Major & Career Exploration Guide

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Exploration and Assessments

The Major & Career Exploration Guide is helpful for students who are determining a major or career path. This guide will introduce you to self-assessments and activities designed to identify occupations and careers that fit your personality style, skills, interests, and values.

Major and career exploration is the first of three milestones in our Career Readiness Roadmap. Once you have completed self-assessment and career exploration, you will be ready to move on to the next milestone and build specific skills through internships, service learning, and co-curricular activities.

What is major and career exploration?

Exploring and choosing an undergraduate major or field of study is called major exploration. Career exploration is the process of researching, evaluating, and learning about a variety of occupations and career opportunities. After completing self-assessment inventories, you will have some ideas of majors and careers of interest to explore. This guide will help you navigate the vast amounts of career-related data, narrow down your options, and make some decisions on majors and careers to pursue.

What is self-assessment?

To determine what you want to do, you must understand how your personal preferences, strengths, and interests determine what is meaningful to you in life and work. We offer several formal self-assessments that are easy to complete online in a survey format and offer a list of potential majors and careers of interest based on how you answer a series of questions.

Self-assessments can be conducted on the following areas and attempt to answer the following questions:

- **Personality**—What are your natural preferences and traits?
- **Interests**—What do you like to do?
- **Values**—What is important to you?
- **Skills**—What are your strengths and areas of growth?

Career assessments are not tests or measures of aptitude–there are no right or wrong answers. Rather, self-assessment tools help people sort through vast educational and occupational data through the lens of their preferences. Since careers and personalities are multifaceted, interpretation focuses on identifying key themes unique to each individual and connecting with their sense of purpose. When you can connect purpose and work, your level of overall career satisfaction increases. Given the many dimensions of self-assessment, discussing your assessment results with a professional career counselor is recommended.

Exploration and Assessments (continued)

The SJSU Career Center offers a variety of assessment tools to students. Most do not require a referral by an academic advisor or career counselor, but it is highly recommended that you 1.) consult with your career counselor to select the most appropriate assessments based on your career goals, and 2.) schedule an appointment to review results.

Review the following information to learn about each assessment tool.

Focus2 is free and accessible using SJSU Single Sign On (SSO). The Focus2 platform offers assessments that help you identify work interests and personality preferences connected to occupations and majors. After completing the assessments, you can work with your career counselor to develop a career plan to help you reach your goals.

There are several assessments available to you on Focus2. The primary assessment referred to in this guide is the *Work Interest Assessment*. This interest assessment is based on research (Holland Theory of Career Choice) that shows increased career satisfaction when one can align their interests with work tasks and work environments.

The *Work Interest Assessment* connects occupations and careers to interest themes known as Holland Codes. There are 6 interest themes (referred to by the acronym: RIASEC).

- **Realistic** (tangible and hands-on activities)
- **Investigative** (research and data-driven activities)
- **Artistic** (creative and ideation-focused activities)
- **Social** (support-driven and people-oriented activities)
- **Enterprising** (leadership and entrepreneurial activities)
- **Conventional** (organizing and systems activities)

While individuals can have interests across all thematic areas, typically there are higher interest levels in three of the six themes. You can learn more about these 6 interest themes on the O*NET site.

Career Values Assessment is designed to help you explore and identify what is most important to you in work and life. Research shows that an alignment with your values and work increases overall motivation and career satisfaction.

Skills Inventory helps you identify and organize your top career-related skills and competencies. You will develop your skills extensively during your college career, and you should check in with your career counselor each year to update your skills development goals.

MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) is one of the most widely used, scientifically validated psychometric tool assessing personality preferences. The assessment is available by counselor referral or by student request. (Note: there is a cost for the purchase of the report.) Through a series of questions, the MBTI helps you assess the following:

- What energizes you (Extroversion/Introversion)
- How you best process information (Sensing/Intuition)
- How you prefer to make decisions (Feeling/Thinking)
- How you organize yourself in the world (Judging/Perceiving)

The assessment requires approximately one hour to complete. Results will be sent to your career counselor who will schedule a 1-hour appointment to review with you.

Strong Interest Inventory is a robust assessment that helps you dive deeply into your Holland Codes (additional cost, by referral/request only).

The Strong assessment requires approximately one hour to complete. Results will be sent to your career counselor who will schedule a 1-hour appointment to review with you.

The following pages will prompt you to take specific assessment inventories, use labor market resources to gather industry-specific information, and prioritize top major/career options based on your values and preferences.

Major Exploration

Major exploration is the process of exploring and deciding on an undergraduate major (field of study) and involves self-assessment and research. Someone ready to explore majors may be asking themselves questions such as:

- I need to decide on a major, but I have so many interests it is hard to decide. What should I do?
- I need to decide on a major, but I don't know what I am good at. Where do I start?
- I have a major in mind, but after taking a couple of classes, I'm not sure this major is a good fit for me. How can I figure out if I should change my major?
- I am undeclared and need to declare a major. Which major do I choose?
- I have declared a major, but I notice that my interests have changed. What other majors can I consider?
- I haven't met the academic requirements in my current major and need to explore other majors. How do I do this?

Keep in mind that a major ***does not*** always equal a career. Your undergraduate education should prepare you to learn how to: collect and analyze data, solve complex problems, understand how humanistic and social factors influence outcomes, and communicate effectively. We recommend you pursue what you are most curious about and work with your career counselor to determine how to build transferable skills.

Consider common myths and facts about majors and careers before you begin the self-assessment process.

