

Exploring Careers and Majors Handbook

**Created by Career Services
Cornell College
Mount Vernon, IA**

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THE CAREER PLANNING PROCESS

Whether choosing a major or exploring careers, self-assessment and exploration are critical in making a good decision. You will find several tools that will help you get to know yourself, the world of work, and the possibilities for various majors and careers. More information about any of these topics is available at Career Services, and you can visit our web page to link to additional resources. Use as many resources as possible to enable you to make the best decision for you!

Choosing a Major

Some people know early on what they want to major in. Others may struggle choosing from among many majors that they enjoy. Still others may have a major in mind only to find that they are not as successful as they want to be in the classes within that major.

Choosing a Career

The same can be true for choosing a career. Some have known since grade school that they want to be a doctor and stay on that path. Others may have that same goal, but discover once in college that the field is not what they expected it to be. Still others, may enjoy many activities and have many interests that could be applied to various careers and must narrow down their choices.

The Career Planning Process

As you can see, the entire process of planning and choosing a career and major is straightforward for some and more complex for others.

Even though we are all unique, there are certain steps you can take and activities you can complete to help ensure that you, as an individual, are headed down the best career path for you.

Read on to find out more about the following steps or activities:

- STEP 1—DISCOVERY AND SELF ASSESSMENT**
- STEP 2—EXPLORATION AND GATHERING INFORMATION**
- STEP 3—GAINING EXPERIENCE AND EXPERIMENTATION**
- STEP 4—CHOOSING AND IMPLEMENTING**

STEP 1 - DISCOVERY AND SELF ASSESSMENT

The Discovery phase of your career planning involves getting to know yourself by exploring your interests, skills, and values. There are many ways to do this, and we suggest that you work closely with a career advisor in our office to help evaluate and interpret your experiences.

ASSESSMENT AND EXPLORATION TOOLS

Strong Interest Inventory

Interests have been linked to actual job titles and majors for decades by a well-known career theorist named John Holland. Using his occupational codes R I A S E C (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional), he has developed an interest inventory that is widely used at colleges and private practices today. The inventory helps individuals connect their interests to actual occupations for further exploration. The results will also match your occupational code to majors at Cornell. So, whether you are exploring majors or careers—or both—this inventory can help you.

We offer this inventory and a one-on-one interpretation of it. Best part is, there is no cost! You just let us know you want to take it and we'll get you started.

PARTICIPATE ON CAMPUS AND IN THE COMMUNITY

In addition to assessments inventories, you can learn a lot about yourself by getting involved. Join an organization or two on campus, get involved in the Mt. Vernon or surrounding communities as a volunteer, or take a class that is outside your anticipated major.

TAKE A WIDE VARIETY OF CLASSES

One of the advantages of a liberal arts education is the opportunity it affords you to take classes that are outside your intended major. In fact, it's encouraged. Your first year is an excellent time to explore different fields by taking a variety of classes. Be sure to work closely with your advisor to ensure that these classes are satisfying your general education requirements.

ASK YOURSELF SOME QUESTIONS

Journal writing is another way to bring your interests, skills, and values into focus. Use the following questions to get you started and then follow up with a career counselor for further assessment.

1. What are you doing when you are so engrossed that you lose track of time?
2. In what kinds of activities, relative to yourself and not to others, do you make the boldest choices?
3. What tasks are you quickest at? Those areas where you work more quickly are likely to be areas you are most skilled in.
4. When you wake up in the morning, what do you most look forward to?
5. When are you at your happiest?
6. Tell me about yourself.

A WORD ABOUT SKILLS

We all have skills that hold value for employers and graduate schools. These skills are called "transferable skills." Simply put they are skills that you gain from one aspect of your life/learning that are transferable to what you want to do next. Some examples of these skills include teamwork, customer service, and flexibility.

