Steps to explore your career options

Here are some great steps to get you started, but remember: Your major is just one of the factors in shaping your future career—your interests, skills, values, and personality all play a vital part. For more help putting the pieces together, make an appointment with the Career Consultant for your college or a Career Advisor at CareerNetwork.msu.edu.

What can I do with this major?

I want to do everything!
“What can I do with this major?” is a resource for students wondering how to connect majors to careers. You can find this at the CareerNetwork.msu.edu website in the “Exploring Options” tab under “Choosing a Career and Major.” Click on majors to see common career areas, employers, and strategies designed to maximize career opportunities. There are also links by major to professional organizations, the Occupational Outlook Handbook, and job websites.

Use Career Tools, our personalized resource search, to learn more about career fields, job outlooks, professional organizations, job and internship opportunities, and other experiential opportunities that can help you figure out a career path that’s a good fit for you.

Informational interviews can be another great way to learn about specific career paths by asking questions of professionals in career fields about which you are curious. Look on pages 24-27 for info.

Job shadowing can be an excellent way to explore a career up close and get a real-life experience. Check out pages 24-27 for more information.

Spartan Links is a group on LinkedIn (a professional networking site) that connects MSU students to alumni working in their areas of interest. It serves as an advice hub, where students can explore different industries and connect with people firsthand who are working in those industries. See page 59.

Career fairs aren’t just for seniors! Employers are hiring interns as well as full time. Get out and talk to recruiters hiring for the types of careers you are exploring. Ask them what education, experiences, and skills they seek in successful applicants. Be a career event ambassador! We recruit volunteers to host employers at career events. Pages 66-67 has advice for getting results at a career fair.

Working on- or off-campus, volunteering, or working on a research project (venture.msu.edu) are all excellent ways to explore specific career fields while networking with professionals, building your skills, and enhancing your resume.

Check Handshake for workshops, presentations, panels, and employer events that are related to your areas of interest. And check out the Career Exposure series, designed to help you learn about various career options in lots of popular industries. You’ll find and RSVP for these events in Handshake.

Check with your college Career Consultant who can help connect you with alumni and professionals or meet with a Career Advisor who can help you lay out a plan to explore your interests. Some colleges may have specific resources on what others who graduated in your major are doing now. See pages 12-13 for more on career advising.

A career assessment can help you discover your strengths and interests and connect them to majors, extracurricular activities, and jobs/internships.

Talk with faculty about their interests, research, and professional experiences to learn about the field and what you will need to do and learn to succeed.

Explore all the opportunities that www.MSU.edu has to offer!
Steps to explore your career options

find your purpose

Start by asking yourself ... and go back to pages 6-7 for more tips!

- Who am I? Who do I want to be?
- What values guide me? What are my most important life goals?
- What ideas excite me? What activities are most engaging?
- How do I learn? What knowledge is important to my plans for personal and professional development?
- What skills are my strengths? Are there skills I need to develop? Are there things I'm good at but don't actually enjoy?
- How have my experiences helped me grow? What assets do my experiences bring to new settings?
- What drives me? How do I make things happen and create new opportunities?

career assessments

“I heard I can take a career test that will tell me what to do ...” Yeah, you can do that, but they aren’t really tests and they won’t give you the one major or career that will be right for you—but the results will help you examine, understand, and talk about how your interests, personality, values, and skills combine to make you who you are!

Taking a career assessment will help you structure your ideas and guide you toward careers to explore further. Talking with a Career Advisor about your results can help you see how you can use what you’ve learned to make career decisions. Learn about the types of career assessments we offer at CareerNetwork.msu.edu under the “Exploring Options” tab.

explore outside the box

College is about exploration, discovery, and taking some risks. You’ll discover so much more if you experiment along the way. Broaden your horizons by ...

- Taking an elective outside your major that really excites you. Employers and graduate schools value students who act on their passions and interests.
- Study Abroad is a great way to broaden your global perspective and develop intercultural awareness. Browse study abroad options at StudyAbroad.isp.msu.edu.
- Browsing career options at a career fair. Career fairs aren’t just for job seekers, they are for anyone interested in exploring different career options. It’s a great way to learn about different employers and talk to Spartan alumni about their experiences. Surf by CareerNetwork.msu.edu for a list of career events and to get more details.
- The Alternative Spartan Break Program helps you gain insight into different communities and social challenges while contributing to a greater good. Check out asb.msu.edu.

Exploring may lead to new questions. Career Advisors can help you find the answers, sort through your options, and plan next steps. Set up an appointment at CareerNetwork.msu.edu.
Liberal arts students: Major ≠ Career

Did you know that 50–75% of all undergraduate degree requirements are the same, regardless of major? The last 25% (about 30 credits) is what determines the name of your major, but most of your academic classes are very similar to other college graduates. As for your major, liberal arts degrees are broad by design. This makes you a versatile graduate with lots of transferable skills to offer employers. Your degree doesn’t automatically predefine what you can do—you can do just about anything you want with the right combination of skills and experience!