MYTH	FACT
Your major will determine your career for the rest of your life.	Your college major is just the first step in your career journey. Gaining additional training, certification, and work experience can lead to various careers throughout one's life. Read about successful business leaders who earned liberal arts degrees.
Your major prepares you for one specific career.	While some occupations require specific career paths that require certain majors (e.g., accounting, nursing, engineering fields), the majority require broad skills developed through undergraduate education with industry or company-specific skills learned through internships or on the job.
An introductory college course on a subject will tell you everything you need to know about the major.	An introductory course provides a high-level overview of a topic, but reviewing ALL the required coursework for a major will provide a more comprehensive view of the subject.

Major Exploration Worksheet

Log in to Focus2 and complete the *Work Interest Assessment*. Refer to the *Focus2 Online Career Assessment* on page 6 of this guide to learn how to complete the *Focus2 Work Interest Assessment*. Fill out the table below based on the information gathered from your assessment results and research.

Column 1: List your top 3 majors of interest based on the *Work Interest Assessment* results.

Columns 2 & 3: Review *What Can I Do With This Major?* to learn more about specific occupations and career areas.

Column 4: Review the SJSU Academic Catalog to identify 3–5 upper division required courses for your major of interest (this catalog also lists a directory of your academic advisor/s)

Column 5: Consider adding other criteria important to you in your major selection process (e.g., program impaction, years to completion, internship/fieldwork/practimum or graduate degree requirements for entering the field).

Column 6: Now that you have identified key factors of importance, you can start to rank them: 1 (most preferred)–3 (least preferred).

Major of Interest (Focus2)	*List 3 occupations related to the major (What Can I Do With This Major?)*	*List 3 career areas associated with this major (What Can I Do With This Major?)*	*List 3–5 upper division / major-specific courses (SJSU Majors and Programs)*	*Other considerations that you want to include*	*Rank major options (from Column 1)*
Example: Psychology	*Counseling* *Employment and Recruitment* *Sales*	*Human Services* *Human Resources* *Business and Industry*	*Psychology of Aging* *Human Learning* *Social Psychology*	*May require master's degree or higher to pursue a career in counseling*	*2*

What questions remain for you as you explore this option?

Note: *Please consult with your Career Counselor if you have any questions.*

Online Career Assessment

Focus®2

This online self-guided assessment and planning system is designed to help you explore majors and careers. Assessments are short (10–15 minutes each) and offer immediate results.

01. Log in with your SJSUOne ID and password.

- Registered students and alumni within a year of graduation have access to Focus2
- Go to Focus2 to log in

There are 3 components of Focus2:

- Career Planning Foundations (Am I Career Ready?)
- Self-Assessments (Work, Personality, and Leisure Assessments)
- Explore Possibilities (tools for ongoing career and education exploration)

02. Complete Career Planning Foundations: *Am I Career Ready.*

This short assessment measures your current competency across top transferable skills that employers seek. Results show areas of strength and ways to develop areas of growth.

03. Complete Self-Assessments.

Discover and explore majors and occupations that match your preferences.

- Select Work Interest Assessment if you have time for only one assessment

Work Interest Assessment

Explore occupations and majors that match what interests you

Leisure Assessment

Explore occupations and majors that match what you enjoy during your leisure time

Personality Assessment

Explore occupations and majors that fit your personality type

- Select *Combine Results* to see occupations and majors that match multiple assessments. Keep in mind that when combining results, your options may be limited to just a few majors or careers.
- Review your assessment results: Use the *Major Exploration Worksheet* (pg. 5 of this guide) or *Occupation Exploration Worksheet* (pg. 11 of this guide).

04. Explore Possibilities.

If you already have a career or major of interest, use this section to find more about the requirements.

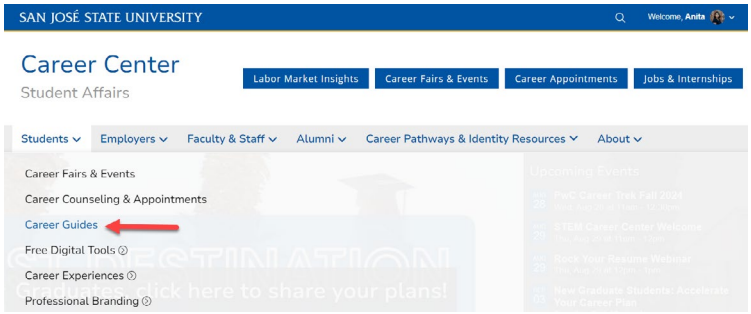
Tip: Save majors and occupations and review them later.

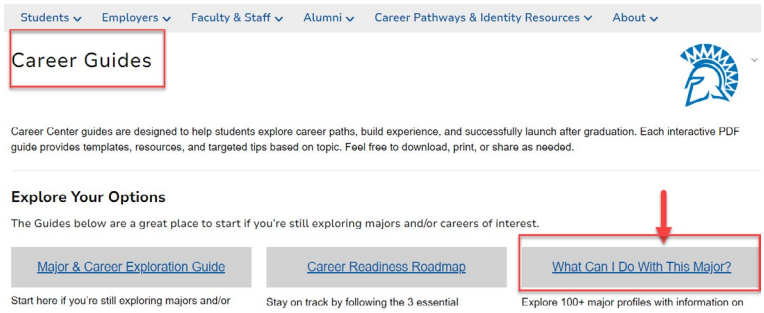
Make an appointment with your Career Counselor on Spartan Connect for more guidance.

What Can I Do With This Major?

What Can I Do With This Major? is a website featuring 100+ major profiles with information on common career paths, types of employers that hire in the field, and strategies to maximize opportunities.

