

## Career Exploration

### Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to help you:

- Understand the career-planning process
- Know how the Vanderbilt Career Center and Career Advisers can help
- Be more self-aware of your values, interests, skills, personality, and work preferences
- Understand the advantages of DISCOVER, an online career guidance system
- Conduct research and explore the possibilities for your future
- Seek ways to test your options
- Make decisions about and plans for your future

### Process Overview – What is Exploration?

#### It's a Process

Unfortunately, there is no crystal ball or magic mirror to tell you what career choice is right for you. Rather, the career planning process is a continuous and lifelong journey. This process incorporates taking a good look at yourself (including your interests, values, and skills) and using that information to research career options. No matter where you are in your educational journey, whether this is your first year or your final year, career exploration can assist you.

Are you headed along the right path to your preferred career? Like any adventure, your career journey is certain to be much more exciting and satisfying if you have a destination in mind. When you are focused and know your strengths and interests, you can target the industries, organizations, and positions that best match your talents and personality. Your immediate goal should be to make the best career choices possible at this point in your life. Keep in mind that it's only natural that your dreams and aspirations may change over time. Changing interests and personal circumstances, combined with the rapidly evolving nature of the workforce and the workplace, will require you to make numerous career-related decisions throughout your lifetime.

### Career Planning process

The VCC uses a 4-step career planning process called "Vpath."



The 4 steps in the Vpath process are:

1. Exploring your Future  
Self-Discovery  
Assess your skills, abilities, interests, values

Research Options  
Consider the possibilities

Test Options  
Evaluate options against your preferences

- 2. Planning your Future
  - Make Decisions
    - Choose a direction
    - Develop an Action Plan
  - Make contact
    - Connect with people who can help

- 3. Taking Action
  - Gain Experience
    - Build your skills and knowledge
  - Pursue Goals
    - Identify opportunities
    - Follow through

- 4. Developing Professionally
  - Adjust
    - Transition to professional life
  - Develop
    - Grow in your career
  - Evaluate
    - Make changes for growth and happiness

**Where Do I Start?**

Making your decisions, whether it is about which major or internship to pursue, what career really interests you, whether or not or when to go to graduate or professional school, or how you can use your degree, depends on a variety of factors.

Are you unsure where to start with all of this information? If that is the case, you will find the following questions can help you focus on what you may need to learn and where you might need to start in the process. By considering the statements in this exercise, you can then decide the steps you need to take next. Answer yes or no to the following questions:

Yes or No

- 1. I know what my major strengths and weaknesses are. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. I know what my values, characteristics, and attitudes are. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. I know what I enjoy doing and what my interests are. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. I know what major interests me and what minor can help me in the future. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. I know how my major and minor translate into future careers. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. I know what I am looking for in a career. \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. I am certain about the types of work that I could perform well. \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. I am sure that my current work choices are right for me. \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. I know what workers do in the occupations in which I am interested. \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. The types of work I can do will pay me enough to live the kind of life I want. \_\_\_\_\_

- 11. I have interviewed three or more people in the occupations that interest me. \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. I am satisfied with the decisions I have made in my life. \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. I know when I have made a good choice. \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. I feel confident in the process of making decisions about my career. \_\_\_\_\_
- 15. I am comfortable with the idea that I can change my mind at a later date. \_\_\_\_\_

If you answered more questions “no,” consider starting with the first steps of the Vpath process. If you answered more questions “yes,” you might consider starting with the middle steps of the Vpath process that seem appropriate to your stage in the process.

**The Role of and Help from VCC**

The Career Center is here to help you with this process. Schedule an appointment with a Career Adviser to discuss your decisions in a private, neutral setting. No matter whether you feel your decision is huge or small, manageable or “out of control,” we encourage you to utilize the assistance of the Career Center. We will support you while you take the time you need and provide you with the help to make the decision on your own.

**Self-Discovery – Assessing Yourself**

It is important that you take the time to identify your values, interests, skills, and preferences so that you can make informed decisions about career options. You may feel that you have a good understanding of them already, but you may not be able to articulate them clearly. However, take the time to sit and make a list of your values (example: what is most important to you), interests (example: what do you enjoy doing, hobbies), skills (example: what are you good at, what makes you stand out), and preferences (example: do you prefer to work alone or in a group?). If you find this process to be difficult, you may want to take career self-assessments (such as the ones described below) to assist you.

A self-assessment can reveal your characteristics, interests, values, and skills and can lead to improved career decision-making. Looking for a match between these factors and the work you are considering is the most important step you can take before you write a resume or begin the search for a job. In fact, when the time comes to write your resume and prepare for a job interview, you might find the task easier if you have completed the self-assessment process first!

You will need to commit some time to prepare your personal summary from your self-assessment process. Your honesty and the quality of your work will predict your level of success in making your career decisions and getting the right job. Write out your answers and the conclusions from your assessments as a permanent record of your thoughts and feelings. This data then becomes an important resource as you continue in your career planning and job search activities. The following self-assessment options will help you identify the values, interests, and skills you have, as well as the aspects of your personality that are important to consider in any job search.