Okay, not having a major that equates to a specific career might make figuring out what you want to do a little more challenging. But it also gives you many directions in which to turn initially and provides versatility over the life of your career. Liberal arts grads can be found everywhere: government, nonprofits, corporations and banks, education, and much more. As a liberal arts grad, you’ve got a lot to offer an employer. For many students, one of the best things to do is to focus less on your major and more on your interests.

Like other majors, employers will expect that you have experience when you graduate. This could include volunteer activities, student organization involvement, studies abroad, undergraduate research, part time jobs, and most importantly, internships. These activities allow you to explore what you might be interested in doing and build important skills valuable to employers before you graduate. Use your experiences intentionally to explore your interests, prepare for life after MSU, and connect with potential employers of interest.

Keep reading through the “Explore Your Future” section (pages 18-29), in addition to the section “Prepare to Make Your Move” (pages 50-63). And if you need help, don’t forget that your Career Consultant or Career Advisor can help you develop a custom plan through a career advising appointment (pages 12-13).
Thinking about graduate school

**Why go to graduate school?**

- **You want to know more** and be able to use that knowledge to help people, research, teach, make a great discovery… As a graduate or professional student, you become part of the process for advancing and creating knowledge in your field. Be prepared for changes—the expectations from faculty members are different than for undergrads and are far more demanding.

- **The career you want requires an advanced degree.** Clearly, if you want to be a doctor, a lawyer, or a faculty researcher, an advanced professional degree is required.

- **You want to make more money.** Having an advanced degree does not always translate to more money. Salaries for someone with an advanced degree vary by profession, job market, and location. Advanced degrees do not always mean better chances of finding a job, either. The key here is to do some solid research on your profession and the demand for people with advanced degrees.

- **Talk with current graduate students and faculty or professionals in your field.** Ask them why they chose graduate or professional school. How has it helped them in their careers and life goals? What advice would they give to a student thinking about graduate school?

- **Attend our new Graduate and Law School Fair** in October to meet and get information from recruiters representing schools and programs around the country. Get more details on career events [at CareerNetwork.msu.edu](http://CareerNetwork.msu.edu).

**What do I have to do in order to apply?**

- **Admissions requirements** will vary from program to program. Find out for each program:
  - preferred undergraduate majors or coursework, if any
  - GPA requirements
  - standardized tests (GRE, GMAT, etc.)
  - academic or work skills preferred
  - application deadlines.

- **Experience** is an asset in any graduate/professional school application. Grad schools like students who have undergrad research experience (see [venture.msu.edu](http://venture.msu.edu) for opportunities). Some graduate and professional programs may require 1–5 years of work experience prior to applying.

- Graduate and professional school applications usually require a personal statement in which you describe yourself, your goals, and the reasons why you want to continue your studies in a particular program at that school. See page 47 for more info on writing personal statements.

- **Need some more guidance?** Make an appointment with your Career Consultant or Career Advisor to discuss your graduate or professional school search and application process.

- **More information.** You can find a list of factors to consider in choosing a graduate school, information on personal statements, and more at [CareerNetwork.msu.edu](http://CareerNetwork.msu.edu) under the “Exploring Options” tab.
if you’re considering graduate school

The MSU website grad.msu.edu offers a variety of resources from how to apply to graduate school to how to fund your graduate education.

Other great sources for information on applying, funding, and/or locating programs:

- Search in Career Tools using “Grad School” filter: CareerNetwork.msu.edu/search
- Peterson’s, at petersons.com, allows you to search for programs by type, degree offered, and location, and get info on financing your advanced degree, test preparation, and more.
- PhDs.org allows students to run customized rankings from the National Research Council. This site also includes articles about applying to graduate school.
- GradSchools.com offers articles about graduate education and tips about the graduate admissions process.
- “Diverse Issues in Higher Education” at DiverseEducation.com/top100 provides rankings of graduate programs in each discipline by minority student participation.
- Interfolio.com is a web-based service that can hold letters, evaluations, and unofficial transcripts for candidates applying to graduate/professional schools or seeking employment in the field of education; documents kept in your file will be sent out upon your request. Open a credential file by going to Interfolio’s website and starting an account. Note that this is a fee-for-service resource. See Interfolio.com for pricing.
Sometimes it can feel like you’re supposed to have it all figured out—what you’re going to major in, what you’re going to do after college. Sometimes it can feel like you’re supposed to know what you’re going to do for the rest of your life!

