Career Exploration and Self-Assessment

If you would like more information or have questions about this document, feel free to speak with a Career Advancement counselor. You can make an appointment by calling 773-702-7040.

Career Exploration is, broadly speaking, the process of matching yourself to the working world. It is often a time-consuming process, but one that can be rewarded with a satisfying way to spend your time and make a living. Many people will go through a process of career exploration several times over the course of their life—in college when choosing a major, when selecting a career, when transitioning into another career, and when looking for ways to stay active after retirement—so this handout is designed to introduce you to the steps one can take on the path to effective exploration and some resources to help you on your way.

Step 1: Self-Assessment

The very first step is to take the time to learn about yourself. What kinds of things do you like to spend time doing inside and outside of class? What would you do if you had plenty of time, freedom, and money? What kinds of problems do you want to solve?

For the present, the answers to these questions may help you decide on your concentration and your involvement in activities outside the classroom. For the future, self assessment will help you answer questions about the type of work you would enjoy doing and the environment in which you want to work.

Far from being an esoteric, unrelated, save-for-just-before-graduation thing, career development is an ongoing process in which you should already be engaged. Ultimately, the knowledge you gain through self-assessment, as related to your career development, can help you find the right career, choose the right employer and position, and present yourself more confidently on your resume and in the job interview.

It is important that you set aside time for self-assessment. Give yourself time to think and then return to the process as your answers crystallize. Answer questions as honestly as you can without regard to what you think others may expect of you.

The information which will be most helpful in your career development and job search process relates to your Skills, Interests, and Values. Focus on finding the ideal career for you right now, which will incorporate enough of these to keep you satisfied and motivated. Don't put pressure on yourself to find the right job for the rest of your life. You will certainly develop new skills and new interests over time, and your values will change as your life changes, so don't be surprised if the careers that work for you now don't work for you in the future and you need to consider a career change.

To begin with your self-assessment, work through the exercises on the next few pages to determine your Skills, Interests, and Values.

SKILLS

An essential part of self-assessment is identifying your motivating and transferrable skills. Motivating skills are the things that you are good at and enjoy using. Transferrable skills are those which you have learned in one environment (for example, your classes) that can be used in other environments. Listed below are some skills that you may have gained through your academic experience. Other skills listed might have originated in extra-curricular activities, or professional or volunteer experiences. For each skill listed, indicate by ranking 1-4 (4 is highest, 1 is lowest) how much you enjoy using each skill. Then do the same for what you feel your ability level to be (4 is Excellent, 3 is Good, 2 is Mediocre, 1 is Unable). Write down any other skills you have that are not indicated here. When you are done, it should be clear which skills are motivating, because they will have ranked high on both scales. Try to be objective, recognizing that although you may wish your skills were stronger, they could be very strong in comparison to someone else.

Enjoyment (1-4)	*Skills*	*Ability (1-4)*
	Identify important questions	
	Read for information	
	Synthesize and evaluate data	
	Multi-task	
	Present information persuasively	
	Write papers and proposals	
	Coordinate a program	
	Supervise	
	Teach/Train	
	Edit and proofread text	
	Lead and motivate a team or group of people	
	Counsel people	
	Design an experiment	
	Budget	
	Organize information	
	Listen	
	Make decisions quickly and efficiently	
	Analyze situations	
	Develop new approaches to a situation	
	Speak/Write/Read other languages	
	Create art/music/literature	
	Manage time	
	Entertain/Perform	
	Work on a team	
	Adapt to change	
	Deal with numbers	
	Design software	
	Maintain and Repair Equipment	

You might also want to think about skills you do not have but would like to acquire. Are there things on the skills list above which you would like be able to do? Circle these skills.

INTERESTS

Your interests are reflected in the things you like to do and how you like to spend your time. The following are some questions to help you think about your interests:

- What are the subjects and activities that arouse your curiosity and enthusiasm?
- What courses or assignments have you found so interesting that you were excited to do the work?
- If you could have three or four research topics/ disciplines, what would they be?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What extra-curricular activities have you participated in: social, academic, work, etc.?
- If you were given $500 to spend in a bookstore, what would you spend it on?
- Is there a cause you feel passionately about?
- What do you daydream or fantasize about? Are there patterns in these daydreams that are indications of your vocation?
- Do you visualize yourself in certain work situations or environments?
- If you have a role model, what about his or her work is relevant to you?
- If you could live five lives simultaneously, and explore a different talent, interest or lifestyle in each, what would you be in each of them?
- What would you do if you knew you could not fail?
- What are problems in the world that you would like to solve?