In survey after survey, employers consistently tell us that they seek the following skills:

1. Communication Skills (verbal and written)
2. Honesty/integrity
3. Teamwork Skills
4. Interpersonal Skills
5. Motivation/Initiative
6. Strong Work Ethic
7. Analytical Skills
8. Flexibility/Adaptability
9. Computer Skills
10. Organizational Skills

From jobweb.com, website of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)

Use the space below to list five transferable skills that you possess. Next to each skill, make note of an example which shows how you used that particular skill. This exercise will not only help you clarify your skills and career path, but it will be a strong building block for writing your resume, job searching and preparing for interviews.

Transferrable Skills I Possess

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

All of these activities will help you further define and clarify what you enjoy, what you are good at , and what you value most. While the results will not give you magical answers, they will point you in the right direction so that you can further explore specific occupations and majors.

STEP 2 - EXPLORATION AND GATHERING INFORMATION

The Exploration phase of your career planning involves finding out more about the careers or majors you have identified. There are many ways in which to explore—through printed materials, by talking to people, and by observing people.

PRINTED MATERIALS

Career Related Books

The Career Services Office has an extensive library of books which detail careers within specific majors, industries and by interest areas. These books can be checked out.

Internet Resources

Career Services has set up links to a variety of websites for career exploration, including

- The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (<http://stats.bls.gov/oco>) is a publication of the Department of Labor which outlines thousands of occupations, giving you information on the nature of work, employment trends and opportunities, training requirements, job outlook, earnings and related occupations.
- *O*Net Online* (<http://online.onetcenter.org/>) is a resource for exploring occupations includes the ability to search for and match skill sets with occupations. It also give complete descriptions of thousands of occupations.
- *Job Web* (www.jobweb.org) is a site maintained by the National Association of Colleges and Employers and provides information on all aspects of your career exploration.
- *Career Service's Sites by Discipline* is a page created by Career Services where you can explore majors and careers by looking at sites that list jobs and associations. Through these you can find out what skills and abilities are sought as well as what organizations hire people with your major.

Course Catalog

If you are trying to choose a major, read through the course descriptions in the Cornell Catalog. This may sound simple, but it can provide you with a wealth of information. Pay close attention to what is to be studied through the

courses and what approach is used.

TALKING TO PEOPLE

Another great source for exploring careers and majors is talking to people in those areas. It's best to explore using printed information first so that you can create more meaningful questions for people.

Informational Interviews

The informational interview is a gathering session used to obtain first hand impressions of a particular job or career field. This career exploration technique allows you to learn strategies for pursuing work in that field. It is also an opportunity to begin and expand your network, which could generate job or internship leads as well as possible mentoring relationships.

Setting up the Informational Interview

Setting up these interviews may be uncomfortable at first, but keep in mind that many alumni and other professionals are willing to talk with college students and share their experiences. Preparing before you make initial contact will increase your comfort level. Make a list of possible contacts. The staff in Career Services can assist you with this. Many times we have alumni in the field you are interested in and can make the initial contact for you. When you are making the first contact, be clear about your status and your purpose for the interview—you are a college student gathering information.

Preparing for the Informational Interview

Sometimes, informational interviews will take place at that person's office, but it may also occur via email or phone. An initial informational interview via email is fast and convenient for both parties and it's a great start. However, your ultimate goal should be a face-to-face interview, and for that, be sure to get directions to their place of business and to their department if the organization is large. Leave your phone number or email in case the person needs to reschedule. Respect their time and arrive 10-15 minutes early. If you asked for 20-30 minutes, be sure to stick to that unless they indicate otherwise. Dress as if you were being interviewed for a job and take your resume along just in case they ask for it.

Above all else, prepare questions that you want to ask!! Think about your goals and what you want to learn during the interview. Below are suggested questions for an informational interview:

Background:

- What was your major in college? What academic degrees have you received?
- What courses have been most useful in your career?
- What additional experiences did you have before beginning this position? This might include part-time work, summer jobs, internships, volunteer experience or involvement in student activities.

Career Path:

- What was your first job after graduating from college?
- Tell me about your career path. How many different positions have you held? Is this a typical path for others in this same type of job?