**DISCOVER**

Planning your future begins with understanding yourself, followed by exploring majors and jobs that fit you. The VCC provides to you an Internet-based, interactive career guidance system named DISCOVER. DISCOVER offers guidance and information to help you in this process of making educational and career decisions. It provides assessments that identify your interests (what you enjoy doing), skills (what you are good at), and values (what is important to you in a job). Then, based on these assessments, you can explore the majors and careers that DISCOVER suggests for you.

To begin using DISCOVER, please contact our office at 322-2750 to obtain a User ID.

Once you have your User ID,

- Go to <http://www.act.org/discover/login>
- If this is your first use of DISCOVER, enter your User ID, leave the Password box blank, and click Submit. You will be asked to select a password.
- If you have used DISCOVER before, enter your User ID and password, and click Submit.

After completing the assessments, we encourage you to discuss your results with a Career Adviser.

## Values

Have you spent time thinking about what you value in life and what is important to you?

Have you ever wondered what causes someone to study for years to enter a career such as engineering or law while another person will look for the quickest way to make money? What causes someone to switch his or her career midstream? The answer to these questions is values. If you value good health, you will make time for daily exercise and proper nutrition. If you value career satisfaction, you will take time to examine your values and make choices that are consistent with them. Thinking about your values provides fantastic insight into yourself and can help you map out what's important to you. Then, you can keep your values in mind as you are making career and life decisions.

Below are two exercises that can start you thinking about what you value. The first exercise deals with general values. The second exercise deals with work-relevant values. These exercises can help you start to identify your values as they relate to your future.

### General Values

Look at the values listed below and circle those values that are most important to you. Feel free to add your own values if you feel the list doesn't capture everything it should for you.

- **An Exciting Life:** a stimulating life, encountering a wide-range of new experiences
- **Financial Security:** sufficient money to supply the material needs or desires you have plus enough surplus wealth for your chosen purposes (i.e. contributing to charity, travel, pampering yourself/others, etc.)
- **Personal Freedom:** a life of independence and always being able to do what you know is right for you
- **A Balanced Life:** an enjoyable life marked by an appropriate balance among your leisure, work, and family commitments
- **Spirituality:** a communion with a source of love and wisdom beyond yourself, which touches you in the deepest part of yourself
- **A World of Beauty:** living close to the beauty of nature and to the beauty of fine art, literature, music, and theater
- **Job Satisfaction:** becoming recognized as one who excels and achieves in your profession and who contributes much to the profession
- **A Long Life and Good Health:** superb physical and mental health over a long life span
- **An Ideal Setting:** a home overlooking the scenery that you find most beautiful
- **Political Power:** the power to institute programs or policies you choose and the ability to gain the cooperation of the persons or organizations required by your purposes

- **Social Justice:** a commitment to the equal rights and fair treatment of all members of society
- **An Authentic World:** a world in which all people are open, honest, and able to relate authentically with one another
- **Social Recognition:** receiving the respect and admiration of all and being in demand at prominent social occasions and decision-making conferences
- **Universal Brotherhood:** a world in which equal opportunity for all and love of one's fellow person are recognized as primary values
- **An Ideal Family Life:** family members who will experience sound relationships together, each finding the needed love and security to assure personal growth within the family unit
- **Inner Peace:** freedom from inner conflicts and security in the knowledge that you will make the right decisions and continue effective personal functioning
- **Respect for the Individual:** a belief in the dignity of each human being and a respect for the growing person
- **Intelligence:** the ability to function at full mental capacity, perceiving solutions to critical problems and engaging in critical reflection
- **Creativity:** the ability to formulate innovative ways of communicating perceptive understandings and having a fine command of several art media and verbal creativity
- **Wisdom:** a mature understanding of life; you are sought by others to furnish advice and counsel
- **Self-Esteem:** a respect for yourself; knowing that you are realizing your potential and that you are a person of great worth
- **Deep Friendships:** many close and meaningful relationships with persons you would choose to know well
- **Mature Love:** attaining lasting sexual and spiritual intimacy with another
- **Community:** helping to create and living in a place where people grow by means of meaningful relationships
- Write Your Own: \_\_\_\_\_
- Write Your Own: \_\_\_\_\_

### Work-Relevant Values

In addition to general lifestyle values, some values are specifically Work-Relevant values. Look at the values below (discussed further in DISCOVER) and circle those values below that are most important to you on this list.

#### **Work Settings**

- Working in an Office
- Working Outside
- Working Separately
- Public Contact
- 40-Hour Week
- Flexible Hours
- Safety

#### **Work Tasks**

- Authority
- Management
- Influencing Others
- Helping Others
- Making Things

- Physical Activity
- Organization
- Precision

**Work Preparation**

- Short Training Time
- Certification

**Work Opportunities**

- Prestige
- Achievement
- High Income
- Creativity
- Intellectual Stimulation

For more resources related to Values, go to our “Resources” page within our website.