The truth is that our lives can take turns we didn’t ever expect, the path we start off on ends up somewhere new, and the real day-to-day work in our careers isn’t always what we envisioned.

When making decisions about what majors, fields, and careers might be a good fit, one of the best ways to gather information can also help you to make professional contacts that can last you a lifetime.
informational interviewing & job shadowing

Talking to current professionals is a great way to determine if a career field is for you. An informational interview is a 10–30 minute conversation with someone working in a position or field that interests you.

During a typical job shadowing visit, you “shadow” an employee at work for a couple of hours, or even a full day. The visit provides an up-close look at the workplace and the “real job” from an employee’s view. You have a chance to observe daily office activities, ask questions, and consider the potential pros and cons of a particular profession or industry. You will also discover what workplace skills and career-related experiences are essential to being successful in your chosen field.

The process for setting up an informational interview or job shadowing visit is the same—for a job shadow, you are just asking for a bit more time. Consider starting with an informational interview, and following up with a job shadow if you want to get a deeper view.

finding people to interview or shadow

Friends, family, and professors. You will be amazed at how many contacts you may be able to make through existing relationships.

Career research tools include a searchable database of employers, including contact info (see page 12). You might be surprised how many professionals are willing to talk with you about their careers and professional experiences.

SpartanLinks. Alumni join SpartanLinks to share their stories and expertise with students. Use your Spartan connections to meet people who want to help you! (See page 59 for more information.)

Social networks. Are you on Facebook? Twitter? LinkedIn? Do you blog? Social networks grow daily, and new ones are always just around the corner. Tap into your existing friends, followers, connections and readers by reaching out to them for the info you’re seeking. See page 59 for more on using social media and networking.

Attending career fairs can be very useful even if you aren’t looking for a job. Go to career events and check out the Career Exposure Series to connect with alumni and employers right here on campus. Then take it a step further with an informational interview or job shadow.

benefits

Learning. If you want to find out what a specific career path has to offer, what the positives and negatives are within an organization’s culture, or which academic major will best prepare you for a selected career path, why not ask the people who are already working within that field?

Building relationships. In a recent national survey, 70% of respondents reported they got their present position because of a personal contact. The earlier you start building relationships with people in your field of interest, the stronger they will be when you actually begin your job hunt later on.

Linking. See how your skill development, courses, and academic planning can connect to your future success on the job.
connecting with people

- **First, know your purpose.** Be clear with yourself, and with them, about why a conversation with them will be helpful to you. How much do you already know? How can they help you fill in the gaps?

- **What do you have in common?** Are they a Spartan? Do you have a shared contact? Are you members of the same social organization or network?

- **Ask for what you’re looking for.** Be realistic about schedules and time constraints—don’t ask for a meeting with less than two weeks’ notice or for more than 30–45 minutes of their time for an initial discussion.

- Asking about *setting up an info interview or job shadow* might happen face-to-face with someone you know or meet at an event—and that’s great. For others, starting with an email request works well. (See the sample email at right for ideas of what you might say). Give your contact a reasonable amount of time to respond (at least one week) and then follow up with a phone call if needed.

- **Hit all the main points.** Explain who you are and how you found them, demonstrate that you’ve already done some research, and request a meeting.
Dear Mr./Ms. _______________________:

I am a sophomore at MSU focusing on art history, professional writing, and Spanish. Careers that combine multi-media communication skills with socially conscious work are very interesting to me and I’m currently exploring those kinds of options. I’m a member of MSU’s SpartanLinks group on LinkedIn and found you through the Communications, Media & Public Relations subgroup.

Your background in journalism and nonprofit management at the ___________________ Foundation and ___________________ Associates is fascinating to me. I know that you are very busy, but if you have the time, I would love to set up a meeting (no more than 30 minutes) to learn more about how a fellow Spartan got started on this kind of path.

I am planning a trip to Chicago for next month—if your schedule allows, I am hoping that I can arrange my dates around our meeting. If a phone conversation would work better for you that would be fine too.

Thank you for your time,

your name

---

before the visit

- **Research** the employer and/or industry you will be observing. See information on job search strategies on pages 52-54 for ways to research employers and fields of interest.

- **Choose 10-15 questions** to ask the employee you talk to. An outline for conducting informational interviews, including sample questions you might ask can be found at CareerNetwork.msu.edu, under the “Exploring Options” tab.

- **Confirm** the time/date and plan for travel to the meeting site.

- **Bring a notebook and pen and take notes!**

after the visit

- **Send a thank-you note.** See page 45 for information on writing thank-you letters.

- **Take time to assess** what you learned about the skills and work experiences needed to pursue your career interests. Are there skills you need to gain? What are your next steps?

---

sample informational interview thank you

Dear Nadia –

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me [at the cafe/your offices/via skype] to share your career insights and advice. I was really [impressed/excited/interested] to learn about [issue/trend/opportunity] you mentioned.