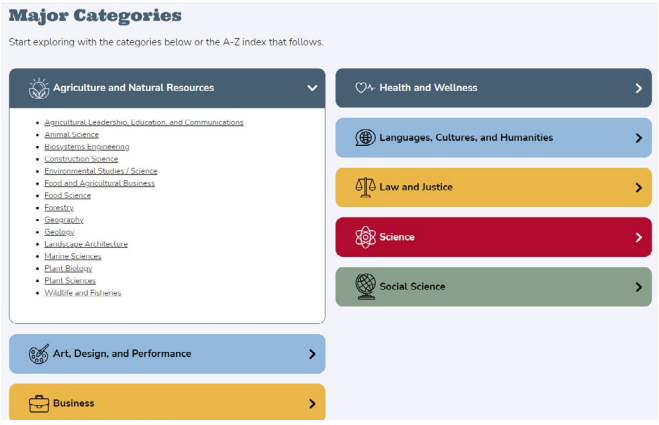
01. Access "What Can I do with this Major?" from the Career Guides Webpage.



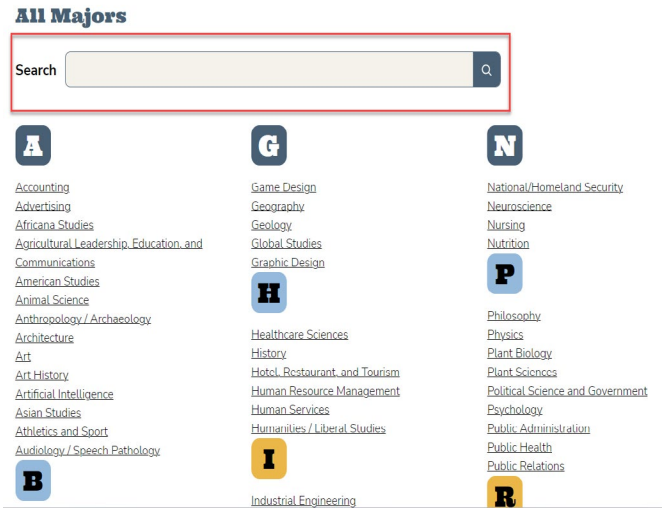


02. Explore Majors of Interest.

Option 1: Search by Major Categories

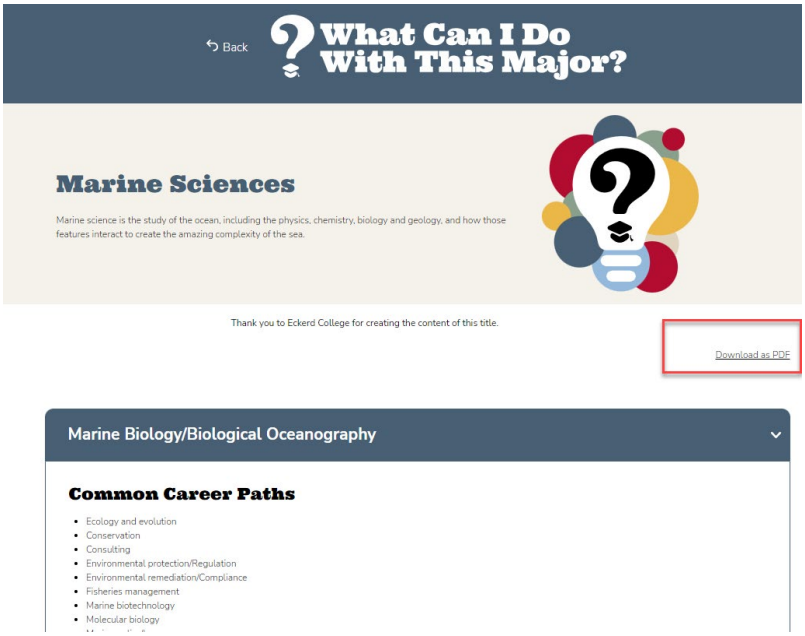


Option 2: Search by A-Z Index



What Can I Do With This Major? (continued)

03. Download the list (PDF) of career interest areas related to your major of interest.



Next Steps

- Review the list of employer types in the second column of the PDF file and note which ones you'd like to prioritize for internship or job searches.
- Consider the strategies suggested in the third column of the PDF File to build experience in your area of interest.
- Remember that a major does not necessarily equate to a specific career. This resource provides ideas of common careers related to specific majors to help you start your career exploration. Be sure to make an appointment with your Career Counselor on Spartan Connect if you have any questions about careers or ways to further research related internships and jobs.

Major Exploration: Next Steps

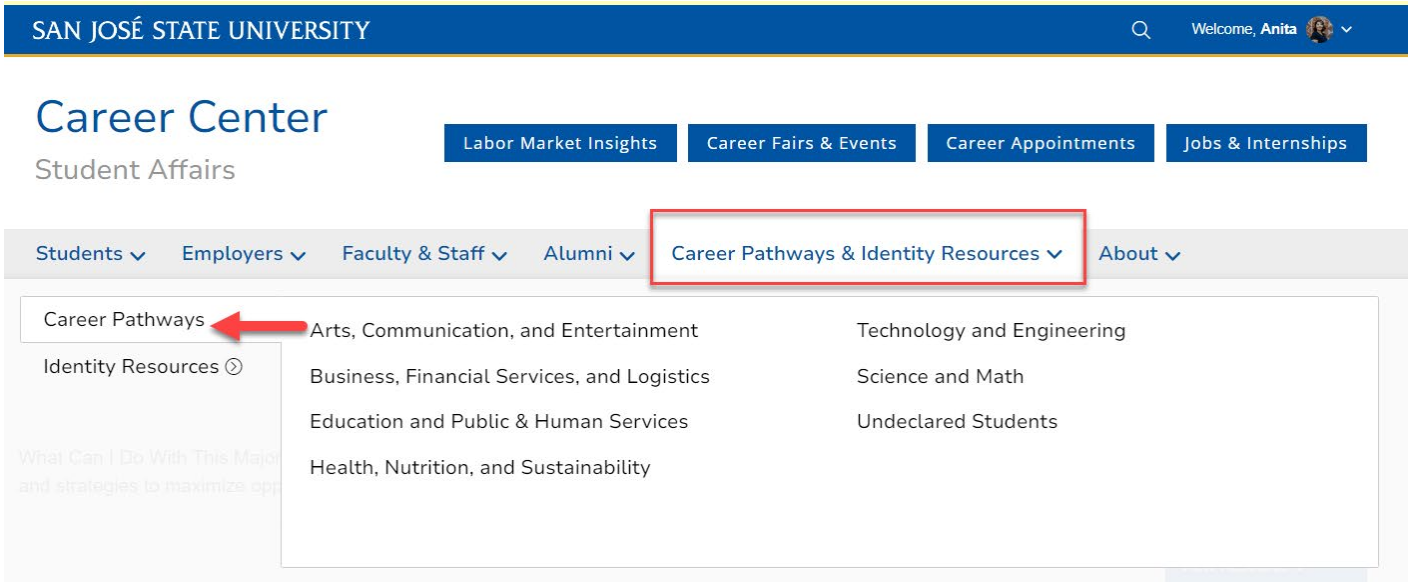
Once you've identified and ranked your majors, select which of the following options applies to you.