**Interests**

The activities people engage in or are drawn to and the work environments in American society can be categorized by a set of common characteristics. Generally, people search for environments that allow them to express their interests and personality traits; people with similar traits tend to congregate in similar occupations. The more compatible a person’s interests are with the work environment, the greater the success and satisfaction the individual is likely to experience.

Consider your broad array of interests. Consider how these interests lead to majors and careers.

One way to consider your interests is to think about the type of job you would like to have in the future. Each job deals with people, things, data, and ideas, but the amount of dealing with each varies by the job. A computer programmer deals primarily with ideas and things. A registered nurse working directly with patients deals primarily with people and ideas. A Certified Public Accountant deals with data and people. How would you prioritize your preferences in these four areas?

- People
- Things
- Data
- Ideas

Based on your preferences, consider jobs and careers that deal more with the areas you prefer. The possible job areas that appeal to you can be categorized into six types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Read through the types below and identify which two or three interest you the most:

Interest Type	Some Career Areas	Works primarily with	Characteristics
<b>Realistic</b>	technical careers “hands-on” careers	things	People who have athletic or mechanical ability, prefer to work with objects, machines, tools, plants or animals; or who prefer to be outdoors

<b>Investigative</b>	science and technology careers research careers	things and ideas	People who like to observe, learn, investigate, analyze, evaluate, or solve problems
<b>Artistic</b>	literary and arts careers creative careers	ideas and people	People who have artistic, innovating, or intuitional abilities and like to work in unstructured situations using their imagination and creativity
<b>Social</b>	social service careers teaching careers	people	People who like to work with people to enlighten, inform, help, train, or cure them; and/or who are skilled with words
<b>Enterprising</b>	finance, management, and sales careers law careers	people and data	People who like to work with people, influencing, persuading, performing, leading, or managing for organizational goals or economic gain
<b>Conventional</b>	business operations careers administrative careers	data and things	People who like to work with data, have clerical or numerical ability, carry out tasks in detail, or follow through on others' instructions

Based on your preferences, consider jobs and careers that deal more with the areas you prefer.

For more resources related to Interests, go to our “Resources” page within our website.

## Skills

In addition to your values and interests, you should think about the skills you can bring to a job. Consider these questions:

- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What are my prominent skills and abilities? Which do I enjoy?
- What skills do I want to use on the job?
- What skills do I need to acquire?

A skill is a learned ability to do something well. Skills are the currency used by workers. In the labor market you receive pay in exchange for the skills that you offer and use at work. Individuals who can describe themselves to a potential employer in terms of their skills are more likely to find the work that they want and enjoy.

If you were asked right now to list your skills, what would your list look like? It might be a short list, not because you do not have the skills, but simply because you have never been

asked to identify them and are not accustomed to thinking and talking about them. Each person has approximately 700 different skills in their repertoire. Most individuals have trouble identifying them, and if they do recognize them, they don't feel right promoting them. However, you cannot afford this kind of misdirected modesty. Before you can be confident about your ability to move through a changing work world, you have to be realistic about and know your strengths.

Being able to identify your skills is the first activity. After you identify your skills, you should determine which skills you enjoy using more than others and thus the skills you would like to see in your future work. Consider both the skills at which you excel and the skills you enjoy.

Rate your skill/ability (and interest) on a scale of 1 to 5 in each of the following fifteen areas, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest (you can find further description of these skills by accessing DISCOVER):

- Meeting People (Social)
- Helping Others
- Sales
- Leadership/Management
- Organization
- Clerical
- Mechanical
- Manual Dexterity
- Numerical
- Scientific
- Creative/Artistic
- Creative/Literary
- Reading
- Language Usage
- Spatial Perception

Another very good skills assessment is provided by the O\*NET, an interactive occupational information website provided by the U.S. Department of Labor. O\*NET subdivides skills into six categories: basic skills, complex problem-solving skills, resource management skills, social skills, systems skills, and technical skills. Consider the skills list below (if you would like more information about these skills than is listed here, visit <http://online.onetcenter.org>). How would you rate your ability and interest in:

**Basic Skills:** Developed capacities that facilitate learning or the acquisition of knowledge

- Active Learning - Understanding the implications of new information for both current and future problem-solving and decision-making
- Active Listening - Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times
- Critical Thinking - Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions, or approaches to problems
- Learning Strategies - Selecting and using training/instructional methods and procedures appropriate for learning or teaching new things
- Mathematics - Using mathematics to solve problems
- Monitoring - Monitoring/assessing performance of yourself, other individuals, or organizations to make improvements or take corrective action

- Reading Comprehension - Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work-related documents
- Science - Using scientific rules and methods to solve problems
- Speaking - Talking to others to convey information effectively
- Writing - Communicating effectively in writing, as appropriate for the needs of the audience

**Complex Problem-Solving Skills:** Developed capacities used to solve novel, ill-defined problems in complex, real-world settings

- Complex Problem Solving - Identifying complex problems and reviewing related information to develop and evaluate options and implement solutions

