

# A Career Planning Course for Parents

## CAREERS 101: FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

During their first year or so of college, students will be involved (formally and informally) in assessing their skills, interests, and abilities. They will do this through finding success (or failure) in courses they take, involvement in campus activities, part-time jobs, discussions with their friends and faculty, and generally being exposed to and trying out different ideas and experiences. Most students enter college with a very limited knowledge of the vast array of courses, majors and career fields available to them. When they begin to delve into studies that are new to them, even those who entered with a plan may be drawn to different options. This is an exciting time for students!

### Here's what you can do to help:

- Support your student's exploration of new areas of study and interests. This, after all, is what education is all about!
- Affirm what you know to be areas of skill and ability he or she has consistently demonstrated. Sometimes students overlook these and need to be reminded.
- Talk with your student about the courses and activities he or she is enjoying and how well your student is doing. Students discover new things about themselves throughout the college experience. Your willingness to listen and be a sounding board will keep you in the loop.
- Don't panic if your student is excited about majoring in field of study that "makes no sense" to you. It may be that it's an excellent choice, particularly if it's a good match for a student's interests and skills.
- Support your student's responsible involvement in campus activities and/or part-time work, but encourage this to be balanced with achievement in the classroom.
- Urge your student to seek assistance from the Career Services which has assessment instruments and Career Counselors to help students to define their skills, interests, and abilities.

## CAREERS 201: SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS

By the second year of college, a student begins to explore majors and career options more seriously. They've been exposed to a broad range of subjects to help promote this exploration.

### Here's what you can do to help:

- If you sense that your student's indecision about a major or career choice is a barrier to progress toward a degree, encourage him/her to look for assistance from Career Services. Students often have difficulty making a "final" choice because they fear closing off other options and making a wrong choice.
- Suggest that your student talk with faculty and Career Counselors about potential choices.
- Don't assume that if your student chooses a major that seems "impractical" to you he or she will never get a job. All majors sharpen skills which are critical to the "package" employers are seeking: strong written and oral communication skills; problem-solving skills; the ability to synthesize information; and excellent research skills.
- Suggest learning a foreign language and developing computer skills. Both of these skills are helpful in today's market, no matter what career field he or she chooses!
- Direct your student to do informational interviewing with people who are in careers of interest to him/her.
- Steer your student toward the Career Services office. If he/she hasn't been able to make a career choice, now is the time to begin the process, and Career Counselors can provide the roadmap and coaching to help move them toward making an informed decision.

## CAREERS 301: "MID-CAREER" STUDENTS

During the sophomore year and throughout the junior year, it is important for students to experiment with possible career options. They can do this in a variety of ways: internships, cooperative education programs, part-time jobs and volunteer experiences, both on or off-campus. This is a critical time for your support and understanding.

### Here's what you can do to help:

- Encourage your student to use the resources available that Career Services provides. We will teach him/her how to prepare a polished résumé, refine her/his interview skills and find opportunities to test her/his career choices, including internships, cooperative education programs and part-time job listings. Career Services is in direct contact with employers.
- Tell your student that you understand the importance of him/her gaining exposure to and experience in his or her field of career interest. Broadening experience through involvement outside the classroom is a valuable use of time.
- Internships in some fields may be non-paying, and a good opportunity may be in a distant location. Discuss your financial expectations with your student before a commitment is made.
- Don't conduct the internship or part-time job search for your student. While providing contacts may be helpful, making the connection and speaking for your student deprives him or her of an important learning experience—and may make a poor impression on the future employer.

## CAREERS 401: GRADUATING SENIORS

The senior year is when organizing and conducting a job search or graduate school search begins in earnest. It is also a time when students are heavily involved in more advanced courses and often have more responsible roles in campus activities, part-time jobs and internships. Balancing these important pursuits and setting priorities is a constant challenge for seniors!

Your student may be moving toward closure more slowly than you would wish and you may be anxious for him or her to make a decision. There are a number of ways you can lend support during this challenging time.

### Here's what you can do to help:

- Suggest that he or she uses Career Services throughout the senior year. Career Services provides assistance with preparation for the job search, offering:
  - \* Workshops and assistance with résumé and cover letter writing, interviewing, and other job-search skills
  - \* Job search coaching
  - \* A library of books and web sites with links to job resources and job search preparation software
  - \* On-campus interviewing opportunities
  - \* Career fairs
  - \* Resume databases that employers can search
  - \* Online job postings
- Don't nag your student about not having a job yet! This will often have the reverse effect. Use positive reinforcement.
- Offer to assist by sending information you may have found about the career field of your student's choice and/or job listings that may be of interest. Listen for indications from the student that you are getting carried away—and back off!
- Don't call potential employers to intervene for your student. Contact with potential employers is the candidate's responsibility!
- Don't attend a career fair or interview with your student. Let them be the one to shine.
- Be prepared to support your student through the ups and downs of the job and graduate school search. It can be a bumpy road! Not every desired job or graduate school acceptance will come through. Your student will need reassurance that for every door that closes, another opens.

### A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS

The college years are a time of exploration, experimentation, and learning on many levels for students and their family! Some student challenges may seem more positive than others, but all contribute to the educational outcomes of the college or university experience.

Throughout these years, students are developing a "record of achievement," which will be evaluated by employers and graduate schools as they move beyond college. There are several pieces of this record:

**Academic achievement.** Although it is not the only determining factor of a candidate's success, the grade point average (GPA) is one factor considered by competitive employers and graduate schools. It is one of the few tangible indications of a student's ability to learn and perform effectively, at least in the academic environment. Therefore, students need to do as well as possible in the classroom, especially in courses in their majors.

**Responsible work experience.** In today's competitive employment market, many employers seek students who have related internship, cooperative education, or part-time job or volunteer experiences. In fact, employers often look to their own such programs as primary sources for their new hires.

**Responsible involvement outside the classroom.** Extracurricular activities provide the opportunity for students to gain many valuable and career-related skills, such as the ability to work effectively with others in a team environment; leadership; planning and organizational skills; and priority-setting and time management. These are part of the package of skills employers seek in their new hires.