- Believe in yourself
- Care and commit
- Specify and self-reflect

The Appreciative Advising process (Bloom, Huston, & He, 2013):

- Disarm
- Discover
- Dream
- Design
- Deliver
- Don't Settle

## **Self-Assessment**

It is important for students to understand that values, skills, and interests develop and change over time. Thus, career exploration is an ongoing process. One of the best ways to engage students in the self-assessment process is to ask questions. See sample questions to ask below. If students are struggling to determine their values, abilities, and interests, it may be helpful for them to take self-assessment inventories. Refer students to the counseling or career services department on your campus for a deeper self-assessment. It is important to note that students may have to pay a fee for career assessments.

### Values/Passion:

- Independence and autonomy
- Making a difference or helping others
- Salary
- Prestige
- Structured work environment with clear expectations
- Creativity
- Job security
- Opportunity for advancement
- Consistent work days and hours
- Flexibility
- Working in a team
- Working alone
- Working in a fast-paced environment
- Working in a calm environment

### *Questions to Ask:*

- After reviewing the values, which ones are most important to you?
- What matters to you?
- What is your why?
- What would people who know you best say matters to you?
- What can't you live without?
- Who/what influences you and the decisions that you make?

### Skills/Abilities:

- Professionalism
- Critical thinking
- Communication
- Teamwork/Interpersonal
- Leadership
- Emotional intelligence
- Problem-solving

### *Questions to Ask:*

- After reviewing the list of career skills, which ones would you say are your strengths?
- What subjects did you perform the best in as a high school or college student?

- What skills have you have gained from work experience, volunteering, sports/clubs/organizations, or other community activities?

#### Interests (According to Holland's, 1977 theory):

- Realistic- prefers to work with things
- Investigative- prefers to work with ideas
- Artistic- prefers to be creative and work in unstructured environments
- Social- prefers to work with others
- Enterprising- prefers to influence and persuade others
- Conventional- prefers structured work environment

#### *Questions to Ask:*

- After reviewing the interest areas, what would your top three interests be in order of importance?
- What was your favorite subject in high school or college?
- What do you do for fun?
- What kinds of blogs, stories, articles, websites do you read on a regular basis?
- Who do you follow on social media and why?

### **Career Information Gathering**

There's no shortage of information on careers. It is very easy for students to become overwhelmed by the endless number of resources. It is helpful for students to engage in focused searches. Guide students to credible resources such as career websites and professionals in the field. Inform students that career information can be discovered through a variety of online and in person resources. Encourage students to use information gained from website searches to prepare for informational interviews and job shadowing experiences.

#### Websites:

Expose students to basic information about careers of interest, as well as information about what careers are currently in demand or are expected to grow faster than average. Help students learn how to best navigate the websites to find the information that they need. The following websites can provide students with essential information about various careers.

Local	State	National
Community College Website	Career Connections <a href="http://careerconnections.nj.gov/careerconnection/s/">http://careerconnections.nj.gov/careerconnection/s/</a>	O*NET <a href="https://www.onetonline.org">https://www.onetonline.org</a>
Library LibGuides and databases	NJCAN <a href="https://portal.njcis.intocareers.org">https://portal.njcis.intocareers.org</a>	Occupational Outlook Handbook <a href="https://www.bls.gov/ooh/">https://www.bls.gov/ooh/</a>

### Professionals:

Encourage students to talk with professionals in the field. This can provide students with a more personal look at career options and help them build a network. Informational interviews and job shadowing can be used for this purpose. Informational interviews are opportunities for students to meet with a professional in the field and learn about that career and position. It is not a job interview. Job shadowing is when a professional allows a student to join them at their place of employment to get a first-hand look at that career and position. This is not an internship or work experience. It is typically a one-time observation.

Assist students with finding someone to conduct an informational interview with or to job shadow. Students can ask their friends, family, professors, classmates, colleagues, and others to help them identify a professional in their field of interest. Students can also reach out to the college alumni office or utilize social media platforms such as LinkedIn to make a connection with a professional in the field.

Help students develop a list of questions to ask during the informational interview or during the job shadowing experience. Encourage students to review the information learned from websites before crafting the questions. Students can then create a list of questions they still have after researching the career online.

### *Sample Informational Interview Questions:*

1. What are the job tasks?
2. What is a typical day like?
3. What is your favorite part of this position?
4. What is the most challenging part of this position?
5. What was your career journey? How did you get to this position?
6. What advice do you have for someone who wants to enter this field?

## Taking Action

One of the best ways for students to discover their values, skills, and interests is to engage in activities. When students get involved and take advantage of opportunities, it is more likely for unplanned events to influence the career exploration process (Krumboltz, 2001). It's also a great way to build a network. The more engaged and involved students are with each of these activities, the more they will learn. Professional experiences in the field will be of significant value. Thus, internships and cooperative education experiences that take place over the course of a semester or longer are highly recommended. Students can talk to others in their network and reach out to campus resources to identify experiential learning opportunities. Help students discover what skills they already have and how to develop and strengthen career skills. Essential career skills can be developed through academic, co-curricular, and community or professional experiences.

### Co-curricular and experiential learning opportunities:

- Internships/Cooperative Education
- On-campus and off-campus jobs
- Leadership activities & opportunities
- Clubs
- Sports
- Service Learning
- Volunteering

### Networking

Help students understand the importance of networking and how networking can happen during any academic, professional, social or civic experience. Every interaction is an opportunity to develop or grow a network. Explain to students that every interaction is an opportunity and the importance of presenting oneself in a positive light both in person and online. Engaging in positive, proactive behaviors will likely be noticed by others. Encourage students to consider creating a professional online presence using LinkedIn.

Sometimes networking is informal and unplanned while at other times networking can be strategic and planned. Having an elevator speech ready is a good idea. Help students craft an elevator speech that addresses a success, area of passion, and plan or desire. Elevator speeches are approximately 30 seconds in duration and focus on one or two key accomplishments and goals.

Networking involves establishing a professional relationship that benefits both parties. Students will therefore want to identify ways that they can contribute to the relationship. Help students see the value they can bring to a professional relationship. Students can build their



network by engaging in experiences beyond the classroom. Encourage students to meet with other professionals such as advisors, counselors, career services, and faculty, make connections at their place of employment, and through their co-curricular and experiential learning activities.

### Educational, financial, and career planning

After students decide on a career path, it's time to start planning. Students will need to determine what educational experience is needed and how they will pay for this education. Students will also want to identify what academic, co-curricular, community, and professional experiences they want to seek out to help them achieve their goal. For example, internships and volunteer experiences can be investigated.

Plans should include the following:

- Career goal
- Educational requirements, including a list of courses, needed to enter this career
- Timeline for completing educational requirements (a semester-by-semester plan)
- Costs related to completing educational requirements and a plan to pay for these expenses
- Experiential learning opportunities including employment, internships, and co-curricular activities

Mapping out a semester-by-semester plan can help students clearly see the steps they will need to take in order to achieve their goal. More specifically, this plan can help students identify actions they can take to meet educational requirements and build knowledge and skills needed for success in their chosen career path.

## **References**

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