Career Development Process and Career Readiness

Career Development Process
When talking to students about Careers it is important to teach them that it is a circular process that they will cycle through for the rest of their lives. Stress about careers is often caused by a misunderstanding of that process. Students have been told the following myths.

- There are only one or two majors or careers that are the right ones for you.
- If you make the wrong choice, you will not be able to switch to something better easily.
- You must follow your passion to find out what you are meant to do.
- Once you decide on a career, you are done and never have to worry about it again.
- Everyone else has figured this out by now. You are behind everyone else.

These myths put a lot of pressure on students to make the RIGHT choice or end up miserable or worse a “failure.” There are lots of options for fulfilling careers and they will likely have several different careers throughout their life. They are only deciding on their first career. And if that doesn’t work out, they can just pick another one.

What does this process look like?

The career development process is all about coming up with possibilities, narrowing them down, and trying something to see if they like it (or what aspects of it they like or not). Then they can use the new information they learned to start the process again. This process starts when they Explore their personality traits and create a list of possibilities that they might like to consider. It then moves to researching those possibilities to narrow down the list and Focus on a choice they wish to try out. Next, they Prepare a plan for how they can test their idea out.
Lastly, they **Take action** to try their choice to see if they like it. What they learn feeds back into the first step where they continue to explore whether this choice is a good option or if they need to try something else. Each of these steps is explained in more detail below.

It is important to remember that your students may be at various places in this process. We shouldn’t assume that they are all starting at Step One. Many students have been exploring careers before they arrive at campus and already know where they want to focus. Some students have a few ideas and need help to narrow down their focus. There are some students that are at the beginning of the process and don’t know how to start. It is normal for new students to be in multiple places within the process and no one is behind if they are starting at the first step. With a process that is circular, you can never fall behind. Once you explain the process, students can determine where they are and then get help with next steps. Some students are in this process to decide a major, and some have decided their major, but are at Step One to decide on specific career interests.

Students who have decided on their career tend to believe they are now done with career development. Instead, they are at the “prepare to try something out” stage. We don’t know if we really like something until we have tried it. College gives them many opportunities to try things with minimal commitment and risk. Students who are sure of what they want to do can be surprised if they do an internship in a career they have chosen and discover that they don’t enjoy specific parts of the work. Then, this can result in them feeling that they have failed. What has really happened is that they have successfully tested their career hypothesis, gathered important data, and now can enter the exploration stage with new valuable information.

There are assignments and resources for each step of the process. You can incorporate whatever elements your students need depending on where they are in the process. With a circular process there is always a next step and no need for any student to feel stuck for long.

**Career Readiness Competencies**

The National Association of College and Employers (NACE) worked with employers to develop a list of eight Career Readiness Competencies that employers look for when hiring new graduates. Students can build up these career competencies throughout their time at college through their classes, on-campus involvement, internships, research, volunteer work, and study abroad. As the NACE website puts it, career readiness is a “foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management.” These competencies include

1. **Career & Self Development**: Proactively develop oneself and one’s career through continual personal and professional learning, awareness of one’s strengths and weaknesses, navigation of career opportunities, and networking to build relationships within and without one’s organization.
2. **Communication**: Clearly and effectively exchange information, ideas, facts, and perspectives with people inside and outside of an organization.
3. **Critical Thinking:** Identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information.

4. **Equity & Inclusion:** Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different local and global cultures. Engage in anti-racist practices that actively challenge the systems, structures, and policies of racism.

5. **Leadership:** Recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.

6. **Professionalism:** Knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace.

7. **Teamwork:** Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.

8. **Technology:** Understand and leverage technologies ethically to enhance efficiency, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.

These competencies are the same regardless of a student's major. Often students do not understand how all their classes can contribute to preparing them for their future career. This causes two (2) different problems: 1) Students who major in liberal arts do not see how their majors can help them to become career ready and 2) Students who major in STEM majors or other career-focused majors do not realize that they also need to develop these transferable skills in addition to specific career skills. There are exercises and assignments below that will help them identify ways to develop these competencies.

**Class activities**

- Talk about all or some of the myths mentioned. What do students think of them? Have they heard of them? Do they believe they are true?
- Present the process. Where do the students think they are in the process? What help do they need the most at this step?
- *Career Readiness Bingo (TBD)*

**Resources**

- National Association of College & Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies [https://career.albany.edu/resources/career-readiness-competencies/](https://career.albany.edu/resources/career-readiness-competencies/) (to learn more about the competencies, you can read more here)

**Assignments**

- 5 Day Handshake profile challenge - [https://career.albany.edu/handshake-challenge/](https://career.albany.edu/handshake-challenge/)