Here also is the article I mentioned about some of the ways MSU is seeking to address [whatever issue you discussed]: www.msu.edu/msutoday. I’d love to hear your take on it if you get a moment.

Thanks again for the investment you’ve made in me. Best wishes for a great spring; I look forward to staying in touch.

Sincerely,

Emma Zimmerman
Develop skills through experience

It doesn’t matter what your major is, employers and graduate schools look for students who have experience. Why is this so important? It helps you build skills that are essential to professional success and apply them in different settings. The good news is there are lots of ways for you to build skills and experience in college.

✔ have you considered . . . ?

- **Working a part-time job** helps you demonstrate your work ethic, build workplace skills, and learn how organizations operate. Check Handshake for all the latest part-time job openings for you.

- **Volunteering** or getting involved in service-learning helps you make a difference in the community and learn how to work in diverse economic, social, and cultural environments. Go to ServiceLearning.msu.edu for opportunities.

- Doing **undergraduate research** helps you gain complex reasoning, problem-solving, and communication skills while building a mind for innovation. See venture.msu.edu for opportunities.

- Being an **active member or leader of a student organization** can help you gain project management, teamwork, and leadership skills. Check out over 500 student organizations on StudentLife.msu.edu.

- **Serving as career fair ambassador** gives you behind-the-scenes insight into what employers are looking for in candidates and opportunities to broaden your professional contacts too. Search Handshake for career fair ambassador opportunities and sign up today!

- Experiences help increase your competitiveness for internships, fellowships, and cooperative education opportunities. To download a copy of the 12 Essentials for Success: Competencies Employers Seek in College Graduates, go to CareerNetwork.msu.edu and click on “Career Guides” under the “Resources + Tools” tab.

### What is an internship?

- **An internship is**:
  - An on-site work experience directly related to career goals and/or fields of interest
  - Supervised, emphasizing learning and professional development
  - Evaluative, providing a system for feedback and communication

- **An internship is not**:
  - Routine, repetitive tasks unrelated to identified learning goals
  - A job that does not offer career-related learning opportunities and experiences
  - Unsupervised, non-evaluated experiences
Internships are challenging work opportunities related to your major or intended career that force you to reflect and integrate your college learning in the professional world.

According to MSU’s Collegiate Employment Research Institute, students who intern earn 10% more over their lifetime than those who don’t. Why the increase? Current research indicates that internships today are equal to entry level jobs five years ago, which gives students who have completed internships a competitive advantage in managing the pace and expectations of professional work.

More significant is the skills advantage interns develop through their experience. Quality internships focus on the critical skills new professionals need to be competitive in the workplace such as risk-taking, leadership, cooperation, critical thinking, and problem solving. Exactly what employers value most!

Internships come in many shapes and sizes. They also vary a lot between career fields and employers. Internships can be paid or unpaid, for-credit or not-for-credit, part-time or full-time, and they can be done at any time during the year, not just in the summer.

Some academic programs, like engineering, offer cooperative education placements (co-ops) which are special partnerships between a student, an employer, and a college or university.

finding internships

- Check out CareerNetwork.msu.edu under the “Jobs + Internships” tab for everything you need to get started.
- Use Handshake to search for internship positions, on-campus interviewing and career fairs. You can also “follow” employers you’re interested in working for to stay up to date on their events and opportunities.
- Consider an internship on or near campus during the school year.
- Meet with a Career Advisor or Career Consultant for your college to discuss and create an internship search plan that fits with your goals and interests.
- See pages 52-54 for more on developing a search strategy.

getting the most out of your internship

- Set goals. Before you begin, sit down with your supervisor and establish several realistic goals for your learning experience. Ask, “What results should I be working toward?” Use these goals to evaluate yourself throughout your experience.
- Know your place. You will be working with professionals who have many more years of experience in the field than you. Remember you do not have all the answers. Communicate respectfully to all employees—those with a college degree, and those without. At the same time, don’t be afraid to share your ideas. Sometimes a fresh perspective is just what your employer needs.
- Find a mentor. If your employer does not provide you with someone who will coach you and answer your questions, seek out employees who will agree to serve in that role.

Building quality professional relationships during your internship is vital to lifelong career success.

- Take the initiative. Some experiences are well-defined with specific outcomes provided, others are not. In either case, don’t sit back and wait! Your employer will be impressed when you see a problem or issue and address it. When you take ownership in your work, you’ll find it more rewarding.
- Build relationships. Learning about your chosen field can be an enjoyable experience. Connect with other students and employees both inside and outside of the work environment. Take it upon yourself to organize after-work social activities if they are not planned for you. Remember to show a strong work ethic throughout your experience, and you will be respected by those with whom you work.
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