Day-to-Day Work:

- What is the typical workday (week) like? What are your specific responsibilities?
- What is the actual number of hours you put in during a typical week?
- Is travel involved with your position?
- Is relocation frequent in your field?
- What is the most satisfying/frustrating thing about your job?
- What particular skills do you use most often in your work?
- What are the most difficult problems you deal with in your work?
- Do you have any flexibility in your work schedule?

Details About the Career or Industry:

- What is the current demand for this position?
- How is this field likely to be affected by technological changes?
- What trends do you see developing over the next 3-5 years for this career and/or industry?
- What is the typical salary for someone just starting out in this career?
- What is the potential for promotion either within your company or within this career/industry?
- What professional journals should I be reading? What professional associations should I be joining?

Breaking In/Landing a First Job:

- What personal qualities do you consider important for someone in this field?
- What can I change on my resume to make it more effective?
- What are your suggestions for finding a job in this field? With this company?
- How do people normally find out about jobs in this field? With this company?
- Who should I contact within your company when I am ready to look for a job?
- What are the most important factors used when hiring for positions within your company or the industry as a whole (education, past experiences, personality, special skill set)?

General Advice and Follow Up:

- If you could start over again would you do anything differently? Different education or training? Career? Employer?
- **Do you know of any other people in this field who might be willing to visit with me about their experiences?** *This last question is key so that you can continue to expand your network while learning even more about your chosen field.*

Major Mentors

Cornell has upperclass students, called Major Mentors, who represent each major here. Their purpose is to provide you with additional information and a student's perspective on the major. You can also get some ideas of how these current students intend to use that particular major. You can find a link to the Major Mentors page on our website; click on Students, then Exploring Careers, then Explore Majors.

Faculty

Talk to faculty within the majors you are exploring. They are happy to provide you with additional information about the courses as well as potential careers.

Career Services Counselors

Throughout all these techniques and tactics, know that the staff in Career Services are here to help you with every step. Make an appointment, and we can provide you with additional information on how careers and majors are related—and how they are not related! We can also help you make sense out of all the information you are finding and hearing!

OBSERVING PEOPLE AND CAREERS

Once you have had a chance to review printed materials and talk with people in the field, the next natural step is to observe them in action. We are not to the internship stage yet—that comes next! Observing people at their work allows you to get an even better idea of what they do on a day-to-day basis. This exploration tool is called “job shadowing” or “externships.” This differs from an internship in that with an externship you are only observing, not doing. With an internship, you will be asked to make specific contributions by *doing* projects, tasks, etc. With a relationship established through informational interviewing, you can easily ask if they might be able to provide an opportunity for you to shadow within their organization. Again, your preparation is key so that you can convey to them your goals and know specifically what you want to achieve.

Job shadows or externships typically range from a few hours of one day to several days within a week.

You can set up shadowing anytime—block breaks and holiday breaks are ideal. The staff in Career Services can

assist you in finding alumni and talk you through how to make your approach.

Externships Over Spring Break

This Career Services program is designed to make this process easy for students. Through the program, the Career Services staff will find and make all the arrangements for a shadowing experience over Spring Break in a career field and location of your choice. Watch for advertisements and applications to this program in November and December of each year.

STEP 3 – GAINING EXPERIENCE AND EXPERIMENTATION

Whether you think you are headed to full-time work or graduate school after Cornell, gaining experience can put your application above those without it.

The experience you gain can take many forms. Here at Cornell, there are opportunities for **off-campus study, study abroad, academic research, and internships**. Or, your experience may be gained through related **summer employment or volunteering** that you do within the community. The most successful students gain experience in multiple forms.

Benefits for Students in Gaining Experience

- Further define your career interests
- Determine if there is a good fit between your skills and interests and those needed for success within a given field
- Test and apply academic theory in a work setting
- Develop and expand skills and knowledge
- Reinforce what is learned in the classroom and place future classroom learning in context
- Feel a sense of accomplishment through professional contributions
- Strengthen your resume with practical experience that employers and graduate school are seeking
- Build networking contacts that may be helpful in getting a job or gaining entrance into the graduate program of your choice.

