

A Parents' Guide to Career Development

From The Office of Career Services

Adapted from article by Thomas J. Denham of JobWeb.com

One of the most valuable things that parents can do to help a student with career planning is listen: be open to ideas, try to help your student find information, and be nonjudgmental. Here are 10 other ways you can help.

1. Encourage your child to visit the Office of Career Services

Many students use their first semester to "settle into" college life, and so perhaps the spring semester of the freshman year is the optimal time to start utilizing Career Services. However, if a Winter Term project is on the horizon, look to Career Services in the fall to explore our **Winter Term Internship Program** with internships sponsored by alumni, friends and parents.

Anytime your son or daughter is feeling anxious about his/her future, suggest that they visit the office and speak with a Career Advisor. Career Services is not just for seniors, and meeting with a Career Advisor can take place at any point during their college career. The sooner a student becomes familiar with the staff, resources, and programs, the better prepared he or she will be to make wise career decisions.

Career Services supports students' career development process through services that:

- Enhance self-awareness of interests, values and talents
- Encourage exploration of future paths
- Provide opportunities to acquire knowledge and experience
- Develop skills for effective self-presentation

2. Advise your student to create a resume

Writing a resume can be a "reality test" and can help a student identify strengths and weak areas that require improvement. Suggest your student get sample resumes from Career Services or www.oberlin.edu/career. You can even review their resume drafts for grammar, spelling, and content, but recommend that the final product be critiqued by a Career Advisor or our trained staff of Peer Career Advisors.

3. Challenge your student to become "occupationally literate"

Ask: "Do you have any ideas about what you might want to do when you graduate?" If your student seems unsure, you can talk about personal qualities you see as talents and strengths. A career decision should be a process and not a one-time, last-minute event: Discourage putting this decision off until the senior year.

You can also recommend:

- Talking to favorite faculty members about opportunities,
- Job shadowing a professional or completing an internship in an interest area,
- Researching a variety of interesting career fields and employers,
- Visiting Career Services

4. Allow your student to make the decision

Even though it is helpful to occasionally ask about career plans or choice of major, too much prodding can backfire. It's okay to make suggestions about majors and career fields, but let your student be the ultimate judge of what's best. Career development can be stressful. Maybe this is the first really big decision that your son or daughter has had to make. Be patient, sympathetic and understanding, even if you don't agree with your child's decisions.

Myth: A student must major in something "practical" or marketable.

Truth: Students should follow their own interests and passions.

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Myth: Picking your major means picking the career you will have forever.

Truth: That's not true anymore. "Major" does not necessarily mean "career", and it is not unusual for a student to change majors. Many students change majors after gaining more information about specific fields of study and career fields of interest. Many students end up doing something very different than originally planned, so don't "freak out" when they come up with an outrageous or impractical ideas. Chances are, their plans will develop and change. It's okay to change majors—and careers.

5. Emphasize the importance of internships

Career Services will not "place" your child in a job at graduation. Colleges grant degrees, but not job guarantees, so having relevant experience in this competitive job market is critical. Your son or daughter can sample career options by completing internships and experimenting with summer internships, employment opportunities or volunteer work. At any year during their Oberlin education the **Winter Term Internship Program**, directed by the Office of Career Services, is a perfect time frame to pursue an internship that will help them to explore their interests.

Employers are interested in communication, problem-solving, and administrative skills, which can be developed through internships. They also look for experience on a student's resume and often hire from within their own internship programs. These days a high GPA is not enough.

6. Encourage extracurricular involvement

Part of experiencing college life is to be involved and active outside the classroom. Interpersonal and leadership skills—qualities highly valued by future employers—are often developed in extracurricular activities, and through on campus employment and community service.

7. Persuade your student to stay up-to-date with current events

Employers will expect students to know what is happening around them. Encourage your student to subscribe or read the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal or other applicable journals and publications. When they are home on break, discuss major world and business issues with them. There are also a vast number of performances and presentations to attend on campus.

8. Expose your student to the world of work

Most students have a stereotypical view of the workplace. Engage your student in conversations about the world of work. Explain to your son or daughter what you do for a living. Take your child to your workplace. Additionally, show him or her the value of networking by interacting with your own colleagues. Help your student identify potential employers and internship sites.

9. Teach the value of networking

Introduce your student to people who have careers/jobs that may be of interest. Suggest your son or daughter contact people in your personal and professional networks for information on summer jobs, internships, or simply for an informational interview. Encourage your child to "shadow" someone in the workplace to increase awareness of interesting career fields. Both Winter Term and summer can be the best time periods to pursue such opportunities.

10. Help Career Services

There are many ways you can partner with Career Services. If your company hires interns (during Winter Term or summer), have the internships listed with Career Services – same goes for jobs. Use your "real world" experience to offer advice to students about their career options by participating in a career panel or career related workshop. Finally, offer short-term housing when students accept unpaid internships in locations other than their hometown.