If you need to declare or change a major:

1. Evaluate your majors of interest by reading the course descriptions in the SJSU catalog.
2. Review the Colleges and Departments website for an overview of majors and career paths.
3. Meet with an academic advisor using the Undergraduate Advisor Directory to review requirements and begin the recommended process.

If you declared a major and would like to stay in that major:

1. Share the *Major Exploration Worksheet* with a career counselor / academic advisor. Discuss majors and career paths that align with your interest areas.
2. Build experience while you are a student. Meet with your career counselor and discuss how to design your undergraduate experience so that you can build transferable skills aligned with your long-term career goals.
3. Review *Career Pathways & Identity Resources* pages by selecting the tab on the SJSU Career Center website to see featured articles and job and internship opportunities.



Career Exploration

Career exploration entails learning about various occupations and how they align with your interests and preferences. Those who are ready to explore career options may have questions such as:

- What career path(s) can I pursue with my degree?
- What occupations/careers would be the best fit for me based on my interests, skills, and values?
- What do I do if I have multiple career interest areas?

There are two steps in the exploration process:

1. **Self-assessment** to identify your preferences (interests, skills, and values)
2. **Researching occupations** based on your preferences and labor market data

Self-assessment helps you determine the criteria you want to use to evaluate your career options. You will make career decisions based on things that matter most to you at a given time in your life. The second part of the exploration process is gathering timely and reliable labor market data. This includes researching job titles, industry trends, in-demand skills, salary, and projected market demand. The ability to conduct career research is a valuable skill that will serve you throughout your career as you navigate shifts in the marketplace and your professional goals. Follow the next steps to get started on the process.

Step 1: Complete the Following Assessments

- Focus2: *Work Interest Assessment*: Identify your top 3 occupations of interest. Refer to page 6 of this guide for step-by-step login instructions if needed.
- Complete the Skills Inventory and select the top skills that you would like to use or develop as a student, intern, volunteer, or in the workplace.
- Complete the Career Values Assessment to identify what is most important to you in future work.

Step 2: Conduct Occupational Research

Review the following resources referenced in the *Occupation Exploration Worksheet* (STEP 3). These tools are beneficial in reviewing large sets of occupational data that are updated in real time. This guide includes a tips sheet with specific directions for using the tool. If you don't want to review the tips sheets, skip to STEP 3.

- **O*NET**: Economic data collected by the government; see our tips for use on page 12 of this guide.
- **Labor Market Insights (LMI)**: Aggregated real-time job posting and employer data; see our tips for use on page 14 of this guide.
- **GenAI**: Advanced language models that can provide tailored career insights, generated based on custom prompts; see our tips for use on page 16 of this guide.

Step 3: Complete the Occupation Exploration Worksheet

Now that you have completed the self-assessments and are familiar with the labor market tools, you are ready to organize your outcomes in the *Occupation Exploration Worksheet* on page 11.

Occupation Exploration Worksheet

Use this worksheet to compare the 3 occupations you are most interested in based on your assessment results. Each occupation will have its own row, and you can use the steps below to add the needed information.

Column 1: List your top 3 occupations of interest from the Focus2: Work Interest Assessment.

Column 2: Which of your skills (refer to Skills Inventory) align with those required for your occupation of interest? (O*NET, Labor Market Insights (LMI), or a GenAI tool)

Column 3: List your top 3 values (refer to Values Assessment) that align with the occupational values listed in Focus 2 or O*NET.

Column 4: Add salary information you found on O*NET, LMI, or a Gen AI tool.

Column 5: Add any additional criteria you would like to compare across your occupations of interest, including possible areas of growth (needed skills, certification required, etc.).

Column 6: Based on the information in the grid, rank your preferred options: 1 (most preferred)–3 (least preferred).

