

Career Exploration and Choosing a Major

Deciding on a major which will lead to a satisfying career is an important decision and can be overwhelming for students. We understand that this can be a stressful and anxious process. The staff in Career Services are available to guide and support you through this journey. Keep in mind that career planning is a life time process..... we are always learning and growing, and as we do, our interests and needs also change and we may need to make adjustments along the way.

This process can be broken down into a collection of small decisions.

Here are some steps that you can follow:

The Steps in the Career Exploration and Decision-Making Process

Step 1: Self-Assessment.....Who Am I?

Careful evaluation of your individual strengths, lifestyle preferences, passions, work style, and financial needs is a critical and often overlooked step. Knowing more about yourself helps in identifying majors that could be the right fit for you. The self-assessment process involves taking a careful inventory of your career values, interests, skills, and personal qualities. Meeting with a Career Services professional and taking formalized interest and personality assessments, such as the Strong Interest Inventory and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) can be helpful in this step of the process. As a result of taking these inventories, a list of potential suitable careers is generated.

Step 2: Career Exploration and Research.

The next step involves learning about the careers generated as a result of your self-assessment inventories. Each career/occupation has characteristics that will make it a better idea to choose some over others. Try not to eliminate any profession from your list until you do some research, even if you think you know something about it. You may be surprised by what you learn when you dig for information. If you cross a career off your list because of some preconceived notion, you could end up eliminating one of your best options.

- **Start With the Basics**

At first, you will just want to gather some basic information about each occupation on your list. Before spending a lot of time on in-depth research, do some preliminary fact-finding that will allow you to narrow down your list.

This will include researching what you do in specific careers/occupations, as well as labor market information, including job outlook, median salary and educational and training requirements.

After learning about all the occupations on your list you will find that several of them don't appeal to you. This could be for a variety of reasons. For example, you may decide that you wouldn't enjoy the job duties of a particular occupation or that you can't or don't want to meet the educational and training requirements. The earnings may be lower than you thought they would be or the job outlook tells you

that employment opportunities will be poor. After completing your preliminary research you will be left with a reduced list of careers on it. Online resources are available to help you with your preliminary information gathering.

- **Delve Deeper**

After you narrow down your list of career choices, your research should become more involved. You will want to learn what working in the field is really like before you actually work in it. The best way to do this is to talk to people who do.

- ✓ Figure out who, in your network, knows people who work in the field or fields in which you are interested, or ask around to see if any of them have contacts who do.
- ✓ Set up informational interviews with anyone who has experience working in the careers you are considering. By interviewing these individuals for information and advice about their work, you will be getting an insider's perspective about the realities of the field and the recommended preparation for it, including continuing education requirements or graduate study.
- ✓ See if any of those people are willing to let you shadow him or her on the job for a day or two.
- ✓ Consider doing an internship to learn about a work field and get experience.

After you complete your in-depth research, you should be able to determine which career is a good match for you. Try not to get too frustrated if you can't make a decision by this point. You may not have enough information yet. Continue to do more research until you can comfortably choose the best career for you.

Step 3: Experimentation.

Internships and part-time jobs are an excellent way to sample a field of interest. They provide the opportunity to perform some of the job functions, observe others work, and evaluate the "real world" workplace environment.

For more information about experiential learning opportunities, contact Janice Kenyatta, NCC's Experiential Learning/Internship Manager <https://www.northampton.edu/student-services/career-services/internships.htm>

Some individuals observe professionals in various fields for a shorter period of time than an internship. These "job shadowing" experiences, can last from a few hours, a day or several weeks and are an excellent way to get a feel for what you would be doing in a given job.

Getting involved in campus clubs and organizations related to potential job functions of interest is another way to test out skills areas. For example, if you are considering a journalism career, you might work for the school newspaper.

Step 4: Decision-Making.

This stage involves an evaluation of the pros and cons of the career options you have been researching. It also involves prioritizing. Which major or occupational area seems to be the best fit based on the previous steps? Does the major or projected plan of study need to be altered? Are there internships or other ways to gain valuable experience in this area?

Does this major/occupational area match my interest pattern? Is this major/occupational area compatible with my personality style? Are identified work values consistent with the major/occupational area? Is this major/occupational area consistent with my abilities? Is the time it takes to complete the educational requirements acceptable to me?

Available Resources at NCC

- **Career GPS** <https://www.northampton.edu/admissions/career-gps.htm>

NCC's Career GPS is a valuable online search tool that will give you the opportunity to explore hundreds of potential local careers at your fingertips.

Just enter a keyword of whatever career suits your interest and quickly learn about employment prospects in the field, job opportunities, income potential and the education and training available at Northampton Community College. You may create a profile and save your degree and career searches, use the resume building tool, and more.

Career GPS includes an interest assessment (6 questions or 60 questions) which provides results based on your interests. Students can create an account (Click – Sign Up) so that their results can be accessed at a later time as well as printed.

Career GPS is unique to our geographic area. The job listings and information provided are specific to the Lehigh Valley, Monroe County and surrounding areas. We offer it as a service to our students, future students and members of our community.

- **Choices360**

Choices360 is an online career guidance system where students can explore careers, colleges and majors, learn about financial aid, find scholarships, and much more. There are a variety of assessments and surveys that students can take including an Interest Profiler, Work Values sorter, Career Cluster Survey and more to help them learn more about themselves. Once each assessment is completed, students will be able to view a list of careers that correspond to their results. Students can go back to do further research and learn more about the careers that emerged as possible options.

Contact Career Services for login information careers@northampton.edu, 610-861-5344

- **Individual appointment with a Career Services specialist or counselor**

Students can schedule individual appointments with a Career Services specialist or counselor to do more in depth career exploration and counseling and take inventories including the Strong Interest Inventory and/or the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) which is a personality inventory that looks at your natural preferences and shows some careers that might be a good fit. Individual appointments can also be arranged to discuss information/results from Career GPS and Choices 360. Additional resources and websites can be found on the Career Services webpage.

<https://www.northampton.edu/student-services/career-services.htm>