**Resource Management Skills:** Developed capacities used to allocate resources efficiently

- Management of Financial Resources - Determining how money will be spent to get the work done and accounting for these expenditures
- Management of Material Resources - Obtaining and seeing to the appropriate use of equipment, facilities, and materials needed to do certain work
- Management of Personnel Resources - Motivating, developing, and directing people as they work, identifying the best people for the job
- Time Management - Managing one's own time and the time of others

**Social Skills:** Developed capacities used to work with people to achieve goals

- Coordination - Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions
- Instructing - Teaching others how to do something
- Negotiation - Bringing others together and trying to reconcile differences
- Persuasion - Persuading others to change their minds or behavior
- Service Orientation - Actively looking for ways to help people
- Social Perceptiveness - Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do

**Systems Skills:** Developed capacities used to understand, monitor, and improve socio-technical systems

- Judgment and Decision-Making - Considering the relative costs and benefits of potential actions to choose the most appropriate one
- Systems Analysis - Determining how a system should work and how changes in conditions, operations, and the environment will affect outcomes
- Systems Evaluation - Identifying measures or indicators of system performance and the actions needed to improve or correct performance, relative to the goals of the system

**Technical Skills:** Developed capacities used to design, set-up, operate, and correct malfunctions involving the application of machines or technological systems

- Equipment Maintenance - Performing routine maintenance on equipment and determining when and what kind of maintenance is needed
- Equipment Selection - Determining the kind of tools and equipment needed to do a job
- Installation - Installing equipment, machines, wiring, or programs to meet specifications
- Operation and Control - Controlling operations of equipment or systems
- Operation Monitoring - Watching gauges, dials, or other indicators to make sure a machine is working properly
- Operations Analysis - Analyzing needs and product requirements to create a design
- Programming - Writing computer programs for various purposes

- Quality Control Analysis - Conducting tests and inspections of products, services, or processes to evaluate quality or performance
- Repairing - Repairing machines or systems using the needed tools
- Technology Design - Generating or adapting equipment and technology to serve user needs
- Troubleshooting - Determining causes of operating errors and deciding what to do about them

For more resources related to Skills, go to our “Resources” page within our website.

## Personality

Another important factor in determining your happiness and success in a job is understanding your personality. Other ways to refer to personality are your nature, characteristics, or attitudes.

Many people talk about their "type" or personality tests they have taken, but few people understand the information they have been given. What exactly is "type" and personality and what do they have to do with your career decisions? According to the Myers-Briggs Foundation ([www.myersbriggs.org](http://www.myersbriggs.org)), psychological type describes the different ways people:

- are energized by the outside world or by the inner world,
- prefer to take in information,
- prefer to make decisions,
- prefer to keep things open or to move towards closure.

These four preferences result in a person's psychological type, sometimes called personality type. The theory of psychological type says that people with different preferences naturally have different interests, perspectives, behaviors, and motivations. Awareness of preferences helps people understand and value others who think and act quite differently, and this awareness can identify majors and careers that might fit you.

Here is a quick self-assessment tool for personality type. Determine which column under each category is truer for you in describing the way that you are (not who you want to be or who you should be):

### Where you focus your attention and where you draw your energy:

Extroversion/Introversion

#### **E--Extroversion**

- Focus is on the outer world of people; are energized by what goes on in environment
- Usually like to communicate by talking
- Need to experience the world to understand it; thus, tend to like action

#### **I--Introversion**

- Focus is more on the inner world; are energized by what happens in your inner world
- Prefer to write and like work which lets you work quietly inside your own head
- Like to understand the world before experiencing it; tend to think before acting

### How you perceive and acquire information

Sensing/Intuitive

**S--Sensing**

- Use eyes, ears, touch, and other senses to find out what is actually there, both inside and outside the self
- Useful in appreciating the realities of a situation
- Live in the here-and-now and are realistic and practical

**N--Intuition**

- Look at meanings, relationship, and possibilities that go beyond information from senses
- Useful at seeing possibilities
- See future possibilities and value imagination and inspiration

How you reach conclusions, make decisions, or form opinions

## Thinking/Feeling

**T--Thinking**

- Predict logical consequences of any choice
- Look at cause and effect and even include the unpleasant
- Seek objective standard of truth
- Are good at analyzing what is wrong with something

**F--Feeling**

- Consider what is important to self or others without requiring it be logical
- Ask how much you care and how much personal investment you have
- Seek harmony above all
- Tend to be sympathetic, appreciative, and tactful

How you deal with the outer world

## Judging/Perceiving

**J--Judging**

- Tend to live a planned, orderly way
- Like to make decisions, come to closure, then move on
- Prefer to be structured and organized and want things settled
- Want to regulate and control life

**P--Perceiving**

- Prefer flexibility/ spontaneity
- Like to keep options open
- Prefer to stay open to experience, enjoying the moment and trusting in the ability to adapt
- Constantly gather new information which could change current plans

**What do the letter combinations mean?**

First and foremost, remember that there are no "right answers." The letters merely are indicative of your preferences and are designed to provide insight into how you function. Keep in mind that no assessment instrument has all the answers and that you are the final authority of your own type!!