Occupation Options (Focus2)	*Top 3–5 skills necessary for this occupation (O*NET, LMI, Skills Inventory, or GenAI)*	*Top 3 work values that align with your values (Career Values Assessment, Focus2, or O*NET)*	*Median Earnings in CA (Focus2, LMI, or O*NET)*	*Other considerations you want to include*	*Rank Occupation Options*
Example: Bioengineer / Biomedical Engineer	*Critical thinking* *Active listening* *Complex problem-solving*	*Independence* *Achievement* *Working conditions*	*$101,870*	*Require masters degree for advancement and desired salary* *Usually requires several years of experience to achieve median earning*	*3*

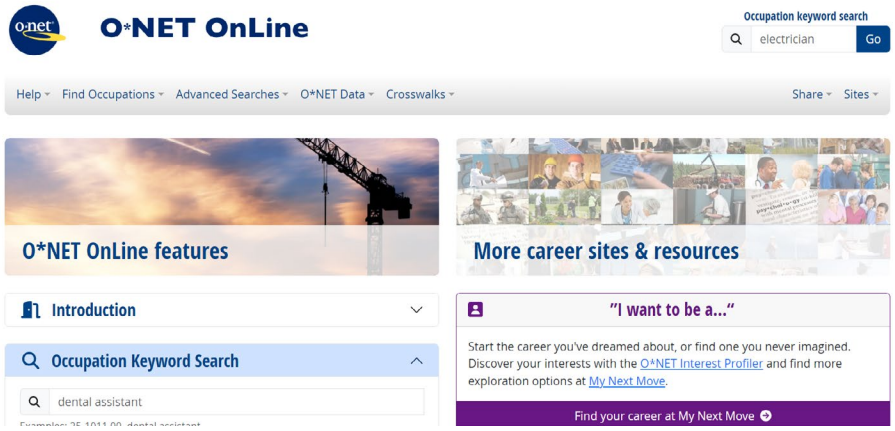
What questions remain for you as you explore this option? *For example: Does your current major prepare you for this occupation? Does the occupation entail tasks you find engaging? How does the occupation align with your interests? I.e., 3-letter Holland Code*

Note: *Please make an appointment with your Career Counselor if you have any questions.*

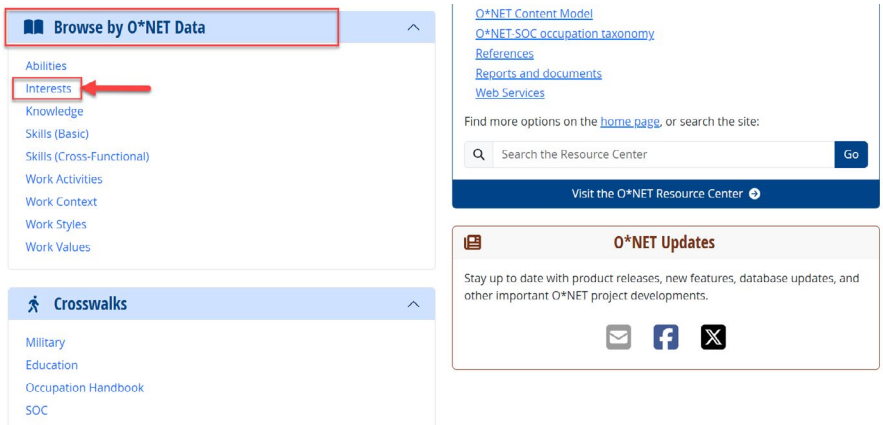
O*NET

O*NET is a great tool that helps you enhance your career exploration and job analysis. It provides detailed descriptions of hundreds of occupations nationally to help you better understand the typical tasks, skills, and work environment.

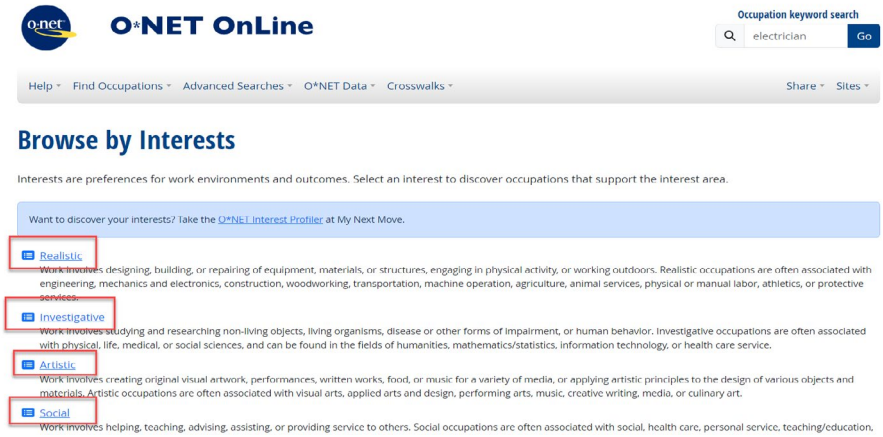
01. Access O*NET By Visiting https://www.onetonline.org/



