Career planning is learning about yourself and the world of work—and then planning your career choices based on what you’ve learned. Knowing what you know about yourself, how do various occupations match up with your interests, skills, personality, and values?

Career planning helps you to:
- Decide what type of job you want.
- Determine the skills you need to attain the ideal job.
- Discover how to obtain those skills.
- Develop ways to implement your plan.

An effective 21st century career planner is someone who:
- Views a plan as subject to change.
- Equates career success with personal satisfaction.
- Believes goals are independent of age.
- Assumes responsibility for his or her own career direction.

— Robert Barner, The Futurist

THE CAREER PLANNING PROCESS

Studies show that a person working in a career that supports his/her interests is happier, more successful, and more fulfilled than someone who is not. Career planning is ideal for selecting an initial field of study or major, beginning a new career, or even changing careers. Career planning can help you acquire a competitive advantage over people who allow random chance to direct their career choices. To begin the process, ask yourself: What are my goals for the future?

Keep in Mind That...
- The working world is changing rapidly.
- You need goals and strategies to make your dreams come true.
- You are in charge of your career.
- You will need to be proactive in your career search.
- Employers are looking for employees who will enjoy their work.

Steps to a Successful Career Plan

1. Ask Yourself: Who am I?
   You need to understand who you are as well as identify your strengths and weaknesses, before you can make an effective career plan.

2. Career Exploration (Discover Your Options)
   Identify your career options. Seek a career that connects who you are with what you want in work.

3. Gather Information
   Identify information you need to make a decision. The more you know, the better you can make an informed plan.

4. Narrow the Field (Evaluate Your Options)
   Compare all your career options to find the perfect one for you.

5. Make a Decision
   Decision-making time! Evaluate the options and choose. Your goal should be the most appropriate career for you, not the “correct” one.

6. Plan for the Future
   Develop and implement a plan of action. Seek to gain experience in the field and plan for your future needs.
Who Am I?

1. What do I really like to do? Find your interests—they will lead you to interesting careers.
2. What is important to me? Your values will also impact the careers you find fulfilling.
3. What lifestyle do I want? Determine your priorities and how you want to lead your life.
4. What do I do well? Interests and values are part of exploration. You also need to know your strengths. Those skills can be transferable or specific to careers.
5. What personal traits do I possess? Skills reflect what you do well but it is also necessary to understand how you do what you do.

Assessments & Testing

There are numerous career assessment tests available to you at Career Services. Assessments can help you gather information regarding your values, interests, traits, skills, personality, work style, and aptitudes. Contact us at 512.245.2645 to take an assessment.

Gather Information

There are many methods of research that you can use to gather information about potential careers. The list below begins with the least time-consuming method. As you narrow down your options however, use methods that require more time.

The Internet

There are plenty of Internet resources that contain useful occupational information. You can even research individual occupations through search sites. Many useful websites can be found on Career Services homepage at www.careerservices.txstate.edu. Two suggestions are:

- The Occupational Outlook Handbook
  www.bls.gov/oco
  Provides essential information about prospective changes in the work world, qualifications needed for certain jobs, the nature of the work, working conditions, employment levels, and outlooks for a wide variety of jobs and careers.

- America’s College Board Online
  Lists career descriptions organized by type of career.

Libraries, Employment Offices, and Career Services

The advantages of using these resources are that they can be accessed over the Internet, and they have knowledgeable staff who can help you find the information you need.

Labor Market Information

This information focuses on such things as working conditions, wages, trends, qualifications, employer demands, as well as other factors which affect the market for labor.

Brainstorm on Your Own

Remember when everyone used to ask you what you wanted to be when you grew up (or maybe they still do)? What were your answers? Write them down. What did you enjoy doing as a child? Write these activities down. Look back at your list of interests, skills, values, and traits that you possess. Can you think of any occupations that might match with these characteristics?

Brainstorm with Others

Talk with friends, parents, teachers, neighbors, relatives, co-workers, etc. Tell them you are trying to figure out what to do with your life. They will probably jump at the chance to throw in their two cents. Keep in mind you are trying to come up with a master list of possibilities. Do not dismiss any suggestions. Do not make any commitments, either.
Informational Interviewing

The informational interview is a chance for you to reverse roles and become the interviewer while a representative from the organization or occupation in which you are interested becomes the interviewee. The goal is to gather information about a particular job or career directly from an employee to help you find out if it is the kind of job in which you would be interested.

Volunteering

There are many advantages to volunteering. It gives you a firsthand look at possible occupations, provides a great way to network, enhances your resume, and will help you explore the pros and cons of possible fields.

Working Part-time

Like volunteering, working part-time can give you a chance to get a first-hand glimpse of the job in which you are interested while also making contacts. And, unlike volunteering, it allows you to earn some money.

Job Shadowing

Job shadowing gives you an insider’s view into career positions you are targeting, giving you a chance to learn what the career is all about without a significant time commitment.

Interning

An internship can be a paid or unpaid position and allows you to gain relevant experience in your chosen career field, or rule out certain career options.

NARROW THE FIELD

Now it’s time to evaluate each of the options that you have identified and narrow your possible career options to a few. In order to evaluate your choices you should:

Check the Fine Print

Check out Career Services, Texas State’s Alkek Library, your academic advisor or department advisor. There are a wide variety of resources available to help gain critical information about your career options.

(Once Again) Surf the Net

Now that you have a list of interesting occupations, the Internet can help explain those professions in even more detail. Some sites recommended to help narrow your scope are:

- **CareerOneStop**  
  **www.careeronestop.org**  
  Provides a wealth of information on most careers, including salary and industry trends, job outlook, and links to career information.

- **Job Profiles**  
  **www.jobprofiles.org**  
  Covers the more personal side of work. Features interviews with professionals in a variety of fields.

- **Get That Gig**  
  **www.getthatgig.com**  
  Contains interesting interviews with professionals and profiles of people in different careers written for college students. The information is presented in a fun way.
MAKE A DECISION
You have now come to the point where you need to make some choices. This may be more painful than the research. Follow these steps to help you through the process of making a decision.

1. Name the Decision
   Stating precisely what it is that you need to decide may help give you some perspective on the situation. What exactly is it that you need to know? What does a career mean to you in the first place? Five years? Ten years?

2. List the Alternatives
   Write down at least two occupations that stood out during your search.

3. Evaluate the Alternatives and Decide
   Write down the potential outcomes of each occupation (both positive and negative) for you and for others who are close to you.

4. Test Your Choice
   Think of ways to test the alternatives you have chosen. Options include summer jobs, taking a related course, volunteering, job shadowing, interning, etc.

5. Evaluate your Decision
   How well did your choice work? If you need to, you can begin the process again.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE
Having chosen one of the career options, you can now begin developing and implementing a plan of action through internships, cooperative education, relevant summer employment, volunteer work, and campus activities. Some additional steps that you will need to take are:

1. Investigate Any Additional Education or Training Needed
   Does the career path require additional courses and are you willing to complete these?

2. Develop a Job Search Strategy
   Plan how you will find a job once you meet the requirements. Networking and gaining experience can help get your foot in the door.

3. Write Your Resume and Compose a Cover Letter
   Career Services has 48-hour resume and cover letter critiquing, as well as Career Counselors that can give professional advice. There are also numerous resources in the Career Services Library.

4. Prepare For a Job Interview
   Draft answers to difficult questions that you could be asked. Career Services is available for mock interviews throughout the year.

5. Gather Company Information
   Investigate a potential employer to prepare for the interview, as well as to ensure that it is a workplace that fits your needs.