Your personality and preferences need to match your choice of major and future career. Ask your Career Adviser about how you can explore and learn about the majors and careers that do match.

For more resources related to Personality, go to our "Resources" page within our website.

## Work Preferences

In addition to values, interests, skills, and personality, there are a number of other factors to take into account when choosing a good career match.

The following is a list of items to consider that will help you clarify what you want and what you are prepared to do to get a job since today's job market requires you to be very flexible. Look at the following questions and identify which answers are important to you:

### 1. Working Conditions:

Where do I see myself working?

- inside
- outside
- combination of both

### 2. Physical Demands:

What type of physical activity am I willing to do on a regular basis?

- sedentary work (sitting)
- light lifting
- moderate lifting

### 3. Working Hours:

Which of the following work schedules would I prefer?

- regular 8 hours per day (40 hours/week)
- irregular hours (shift work, extended hours, flex hours)
- concentrated work weeks (work camps, construction sites)
- on-call hours

### 4. What type of work arrangement am I seeking?

- full-time
- part-time
- casual
- seasonal

### 5. Geographic Location:

A. Relocation

Would I relocate to pursue further education?

- Yes
- No

Would I relocate to find employment?

- Yes
- No

Would I relocate to keep your job?

- Yes
- No

Would I relocate in order to accept a promotion?

- Yes
- No

B. In what setting would I prefer to live and work?

- an urban setting
- a rural setting

C. In which region(s) would I like to live?

- Northeast
- Mid-Atlantic
- Southeast
- Mid-West

- Southwest
- Mountain West
- West Coast
- Northwest
- International

**6. Travel:**

How much travel am I prepared to do in your work?

- none
- local travel only
- local and within state travel
- extended travel

**7. Work Rewards:**

It is more important for me to:

- earn a high salary
- do work that I enjoy
- work in an environment where I belong and feel accepted

**8. Level of Education:**

I am looking at further education.

- Yes
- No

If YES, what duration of time would I consider pursuing more education before entering the workforce?

- less than 1 year
- 1 - 2 years
- 2 - 4 years
- longer than 4 years

**9. Work Environment:**

Am I looking for a job where there is:

- little or no risk of physical danger
- some risk of physical danger
- high risk of physical danger

What level of pressure/stress due to workload and deadlines could I handle in the workplace?

- little or no pressure
- some pressure
- extreme pressure

Am I able to work in the following conditions?

Extreme temperatures (cold, heat)

- Yes
- No

Strong smells

- Yes
- No

Extreme noise

- Yes
- No

Where there may be dust, pollen, grain dust, animal hair in the work environment

- Yes
- No

Would I prefer to work in:

- a calm, relaxed atmosphere

- an exciting, busy setting

**10. Level of Responsibility:**

I would prefer to have a job in which I:

- can plan work for and supervise others
- do not have to plan work for or supervise others
- work as part of a decision-making team

**11. Organization Type:**

I would prefer to work in:

- a large organization
- a small, private company
- self-employment

**Bringing It All Together**

There is no easy scientific formula that tells you: “by combining these values with these skills and considering those interests and that personality you should therefore be an XYZ.” It is an art and not a science when deciding how what you discovered about yourself through self-assessment leads to majors and careers.

The next step is to bring all the information together and see what it tells you or others whose opinion and advice you respect. What majors and careers might match you based on these areas you have assessed? The remaining steps of the Vpath process will help you find out more about the possibilities and ways to test whether they might match who you are and what you want.

**Research Options – Consider the Possibilities****Research, Research, Research**

Career exploration is exactly what it sounds like -- investigating the world of work before deciding which goals to pursue.

You started with self-assessment as the basis for career exploration to help you learn more about yourself and clarify your goals.

Now it is time to discover what kinds of work you find rewarding and satisfying. This involves doing research to gather information from many sources about fields, companies, and industries.

What are occupations and career fields that provide the best blend of your unique style, interests, skills, and values? The goal in this step is to identify possible career options that match your criteria for job satisfaction and to eliminate those that offer no fit. In this step, books and electronic resources can provide knowledge about career fields so that you can compare the occupation characteristics with your personal characteristics.

Did you know that there are over 10,000 occupations out there? There are some you may know about (e.g. doctor, teacher, lawyer, engineer), but there are others you may not know about, such as a cross-cultural consultant or utility operations manager. Exploring options is an important part of finding careers that fit for you.

Using a combination of methods for your research is key to success. You should consider tapping resources in print and online, connecting with people in your field of interest, and using job postings and internships as reality checks as you search for career options that fit you.

This research falls into two types:

- Reading – reading as much as you can about jobs/careers, fields, industries, and companies
- Talking – listening to and talking with people who can share their knowledge about jobs/careers, fields, industries, and companies

Here's a way to take notes while you're researching careers:

- Career Field of Interest:
- Education Necessary:
- Professional Associations:
- Examples of Job Titles:
- Where can I find job postings?
- What fascinating facts did I learn about my field of interest?
- What information do I still need to find out? How might I go about finding that information?
- Self-rating of current interest level: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
  - Why?
- What resources helped me the most?
- What do I need to do next with this information?

