A Parents' Guide to Career Development

One of the most valuable things parents can do to help a student with career planning is listen: be open to new ideas, try to help your student find information, and be nonjudgmental.

Here are some important ways you can help:

1. **Encourage your child to visit Career Development (and you can go too!)**
   Next time you visit campus, drop into the Career Development and pick up a business card from one of the career advisers. When your son or daughter is feeling anxious about his/her future, offer the card and say, "Please call this person. He (or she) can help you." Many students use their first semester to "settle into" college life, and so perhaps the spring semester of the freshman year is the optimal time to start using career center services. And, it's a good time for you to prompt that first visit. Ask your student (in an off-handed way), "Have you visited the university’s career center?" If you hear, "You only go there when you are a senior," then it's time to reassure them that career services is not just for seniors, and meeting with a career counselor can take place at any point (and should take place frequently) in their college career. The sooner a student becomes familiar with the staff, resources, and programs, the better prepared he or she will be to make wise career decisions.

   Our career center offers a full range of career development and job-search help including:
   - Mock interviews
   - A network of alumni willing to talk about their jobs and careers,
   - A library of books on a wide range of careers
   - Workshops on writing resumes and cover letters
   - A recruiting program
   - Internship advisement
   - Individual career advising

2. **Advise your student to write a resume**
   Writing a resume can be a "reality test" and can help a student identify weak areas that require improvement. Suggest that your student get sample resumes from the career center, from books at the public library, or online.
   You can review resume drafts for grammar, spelling, and content, but recommend that the final product be critiqued by a career development professional.

3. **Challenge your student to become "occupationally literate"**
   Ask: "Do you have any ideas about what you might want to do when you graduate?"
   If your student seems unsure, you can talk about personal qualities you see as talents and strengths. You can also recommend:
   - Taking a "self-assessment inventory," such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or Strong Interest Inventory, both free to students at Career Development.
   - Talking to favorite faculty members, and
   - Researching a variety of interesting career fields, and employers. A career decision should be a process and not a one-time, last-minute event: Discourage putting this decision off until the senior year!
4. **Allow your student to make the decision**

Even though it is helpful to ask occasionally about career plans, too much prodding can backfire.

**Myth:** A student must major in something "practical" or marketable.

**Truth:** Students should follow their own interests and passions.

**Myth:** Picking your major means picking the career you will have forever.

**Truth:** That's not true anymore. "Major" does not necessarily mean "career", and it is not unusual for a student to change majors. Many students change majors after gaining more information about specific fields of study and career fields of interest. Many students end up doing something very different than originally planned, so don't freak out when they come up with an outrageous or impractical career idea. Chances are plans will develop and change. It's okay to change majors—and careers.

It's okay to make suggestions about majors and career fields, but let your student be the ultimate judge of what's best. Career development can be stressful. Maybe this is the first really big decision that your son or daughter has had to make. Be patient, sympathetic and understanding, even if you don't agree with your child's decisions.

5. **Talk to them about Grade Point Average (GPA)**

Some students who get off to a rocky start eventually pull up their grades; however, this can be very difficult to do. Advanced placement credits and study abroad courses generally do not count in the computation of a student's GPA. Some employers use GPA cutoffs in considering applicants. Other employers stress the student's overall background: experience, number of hours worked during the school year to finance college, leadership activities, etc. Encourage your son or daughter to make academics a high priority beginning with his or her freshman year. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that it may take him or her a while to adjust to the rigorous academic demands of college.

6. **Emphasize the importance of internships**

Career Development will not "place" your child in a job at graduation. Colleges grant degrees, but not job guarantees, so having relevant experience in this competitive job market is critical. Your son or daughter can sample career options by completing internships and experimenting with summer employment opportunities or volunteer work.

**Why an internship?**
- Employers are interested in communication, problem-solving, and administrative skills, which can be developed through internships.
- Employers look for experience on a student's resume and often hire from within their own internship programs.
- Having a high GPA is not enough.
- A strong letter of recommendation from an internship supervisor can often tip the scale of an important interview in their favor.

7. **Encourage extracurricular involvement**

Part of experiencing college life is to be involved and active outside the classroom. Interpersonal and leadership skills—qualities valued by future employers—are often developed in extracurricular activities.
8. **Persuade your student to stay up-to-date with current events**
   Employers will expect students to know what is happening around them. Buy your student a subscription to the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*. When he or she is home on break, discuss major world and business issues.

9. **Graduating early vs. graduating late**
   Some students graduate early through advanced placement credits, heavy course loads, and summer school courses. The advantages are lower educational expenses and the ability to start employment or graduate school earlier. The disadvantages may include the sacrifice of academic honors, work experience, and extracurricular and volunteer activities that may contribute to a student's maturity level and qualifications. Other students graduate late due to light course loads, academic difficulties, changing majors, poor academic advising, lack of direction, or reluctance to leave the cocoon of the college environment. Advantages to late graduation include the ability to improve grades with light class loads, extra time to change majors, the ability to take additional electives to improve marketability, and extra time to gain more career-related or leadership experience. Disadvantages to late graduation are increased college costs and possible disapproval of employers and graduate schools.

10. **Planning for graduate/professional school**
    About 88 percent of the nation's college freshmen indicated in a recent survey that they plan to go to graduate or professional school, yet only about 24 percent do so within a year of completing their bachelor's degree. Students aspiring to graduate or professional school should: Be clear about the reasons they want to go on for further education; research the qualifications required for admission and be realistic about their chances of acceptance; and always have a "Plan B" or back-up plan in case they are not accepted. Students should discuss their interest in graduate or professional school well before their senior year with their academic adviser, as well as a career adviser to obtain advice and guidance from two different perspectives.

11. **Taking time off**
    Many students want to take time off after college graduation before attending graduate school or taking a career-related job. Future employers will want to know how the student has spent the intervening time. Do activities during this period demonstrate relevance to future career goals and/or a good work ethic? While short-term travel may be personally broadening, it does not increase a student's marketability to employers unless it is seen as career related. Therefore, the time off may result in a longer job search. For example, management trainee programs, which often begin shortly after graduation and hire large numbers of new graduates, may be filled by the time your child is ready to begin a job search.

12. **Expose your student to the world of work**
    Most students have a stereotypical view of the workplace. Take your child to your workplace. Explain to your son or daughter what you do for a living. Show him or her how to network by interacting with your own colleagues. Help your student identify potential employers.

13. **Teach the value of networking**
    Introduce your student to people who have the careers/jobs that are of interest. Suggest
your son or daughter contact people in your personal and professional networks for information on summer jobs. Encourage your child to "shadow" someone in the workplace to increase awareness of interesting career fields.

14. Help the career center
   Call Career Development when you have a summer, part-time or full-time job opening. The staff will help you find a hard-working student. If your company hires interns, have the internships listed on CareerShark. Join our office’s career advisory network and use your "real world" experience to advise students of their career options, participate in a career panel or career related workshop.