Now go back and circle the activities and/or subjects that you would like to continue as part of your work life.

VALUES

Values determine what we consider important and worthwhile in our lives. In relation to a job, your values may be reflected in what you hope to gain or accomplish. For some, satisfaction will be gained from prestige, money, or power; for others, satisfaction will be gained from working with or helping people. Some people will seek jobs that allow sufficient free time for other interests, whereas others will want a job that is the primary activity in their life.

Examine the list of work-related values below. Add any values that are important to you and not included in the list. Rate each value according to its importance in your choice of career.

1 = Not important at all *2 = Somewhat Important*
3 = Important *4 = Very important*

_____ Direct service to others
_____ Benefit the "Greater Good"
_____ People contact
_____ Work alone
_____ Work on teams
_____ Friendships
_____ Competition
_____ Job pressure
_____ Fast-paced environment
_____ Power and authority
_____ Influence
_____ Knowledge
_____ Expertise
_____ Creativity
_____ Aesthetics
_____ Change and variety
_____ Job security
_____ Recognition and prestige
_____ Challenging problems
_____ Career advancement
_____ Physical challenges
_____ Excitement and adventure
_____ Wealth or profit
_____ Independence and autonomy
_____ Moral fulfillment
_____ Location
_____ Self-realization and enjoyment
_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____

Additional Self-assessment Tools and Resources

Assessment Instruments

If you are feeling frustrated with the self-assessment process, you should ask a Career Advancement Counselor about the Strong Interest Inventory and/or the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. These are computer-based instruments that help assess your interests and personality type. You can then explore what kinds of careers people with your "type" tend to enjoy. A Career Advancement counselor can tell you if they think this kind of assessment would be beneficial for you.

Books (just to get you started)

- *Discover the Best Jobs For You!: Find the job to get a life you love*, Ron Krannich (2002)
- *Do What You Are*, Paul D. Tieger and Barbara Barron (2007)
- *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was,* Barbara Sher and Barbara Smith (1995)
- *I Don't Know What I Want, but I Know It's Not This*, Julie Jansen (2010)
- *Making a Living While Making a Difference*, Melissa Everett (2007)
- *The Pathfinder*, Nicholas Lore (1998)
- *Real People, Real Jobs*, David H. Montross (1995)
- *What Should I Do with my Life?*, Po Bronson (2005)
- *Zen and the Art of Making a Living*, Laurence G. Boldt (Aug 25, 2009)
- Career Advancement also has a selection of called "*Great Jobs for …*" (English Majors, Math Majors, etc.) and "*Careers for …*" which introduce you to careers by "type" – (artsy types, outdoorsy types, etc.).

Step 2: Brainstorming

You've done step one: self-assessment. Now it is time to step back and look at the big picture.

What patterns do you see? Do you see similar types of information appearing more than one or two times? It is important to note such things and think about what common interest or desire they tap into. This would be a good time to make an appointment at Career Advancement if you haven't already done so and discuss what you do or do not see in your self-assessment. You are working toward defining the career and type of work environment in which you can find meaning and fulfillment based on what you know about yourself.

One great way to take advantage of what you've learned in your self-assessment is to brainstorm new career ideas based on what you see in your skills, interests, and values. For example, if you like are good with numbers, enjoy organizing and evaluating data, and want a job with some stability, you could consider a career as an actuary. You don't need a lot of information about career options to do brainstorming. You just need to be thinking creatively and allowing for ideas that don't sound perfect. By adding a job to the list you are not committing to it, just throwing it in to see what turns up.

Some good ground rules for brainstorming are:

1. Get together a couple of friends to help, and ask them to come up with at least 5-7 ideas for your career.
2. Ask everyone to pull together at least two elements (one skill and one interest, for example), and come up with an idea that incorporates them. This can be a job title, industry, or employer/organization.
3. You aren't allowed to say "no" at this stage—if someone suggests that you become an acrobat, and you are terrified of heights, you still have to write it down.
4. Once something is written down, it is okay to work from it. But no repeats!!
5. Don't be limited by your current situation. Just because you are majoring in English now doesn't mean you can't decide to be a biologist later!