## Research Tips

### 1. Get organized.

Career research does not happen in one sitting. It is a process that continues over time. You are likely to begin with a particular set of topics to explore but find, as you go along, that some are no longer top priorities or that you have discovered other possibilities. If you keep a journal or notebook detailing sources you have consulted and thoughts or ideas you have had, you will not have to worry about forgetting to follow up on a lead you stumbled upon just before you left the library (or as you were walking down the street). You will also be able to pick up where you left off the next time you sit down to work, rather than inadvertently duplicating your research efforts. Perhaps most importantly, you will remember to follow up on leads generated by your networking contacts and to keep in regular contact with them as you continue your career exploration and/or development.

### 2. Keep an open mind.

If you come across a piece of unexpected information, incorporate it into your research. Many fulfilling careers are the result of a combination of focused research, thoughtful self-assessment, and serendipity.

### 3. Stay connected.

Although you will need to devote a certain amount of time to the solitary perusal of print and on-line resources, don't become a recluse. Test the information you are gathering in the real world. Ask the people in your network for feedback on what you have

learned, how you might best apply that knowledge, and what other issues you should be researching as you explore career fields or prepare yourself as a serious candidate for a specific job.

#### **4. Relax and reflect.**

Whether you are just beginning to explore possible career options or are intensely preparing for an interview, you need to be able to make sense of what you have learned. Your objective is not to memorize data so that you can recite it by rote, but rather to prepare yourself for a future dialogue, whether internal (What is it about this field that excites me?) or external (So, Wonderful Candidate, given what you know about us as an organization, in what ways do you see yourself contributing to our success?).

#### **5. Have fun!!!**

There is a world of options out there. Not all of them will be right for you, but by listening to your inner voice, doing your homework, and being persistent, you will find the ones that are right for you. Your reward will be a career path or series of careers that will sustain you both personally and professionally throughout your life.

### **Reading Research**

Find resources to read to learn more about jobs/careers, fields, industries, and companies. Take notes as you increase your knowledge about the possibilities that are out there for you. As you read, think about what you're learning and how it compares to your values, interest, skills, personality, and work preferences. Here are some resources to consult when conducting your research:

- The VCC Career Library has many books on career exploration.
- For more resources on career exploration, go to our "Resources" page within our website.
- See Chapter 6 to learn how to use Company Research as a form of reading research.
- Another good source to learn about jobs/careers is online job sites, such as Monster, Career Builder, and Hot Jobs. While these sites might not be the best way to land a job, use the sites to read the job descriptions to learn what companies are looking for today and what you might do in these jobs.

Reading job descriptions can provide valuable information, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Nature of daily functions/responsibilities involved in work
- Commonly desired skills specific to a certain job/industry
- Company/industry values and culture
- Salary range
- Type of work environment (e.g. team vs. individual)
- Opportunities for further training, professional development, and advancement
- Geographic constraints, if any

### **Talking Research**

#### **INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

A great way to learn about an industry or a career is to speak with someone who is currently working in that industry or career. An informational interview is a conversation or informal interview that you conduct to gather information and seek advice from a

knowledgeable individual. It is important to understand that the purpose of an informational interview is NOT to ask for a job or internship. See Chapter 3.

#### EMPLOYER INFORMATION SESSIONS

Another aspect of talking research is listening to presentations from Employers. Employers frequently come to Vanderbilt and conduct Information Sessions. These employer presentations provide a convenient and comfortable way to network with recruiters and other company representatives. Most information sessions are held an evening or two prior to the employer's campus interview visit.

To access a schedule of information sessions, see the calendar within CareerLink (more information in Chapter 9).

### Test Options – Trying it Out

Test drive your career choice to see if there is a fit. After talking with people in the field, take classes that are relevant to the career to learn more about the field, make plans to observe the type of work, or work in the field to gain career-related experience while actually testing to see how you like it. Then add the next dimension to your career decision: how is the fit? If it is not a good fit, this may be a time to recycle. As possible career choices are eliminated, others may need to be identified, requiring a step back.

#### Classes

Bear in mind that "testing" a major by taking a course in that field sometimes isn't the best way of investigating a major. Courses within a major often focus on a specific topic, and if you happen to find that one topic uninspiring, you might rule out the entire field prematurely. Look for introductory courses that are broad enough to provide a clear picture of what the major is like. Some majors have survey courses for just this reason.

If you have already chosen a major, look into the electives within the major that are appealing. Also consider minors that might broaden your perspective.

Do take advantage of:

Course catalog – You will be amazed at the wealth of information you can find here, from required courses to specialized majors, minors, and concentrations.

Class Syllabi – Look online to find class syllabi. See what the assignments are like, what books are required, what sorts of essays must be written. Do the requirements for the courses in one major seem more interesting than another? Try to pinpoint why. If you're drawn to math problem sets over essay assignments, that's another clue to where you might be headed.