02. Scroll down and browse occupations by *Interests*.

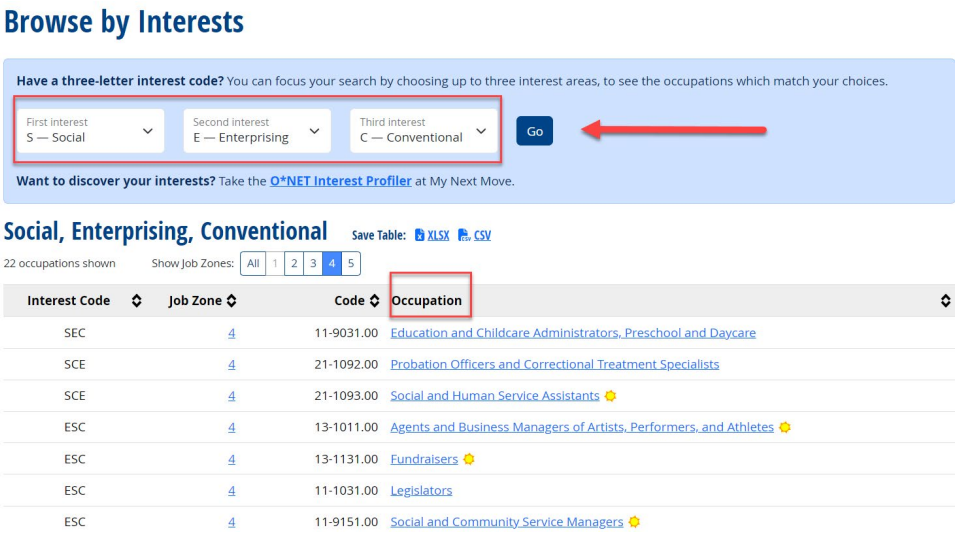


03. Use your Focus2 Holland Letter Code to review occupations (see pg. 6 for Focus2 tips).



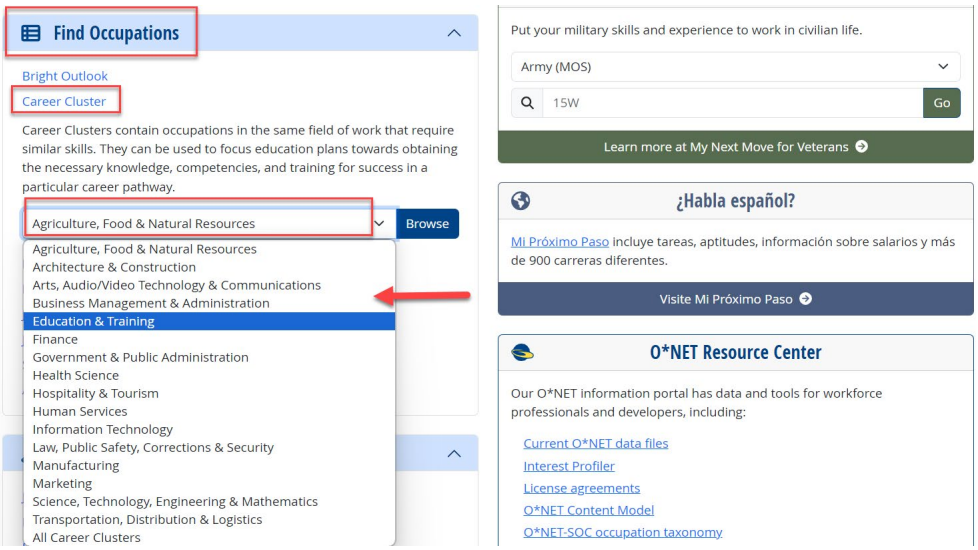
04. Select specific occupations of interest from the list provided

If your *Occupation* list is short or you're not finding occupations of interest, consider searching for occupations using just the first two letters of your Holland Code to expand your search.



05. Consider researching occupations by Career Cluster.

Career Clusters include occupations in the same field of work that require similar skills. You can use Career Clusters to help you align your educational plan towards obtaining necessary knowledge, competencies, and training for a specific career pathway.



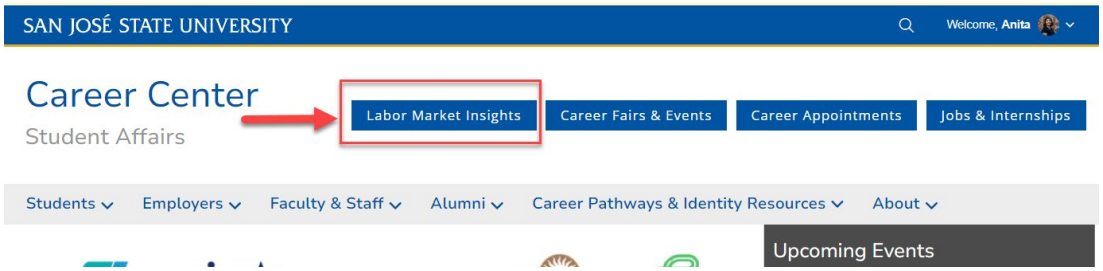
Next Steps

- Take note of skills, tasks, and experiences you find interesting and areas where you would like more clarification (see your Career Counselor).
- Review the list of related occupations for additional ideas.
- Schedule an appointment with your Career Counselor on Spartan Connect if you need more guidance.

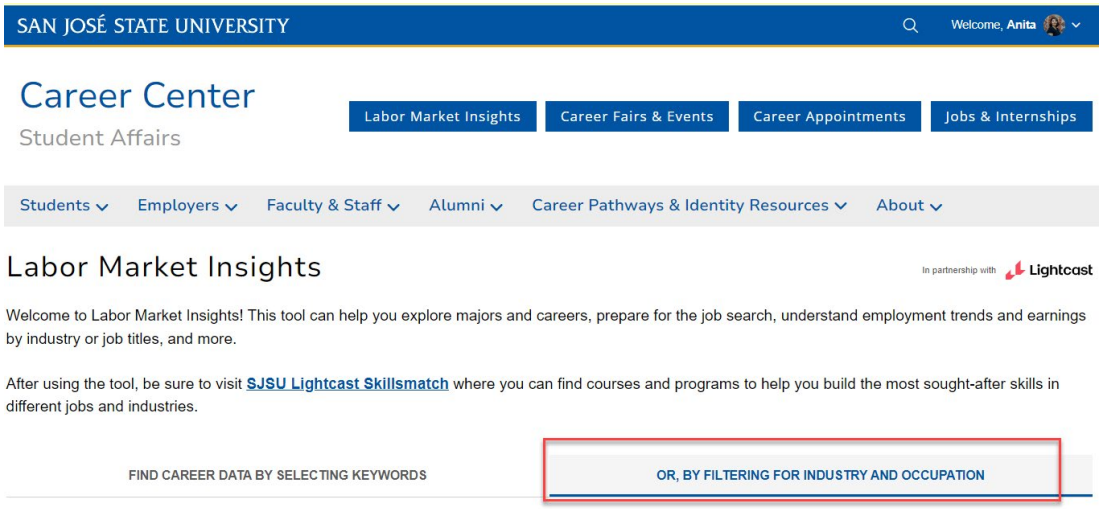
Labor Market Insights

Labor Market Insights is a tool that can help you understand employment trends and earnings by region, industry, or job title by using real-time data across various employment databases, government economic data, and current job postings.