Step 3: Researching Options

Once you have a list of possible careers generated from your brainstorming exercise, research those careers to see what is a good fit, what isn't, and what has a related job that might be a better idea. Start with three careers--and these can be those which are of greatest interest to you or those which you know the least about.

Career Advancement Resources

Career Advancement Career Resource Library: 3d Floor of Ida Noyes Hall

- General career exploration books
- Industry-specific books and other resources
- Industry-specific Career Advancement handouts (as well as general jobs search handouts)

Career Advancement Events and Programs

Career Advancement offers programs throughout the year designed to educate students about career options in a variety of fields. This is a great way to learn more about an industry, job or career path. Many programs include guest speakers/panelists whom you should make a point of talking to afterwards to learn more about the career field, industry, organization or company. View the Career Advancement event calendar online to learn more.

Career Advancement Website:
https://careeradvancement.uchicago.edu/
Under the "I'm interested in..." drop-down box on the main page, select a field that interests you (Business, Communications, Nonprofits, Government, etc.) to access online resources and Career Advancement handouts.

Email Listhosts
To get regular updates on career-related programs and job leads, sign up for these Career Advancement industry-specific listhosts: (e.g. Arts and Culture; Communications; Consulting; Education/Teaching; Financial Services; Government, Policy and Nonprofit; Journalism; Science and Technology). Sign up via Chicago Career Connection (accessible via the Career Advancement website https://careeradvancement.uchicago.edu/).

Suggested Online Resources

America's Career InfoNet: http://www.acinet.org/acinet/
Wage and employment trends, occupational requirements, state-by-state labor market conditions. The site provides a variety of self-assessment and career exploration tools. InfoNet draws heavily from government sources.

The Career Guide to Industries: www.bls.gov/oco/cg
Provides information on available careers by industry; including the nature of the industry, working conditions, employment, occupations in the industry, training and advancement, earnings and benefits, employment outlook, and lists of organizations.

Occupational Outlook Handbook: www.bls.gov/oco/
A nationally recognized source of career information it describes what is done at specific jobs, working conditions, information about training and education needed, earnings, and expected job prospects.

*O*Net: Dictionary of Occupation Titles:*
http://online.onetcenter.org/
Database that includes information on skills, abilities needed, work activities, and interests associated with occupations.

Professional Associations
Professional associations/organizations are a great way to learn about a career field or industry. Some associations offer student memberships and training programs (webinars, seminars, etc.). Do an internet search for "national association _____" or "_____ organization" or "_____ association".

Informational Interviewing

Talking with professionals about their work (informational interviewing) is the best way to get accurate, thorough information about an industry, career, organization or company.

Career Advancement counselors can show you how to use the online alumni directory to identify University of Chicago alumni in this field; how to set up and prepare for an informational interview; and how to network effectively.

Step 4: Evaluating Options and Making a Decision

The career exploration process isn't always a straight path, so while this is listed as Step 4, it could also become Step 6, Step 8, and so on as you go back to the earlier stages in your quest for the right career. Now that you have conducted research on some of the options you brainstormed, it's time to go back to the results of your self-assessment and evaluate each career option against what you know about yourself. Do the priorities, tasks, and environment match what you said you were looking for? Do you need additional information to come to a decision?

The last, and often most difficult, step in this process is making the decision about which career you will pursue. A Career Advancement counselor can work with you to help you think about how to make your decision based on what you have discovered thus far, the current state of the industry, and a sound decision-making approach. In addition, many of the books on career exploration at Career Advancement have sections on how to make a career decision (most notably The Pathfinder by Nicholas Lore).

Step 5: See a Career Advancement Counselor

Would you like some more guidance during this process? Do you have questions about how to proceed? Not sure whether to get an advanced degree or how to use your degree to get started in a field that interests you? Want to find internships or part-time work to get some experience? Want to learn more about how best to highlight your skills and experience? Career Advancement counselors can help! Call 773-702-7040 to make an appointment.