Classmates, especially upperclassmen and your resident adviser – These are your peers who are deep into their major, perhaps already having had an internship or gone through job interviews. Utilize them as a resource to gather more information. Are they happy with what they're studying? Are they inspired by the work they do? Do they look forward to class or dread it? Is the major what they'd thought it'd be? Why or why not? Try to find out what their interests are, and how they channel them through their major.

Adviser – Talk to your adviser about possibilities and doubts. That's why your adviser is there. Schedule a block of time for the two of you to discuss your host of options.

Professors – Talk with professors, whether you have taken a class with them or not. Many of them have worked in the field in which they teach, and all are experts about careers and career opportunities.

## Volunteering

Through volunteer work you can gain first-hand knowledge of your field and establish yourself in a professional network. Volunteering is also an excellent way to round out your skills if your research indicates that you need to gain more related experiences.

Things to know about volunteering:

- It is an opportunity to meet professionals in your field.
- You can become involved in relevant projects.
- The application processes are less stringent than full-time job processes.
- If you're successful, it could potentially lead to a full-time job.
- It enables you to show future employers demonstrated success in a related field.
- The experiences are often unpaid.
- It requires additional time commitment.
- You may assume some responsibilities unrelated to your interests.

For more resources to find volunteering opportunities, go to our "Resources" page within our website.

## Externship

An externship is a volunteer job-shadowing opportunity for students to spend up to five days observing and often working with professionals, investigating a career field, and experiencing a typical day(s) on the job.

The experience is intended to help students better understand a work environment and a career field and thus help clarify career goals. The experience gives students a professional contact. Professional conduct by the student is essential. Students do not earn academic credit or pay.

An externship involves shadowing the sponsor through normal workdays. Some students may observe one department of an organization during the externship; others may spend time in more than one department to get a broader overview. You might conduct informational interviews with your sponsor's colleagues, sit in on staff meetings, assist with office tasks or projects, or observe interactions with clients. Your sponsor will determine how your time will be spent during the externship.

Contact the VCC for more information about the current Externship program and opportunities.

### **What is the difference between an externship and an internship?**

Externships are short-term (generally one week or less), and offer no pay or academic credit. Internships are longer-term (from several weeks to a year), may be unpaid or paid, and sometimes enable you to earn academic credit.

### **How long does an externship last?**

From one to five days. The program dates are typically Spring Break and Maymester.

Sponsors specify the number of days they offer. When you apply, you should indicate the number of days you prefer. You will have an opportunity to review all externships and apply for up to three that are of interest to you.

**Which students are eligible?**

Undergraduate (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) and graduate students in:

1. The College of Arts and Science
2. Blair School of Music
3. School of Engineering
4. Graduate School
5. School of Nursing
6. Peabody College

The availability of externships for students depends on what sponsors offer; each sponsor may specify preferences for academic levels and majors.

**Who are the sponsors?**

Sponsors may include VU alumni and possibly parents of students.

**Work: Part-time, Summer, and Internships**

Perhaps the most hands-on way to explore careers is by getting experience through internships, summer and term-time work, and extracurricular activities. This "reality-testing" can help you hone in on the qualities you like and don't like, as well as learn the language and skills of the industry.

For more information on seeking internships and part-time and summer work, refer to "Gaining Experience" in Chapter 4.

**Make Decisions – Choose a Direction and Develop Plans****Decisions**

Did you know that most people spend much more time deciding what car to buy than they do choosing a career? The decision-making process becomes much less burdensome the more focused you are overall.

From your self-assessment, career exploration, research, and experience, a picture begins to emerge of the kind of work you would like to do and where you want to do it. Goal-setting involves clarifying what you want and breaking it down into short-term and long-term goals. It is important that you're able to articulate this information clearly to anyone willing to listen. This includes employers and interviewers, as well as other contacts you may need in pursuit of employment. At the minimum, the kind of information you need to express with confidence includes the following:

- Major career field target
- Preferred work functions and ideas or issues with which you'd like to work
- Income requirements (consider housing, lifestyle, geography, loans, transportation, salary goals, etc.)
- Geographical requirements (city, rural, mobility, near home, climate, etc.)
- Preferred work environment (size of organization, co-workers, physical facilities, etc.)
- Special needs (training, management development, advancement opportunities, career flexibility, entrepreneurial opportunity, etc.)

- Industry preferences (manufacturing, government, communications, nonprofit, high tech, products, services, etc.)

**Decision Making**

Determine your own decision-making style by learning from the past as you answer these questions:

Part 1:

First, describe a recent "big" decision you made: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- What steps did you take when you were making that decision? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- How did you evaluate the information? Did you explore a variety of options? If so, what were they? If not, why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- What helped you make the decision? Whose opinion did you seek? What actions did you take (for example, writing in a journal, flipping a coin)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- Now that the decision has been made, was it a good decision? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- If you had it to do over again, what would you do differently? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- What would you do the same? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Part 2:

Now, consider the things that helped you the most when making the decision described above.