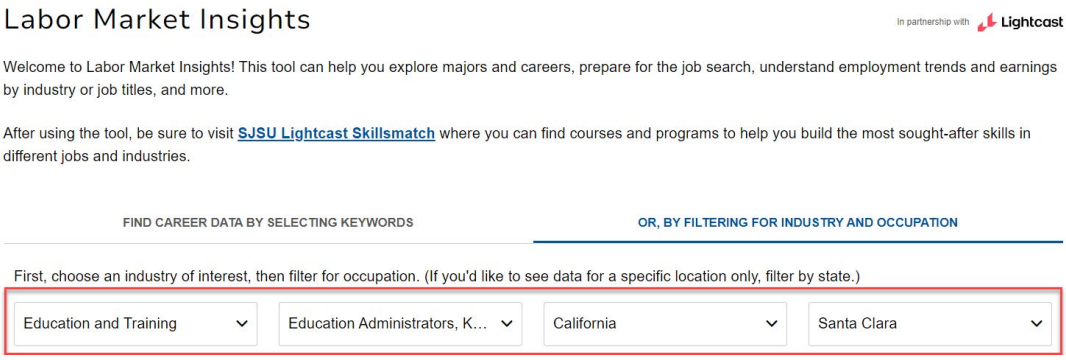
01. Access "Labor Market Insights" from the SJSU Career Center website.



02. Filter by Industry and Occupation.



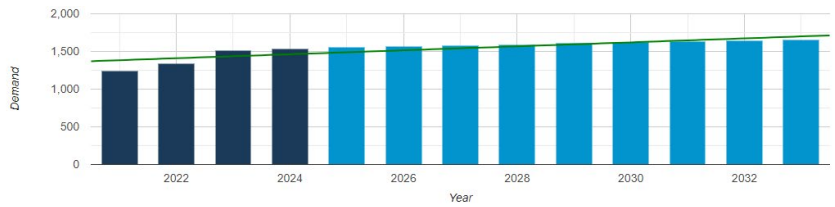
03. Include State and County for more specific information.



Labor Market Insights (continued)

Lightcast

04. Review information on Employment Trends, Top Employers, and Annual Earnings specific to the industry, occupation, state, and county selected.



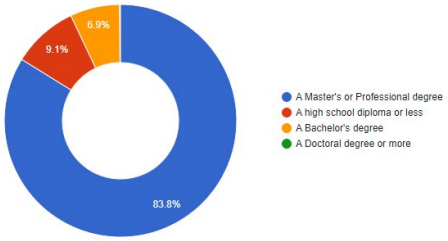
Top Employers

These companies are currently hiring for Education Administrators, Kindergarten through Secondary.

1. Stanford University
2. Kipp Public Schools Northern California
3. Microsoft
4. Synopsys
5. Northrop Grumman
6. Campbell Union High School District
7. Diocese Of San Jose
8. Google
9. Netapp Solidfire
10. ServiceNow
11. Foothill-De Anza Community College District
12. San Jose Unified School District
13. The Primary School
14. Alpha Public Schools
15. Amazon
16. Apple
17. Braintree
18. Moreland Elementary
19. Sephora
20. Sk Hynix

Education Levels

The educational attainment percentage breakdown for a career (e.g. the percentage of people in the career who hold Bachelor's Degrees vs. Associate Degrees). Educational attainment levels are provided by O*NET.



Next Steps

- Review the list of job titles commonly associated with the occupation. Search for internships/jobs using these job titles as keyword searches.
- Consider the technical skills and core competency skills. Research how you might build experience and develop those skill sets (e.g., internships, volunteering, LinkedIn Learning, student clubs/organizations, professional associations, etc.). Review pgs. 9-10 of the Build Experience Guide for more ideas.
- If you need more guidance, make an appointment with your Career Counselor via Spartan Connect.

Using Generative AI for Major & Career Exploration

Generative AI (Gen AI) is a type of artificial intelligence that uses algorithms to process data (text, image, audio, video) from the internet to understand and create new content based on given instructions ("prompts"). It's a powerful and fast tool for comparing or analyzing large data sets to identify themes and patterns as well as generate new customized content—making it useful for career ideas, job titles, and identifying top skills for desired occupations.

GenAI Product Examples: ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini

Disclaimer: SJSU does not endorse or sponsor any listed products. We recommend starting with a free version of any product. Select a product based on your specific needs such as content (text, code, image, audio), data accuracy, and timely data collection.

Ethical Considerations: While Gen AI is a powerful tool for generating ideas, it is important to be aware of its challenges, such as biases in data, potential inaccuracies, plagiarism risks, and data security concerns.

Recommendations for Ethical AI Use

- Avoid including private information in your prompts, such as name and contact information.
- Verify AI-generated content against trusted sources (e.g., research-based studies, professional journals, insights from professionals in the field) to ensure accuracy.
- Use AI to analyze and summarize large data sets, generate ideas, and simplify complex tasks.
- Personalize AI-generated content by paraphrasing it in your own words and style.

Get Started: Before using Gen AI products to explore majors and career paths, do the following:

1. Complete Focus 2 to learn about your interests, suggested occupations, and majors.
2. Develop your **prompt.** A prompt is an input or query a user or program gives an AI model to get a specific response. Focus your prompt on a specific task and include context. See the formula below.

