



CAREER EXPLORATION

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Before committing to a career goal, it is helpful for college students to go through the process of ensuring they have made the right choice, including the right career path and the right academic major. Matching your personality to the appropriate occupation is critical to your personal satisfaction and professional success.

Your confidence in making the right decision regarding your career and life goals is dependent on your ability and willingness to gather good information and conduct thorough research. Once you have explored the details of your personality (interests, skills, abilities, strengths, values, purpose, needs), you are ready to begin exploring your career options (occupations, job titles, career paths).

What variety of functions exist in the job market? What type of work activities are you most suited for? What work settings are conducive to your personality? What qualifications are required? What is the salary range?

GATHERING INFORMATION

To avoid making a poor decision, it is very important that you thoroughly examine your career options. Effectively investigating and researching specific occupations involves gathering relevant facts and data about the realities of the field and the required training and skills. Gaining accurate and in-depth knowledge about various industries and occupations is critical to your confidence in choosing the right career path. The best sources of information related to careers include published materials (printed and on-line), people in the field, and your own firsthand personal experience. This three-step process of gathering career information is highly recommended:

1 | PUBLISHED MATERIALS

A wide range of books and other printed materials are available to researchers who want to learn more about various occupations, job titles and career paths. This kind of published information is generally accessible through libraries and career resource centers. Additional data can be obtained from company reports, corporate literature, industrial directories, chambers of commerce, professional organizations, and government agencies.

A wealth of career information is easily accessible on the internet. Whether you are researching a company, industry or occupation, the information available on-line is plentiful. There are numerous websites that provide detailed data about careers, including descriptions of work functions, work settings, qualifications, training, credentials, salary, and more. There are websites devoted to particular career sectors or industries that offer detailed information. There are on-line directories and databases that organize career information into categories and provide job-specific data.

Occupational Outlook Handbook	www.bls.gov/oooh
My Plan	www.myplan.com
My Majors	www.mymajors.com
Career One Stop	www.careeronestop.org
Career Ship	www.mappingyourfuture.org
Career Profiles	www.careerprofiles.info

2 | PEOPLE IN THE FIELD

Another effective way to learn more about a career is to talk with people who are actually working in that career. By identifying key players or prominent figures in your particular field of interest, you can locate someone who might be willing to offer some practical perspectives. You can meet people from the field through career fairs, conventions, conferences, professional meetings, or through your teachers, counselors and advisors.

Meeting and interacting with professionals in your field is typically accomplished through brief informal pre-arranged meetings called informational interviews or informational discussions. You might also consider a mentorship or a job shadowing experience. Personal interaction with people in the field provides you the opportunity to gather real world insight, professional advice, and firsthand observations.

3 | PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

After you have conducted your research and talked with people in your field, you are now ready to experience it firsthand. “Trying it on for size” or “taking it out for a test run” is a good idea. You can obtain this personal exposure to a particular career through a variety of relatively risk-free arrangements.

You could take a course related to your field of interest. You might join a club or organization related to your field. You could participate in volunteer community work related to your field. You might get a part-time job in your field. Or, you could obtain an internship in your field. By “testing the waters,” “getting your feet wet,” or “getting your hands dirty,” you can finally determine if you are a good fit for the career path you are considering.

INFORMATION CHECKLIST

- Library Resources and Published Materials (Printed, Internet)
- Exploratory and Elective Coursework
- Extracurricular Activities, Campus Projects
- Clubs, Organizations, Societies, Associations
- Volunteer Community Projects
- Informational Interviews, Discussions with People in the Field
- Mentoring Activity
- Job Shadowing Activity
- Part Time or Seasonal Employment
- Internship Experience