- How can what you've learned from past decision-making help with your career exploration and decision-making? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Part 3:

Next, develop an action-plan for yourself. Looking back at what has worked well for you in the past when you had to make decisions, write down a plan for making your career decision. You can structure it however you choose; just make sure it works for you and you can hold yourself accountable to it. Do remember to be flexible and change your plan as necessary.

**Develop the Action Plan**

The plan that you create and follow has to work for your style and preferences. There are many different ways to approach your plan. Some things to consider in planning:

### **Remember the 6 W's plus 1**

**Why** – be clear on the purpose for doing what you are doing (selecting a major, picking courses, conducting your research, finding an internship)

**What** – what actions have to take place for it to occur?

**hoW** – what methods do you need to follow to make it happen?

**Who** – whose help do you need?

**When** – what target dates or deadlines do you have?

**Where** – do you have to go someplace or get some space to make it happen?

And don't forget the extra W

**Woo-hoo!** – celebrate when you have achieved your goals

### **SMART**

We usually fail in our plans if we try to do things that are too vague, too big, or shouldn't be done. One way to approach your planning is to make sure your objectives are SMART:

**Specific** – Your objectives should specify what you want to achieve and be clearly defined

**Measurable** – You should be able to measure whether you are meeting the objectives or not

**Achievable** – Are the objectives you set realistic, achievable, and attainable (humanly possible)?

**Relevant** – Avoid the temptation of defining a goal just because it fits nicely into the previous three criteria; does it have an impact on your overall purpose?

**Time-framed** – Set deadlines: when will you start, and when will you need to finish?

### **Find Supporters**

Find people with whom you can discuss your progress and exchange ideas. These people can support you and make you feel better when things get tough, but they can also hold you accountable for achieving your goals and meeting deadlines. You might create a schedule with them to check-in and report your progress.

### **Overcome obstacles**

Obstacles or barriers can substantially set you back, as they often consume valuable time, energy, and excitement from your activities. Look for the obstacles before they occur and try to avoid them.

If you are up against an obstacle, are there other ways around it? Do you even need to be doing what you're attempting? Contact your "supporters" and ask their advice. Often a fresh perspective can help.

## **Personal Career Strategy – Plan A and Plan B**

In deciding your future direction, it's only natural to want to focus solely on the task at hand—that is, on the specific job or career you have in mind at the moment. But what happens if your "first-choice" Plan A doesn't work out for some reason, either now or at some point in the future? Do you have a "Plan B" and even a "Plan C" in case your initial new job or career decision falls through?

If you don't, you may be setting yourself up for undue stress at best and wasting time at worst. So, diversify your career plans. The "don't put all your eggs in one basket" cliché,

while tired, is nonetheless good advice, especially when it comes to making job and career decisions.

Why? Because you really don't know what you're going to discover about a new job or career you're considering, be it now or months or years from now. You also don't know what the future will hold in terms of economic growth/recession, job increases/decreases, or industry expansion/contraction. You've probably heard that it's a good idea to diversify your investments; do the same in your career planning.

That's why, just as you invest considerable time and effort in developing a "Plan A" (your ideal job situation) for your job or career plans, it's wise to spend at least a little time and effort developing a "Plan B" (your safety plan or a reasonable alternative) and, if you're very thorough, a "Plan C" as well. Your Plan B and Plan C jobs/careers may be slight variations on Plan A, major departures from Plan A, or somewhere in between. What they are isn't what counts; that you have them is what really matters.

## **Working with a Career Adviser – Getting Help**

### **Working through the steps**

Making your decisions, whether it is about which major or internship to pursue, what career really interests you, whether or not or when to go to graduate or professional school, or how you can use your degree, depends on a variety of factors. All of the information you've gathered about yourself and about different careers needs to be synthesized through a personalized, integrated decision-making process.

The Career Center is here to help you with that process. Take advantage of the quick activities in this section to reflect on your decision-making style and to gather your thoughts. Also, schedule an appointment with a Career Adviser to discuss your decisions in a private, neutral setting. No matter whether you feel your decision is huge or small, manageable or "out of control," we encourage you to utilize the assistance of the Career Center. We will support you while you take the time you need and provide you with the help to make decisions about your career on your own.

The Career Center provides many ways for undergraduate students, graduate students, and alumni to talk with a Career Adviser about their career-related needs:

#### Walk-in Hours

Have a quick question? Need your resume reviewed? During the academic year, we have walk-in hours for a brief meeting with a Career Adviser. Go to our Career Center website for more information and times.

#### Career Advising

Students/alumni wanting to discuss their personal career path and job search strategy, from initial thoughts to assessing job offers (or their graduate/professional school plans), may make an appointment with one (or more) of our staff. Feel free to email questions to your Career Adviser. From our Career Center website, go to the Staff Directory for a list of staff members and email addresses.

### **Bring your assessment results to your Adviser**

Make sure you hold on to your assessment results and other information from these exercises and from DISCOVER and bring them with you when you meet with your Career Adviser.