TASK	+	CONTEXT
What you want Gen AI to do		What information Gen AI needs from you

=

PROMPT

"Generate a list of entry-level job titles that align with my interests in communication and art."

Additional Prompts

- Identify 5 majors at San Jose State University that match my interests in [INSERT INTERESTS] and skills in [INSERT SKILLS] See this prompt in action.
- Suggest common job titles pursued by graduates with a major in [INSERT MAJOR]. See this prompt in action.
- Provide a list of top transferable skills a [INSERT MAJOR] learns while obtaining their degree and include a list of entry-level jobs that utilize these skills. See this prompt in action.

Next Steps: Log into a Gen AI product of your choice and practice prompting. Make an appointment on Spartan Connect for further personalized assistance from a Career Counselor.

Informational Interview

An informational interview helps you gather information about majors, careers, jobs, industries, or companies. It is an arranged meeting (in person or virtually) that lasts approximately 20–30 minutes. The purpose of an informational interview is to gather information and develop a professional network rather than a job referral. In addition to your online research, informational interviews provide real-world feedback from those active in the career/field that you would like to pursue.

Before Setting Up the Informational Interview

Step 01: Establish why you are interested in conducting an informational interview. Here are some prompts that might help you identify your specific objectives:

- I want to learn more about career paths that others with the same major have pursued.
- I'm curious about several careers. I'd like to learn more about each from those in the field.
- I'm interested in learning how to prepare for success in a specific career path. What skills, courses, and experiences should I develop before I graduate?
- I'm considering graduate school, but I'm not sure how to evaluate which school/program might be best for my chosen career path.
- Whose perspective would help me most in my exploration process? (E.g., hiring manager, employee, alumni, current graduate student, admissions advisor)

Step 02: Take time to research fields of interest. This will help you prepare a list of questions. Possible resources include:

- What Can I Do With This Major?
- Labor Market Insights
- O*NET

Step 03: Prepare your list of questions. Below are some examples of questions you may want to ask.

Explore Careers	Build Experience	Launch	Exploring Graduate School
How did you decide on your career? How did you know it would be a good fit for you?	Beyond internships, are there ways I can develop relevant skills/experiences that are valued in this field?	Do you have any tips for standing out in the application process?	How has receiving a graduate degree helped you and your career?
What college experiences were most helpful in determining your career path?	What top tips do you recommend to search for jobs/internships in this industry?	What transferable skills from your education or previous experiences have been most valuable in your career progression?	How did you decide that graduate school was something you wanted to pursue?
How did you explore career options while in college? What resources did you use?	What are some of the essential skills, and how can I develop those skills as a student?	How can I best prepare for an interview at your organization or in this industry?	How did you decide which graduate program was right for you?

Informational Interview (continued)

Scheduling the Informational Interview

Step 1. Identify people to interview. You can start with your existing contacts (e.g., family, friends, classmates, professors). The best resource for informational interviews outside of your contacts is SJSU Alumni. You can Identify SJSU Alumni using the SJSU LinkedIn Alumni page.

Step 2. Develop a brief introduction of yourself and your reason for requesting an informational interview.

Hello, my name is _____ and I am a _____(year level) at SJSU studying _____. I'm researching career opportunities / graduate programs in the _____ field and was given your name by _____(referral source) or (I saw your profile on LinkedIn). I'm very interested in learning more about your career journey and tips for success as a fellow Spartan in the_____field. Would you be available to spend about 20–30 minutes with me (virtually or in person as you prefer) to ask you a few questions related to_____.(I.e., Share your specific ask: discuss your experiences in the field, discuss how you decided to apply for a graduate program?) I appreciate your consideration and look forward to connecting.

Only reach out to the number of people that you would be able to fit into your schedule and ensure that you can track for any follow up.

Step 3. Respond promptly (within 24 hours) when corresponding with potential interviewees. Offer several options for connection as is convenient for your interviewee (e.g., video call, phone call, or in person).

Conducting the Informational Interview

Dress professionally and be on time if your meeting is in person. Even if you schedule a video or phone call, it is recommended to dress appropriately as it helps you be in the right state of mind.

- Bring your list of questions and ask permission to take notes.
- Introduce yourself (education, background, and experience).
- Respect the person's time and limit the meeting to the agreed-upon time frame.
- Close the interview with gratitude, and ask if you may stay in touch with them. Also, politely inquire if there are other people they suggest you connect with for additional informational interviews.

After the Informational Interview

Congratulations, you've completed an informational interview. You have now made some professional connections, learned more about your chosen field or future program, and can make some decisions on your next steps (take a certain class, join a club/organization, reach out to another contact). Be sure to keep track of your contacts, send them updates on your progress if they agree to stay connected, and share interesting articles/resources/ideas based on your conversation to maintain your new network. As you develop your relationship with your contacts, you can reach out again for tips on other areas of your career journey; for example, a resume review for an upcoming job, ideas for internships or job leads, etc.

Occupation Exploration: Next Steps

Once you've narrowed down your occupations of interest, you can take these next steps to help with the decision-making process.

1. **Schedule an appointment with your Career Counselor** and share your completed *Occupation Exploration Worksheet*. Your career counselor can help you develop a roadmap to meet your goals.

2. **Connect with an academic advisor** if you are considering changing your major, adding a minor, or taking specific courses to prepare for your occupation of interest.

3. **Conduct Informational Interviews with alumni and professionals** in your field using the SJSU LinkedIn Alumni page

4. **Start Networking:** Attend career panels and employer events. Use SJSU Handshake to search for live and virtual career panels, information sessions, job fairs, and alumni events on and off campus.

Congratulations on completing the Major & Career Exploration Guide! If you are looking for ideas on how to build experience, please refer to the Build Experience Guide.