UNDERSTANDING THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The following four steps are the basic foundation for the career development process:

1. Understand yourself
2. Explore options
3. Make decisions
4. Take action

A previous article addressed the first step: Understand yourself. This article will discuss the second step: Explore options.

The career development process is ongoing, and each step of the process may also be continual. Exploring occupations begins in childhood when we play career games by pretending, for example, to be teachers or firefighters.

Exploring occupations can be enjoyable and exciting but it also may feel overwhelming, especially when we consider hundreds of occupations exist in the U.S. (Using the 2010 Standard Occupational Classification system, Federal statistical agencies classify all workers into one of 840 occupations: http://www.bls.gov/soc/.)

So how do you navigate this ocean of occupations?

1. Begin with what you know.
   Most of us begin learning about occupations from our parents and other family members, friends (and their families), teachers, and members of the community. Using this network you already have, make a list of the occupations that interest you.

   You also may start creating a list of occupations based upon results from career assessments (http://careercenter.missouristate.edu/Assessments.htm). Keep in mind, though, that lists of occupations from assessments are statistics only—people who share your results have found career satisfaction in these careers. The lists do not mean that you should or should not go into particular occupations.

2. Conduct informational interviews.
   Again, beginning with the people in your network, set up appointments with them for you to ask questions concerning their occupations—and perhaps observe them
at work by job shadowing. In addition, the people you know may be able to introduce you to other professionals in the field, thus expanding your network of contacts. The Career Center website includes additional details on conducting informational interviews: [http://careercenter.missouristate.edu/InformationalInterviewing.htm](http://careercenter.missouristate.edu/InformationalInterviewing.htm)

3. **Learn about career paths.**
Through informational interviews and additional research you do, learn about occupations and other careers that are related to those occupations. These related occupations are referred to as career “paths” or career “clusters.” For example, someone who is now working as a marketing manager may have begun as an advertising account representative. Someone who begins a career in teaching may become a trainer in human resources.

Most of us have more than one career in our lives, and usually more than one occupation would be a good fit for each of us. Sometimes people leave one career to enter a related occupation, but sometimes people leave a career cluster completely and, usually with additional education or training, enter an entirely different career path.

It is important to realize that many occupations do not have a direct correlation with an academic major. Of course, the more technical an occupation is, the more likely it is directly connected to a specific major. For example, nurses major in nursing; engineers major in engineering. However, some career fields benefit from a broader educational background. A journalist may major in journalism, but a major in political science, business, English, or many other majors—combined with strong writing skills—may also be appropriate.

Similarly, a specific academic major may provide numerous occupational possibilities. “What Can I Do with This Major?” on the Career Center’s website connects many majors to careers ([http://careercenter.missouristate.edu/WhatCanIDoWithThisMajor.htm](http://careercenter.missouristate.edu/WhatCanIDoWithThisMajor.htm)). Additionally, at the bottom of the pages for each major are links to additional resources for exploring occupations.

4. **Use resources such as websites, books, and videos, to research occupations.**
In addition to speaking with professionals working in career fields that interest you, allot time to research careers.

The Department of Labor is the leading government agency for providing employment information in the United States. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* is probably one of the most recognized sites for providing career information ([http://www.bls.gov/ooh/](http://www.bls.gov/ooh/)). In addition to grouping careers into 25 groups, the site enables users to search occupations by pay, educational level, training, projected number of new jobs, and growth rate.
O*NET OnLine is another site developed by the Department of Labor to provide occupational information (http://www.onetonline.org/). In addition to enabling users to search for occupations, this database allows users to browse occupations by career cluster, industry, interests, and skills.

CareerOneStop includes short career videos organized by clusters, skills and abilities, industry, and work options. It also provides career videos in Spanish (http://www.careeronestop.org/Videos/default.aspx)

These are just a few resources to help you get started. There are numerous websites, books, and articles that provide information on various careers.

Exploring careers takes time; this is not something that can or should be done quickly. It is also important to organize your research process. As you create a list of careers that interest you, group them into categories. This also may help you notice a pattern in the types of occupations that attract you.

Future articles on the career development process will discuss making decisions and taking action.