Off-Campus Study and Study Abroad

Off-campus study can occur within the context of courses here at Cornell or can be arranged on your own (with appropriate approvals).

If you are unsure if a certain major or course allows opportunity for off-campus study, visit with a faculty member in that department for more details.

If you are interested in the possibility of studying off-campus or abroad outside a one-block course, visit with your faculty advisor as soon as possible. You can also find more information and programs on the Registrar's website—www.cornellcollege.edu/registrar/students/offcampus.shtml. You must apply for off-campus study through the Registrar's Office by February 1 prior to the academic year in which you wish to pursue that study. For example, deadline for off-campus study for 2006-07 academic year would be February 1, 2006.

Academic Research

Start talking to faculty as soon as possible if you are interested in contributing to academic research on campus.

There are also many undergraduate research programs available, particularly during the summer. Contact Career Services, and we would be happy to help you research and apply for these varied opportunities. For students interested in science or healthcare related research, be sure to visit the website of the Dimensions Resources Center at www.cornellcollege.edu/dimensions.

Volunteering and Service

Many, many organizations seek volunteers to carry out a variety of tasks and projects. In fact, many non-profit organizations could not survive without their volunteers! Visit the Leadership and Service Office (LSO) for more

information and to sign up to receive notification of upcoming events and opportunities.

Internships and Summer Jobs

Career Services has listings and resources available to assist you in finding a summer job or internship. Many times, you can gain valuable experience within a summer job by requesting additional responsibilities that more closely match your skills and career goals.

See further information about internships in our “Finding an Internship” booklet, which is available in Career Services or visit our website www.cornellcollege.edu/career/students and click on Internships.

STEP 4 – CHOOSING AND IMPLEMENTING

Congratulations. You have gone through some self-assessment, explored using a number of resources and gained experience in one or more fields of interest to you.

It’s now time to make some decisions. It’s okay to pursue several career possibilities at the same time, but ultimately you will need to choose one over the other—at least for now.

Choosing a Major

You will be asked to declare your major at the beginning of February of your second year. Hopefully, self-assessment and exploration have raised your comfort level in making this choice. In addition, here are some final pieces of advice:

- Family, friends and stereotypes can influence your choice of major. Use the research you have done to make the best choice for you.
- Remember that there is not one major made for you. We are all multi-faceted and thus, will most likely be happy and succeed in a number of different majors.
- Your choice of major will not “lock” you into a specific career or job. This choice is but one piece in the entire planning process; don’t forget that the experiences you gain will also be part of who you are and what you offer to employers and graduate programs.
- We are constantly changing and learning about ourselves and the world of work. So, changing your major or keeping your major and changing your career path are perfectly normal and doable.

Choosing a Career Path

Similar to choosing a major, your self-assessment, exploration and experiences should help you when it comes time to choose a career path. Remember these final thoughts:

Some will choose a path because their major and experiences naturally lead them to it, and they have been satisfied with the content of both. Others will come away from a major or experience knowing that they do not want to go in that direction. Depending on where you are in your college career, your major may stay the same, but you may choose to apply it in a different way. Either way is okay.

Be aware of which category you fall into and why. In either instance, you will have developed a unique set of skills. Get to know those skills and practice talking about them.

Continue to utilize and expand the network of contacts you built while exploring and through your internships or summer jobs. These individuals can continue to be a great source of information to you as you continue down your chosen path.

Implementing Your Choices

It’s time to begin applying to and choosing a graduate program or full-time job.

Other Career Services handbooks and resources address this step in more detail. Make an appointment to visit with a career counselor to map out your personal job search or graduate school search.

To get started, visit our website at www.cornellcollege.edu/career and/or pick up our handbooks on “Applying to Graduate and Professional School” and “Interviewing.”