



Parents Supporting Their College Students' Career Planning

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Identity Formation

At this time in their lives, college students are faced with the unique task of forming a stable sense of who they are. Although the development of identity is an ongoing process, adolescence is a distinct stage in which decisions about one's roles and purposes in life need to be defined. The task of identity formation is achieved when adolescents commit to a set of values and roles as a result of an exploration process that responds to both personal needs and societal demands.

College students are challenged with decisions in relation to occupations, interpersonal relationships, ethnic and ideological views. An occupational choice is indeed one critical decision since students attempt to express their interests, abilities, values, and personality through the selection of a major. Their major and career options are an expression of who they are and what lifestyles they want to live. Additionally, students need to be aware that an occupational choice is done in a context where social, economical, and political factors also take place.

Helpful Practices

As a parent you play an important role in the career development of your college student. Your educational background and employment history, coupled with the emotional environment that you provide to your children, influence your student's decisions in both positive and negative ways. You, as a social support, have the highest influence on your children's attitudes and values toward school, major choices, their educational and career goals, as well as the job market.

The following guidelines summarize helpful practices that you as a parent may use to foster the career exploration process of your student and encourage satisfying decision-making. As a parent you can:

- Create a safe environment in the family where your student can begin to express their interests, abilities, values, and also be positively reinforced.
- Be accessible to your student to discuss their fears, aspirations and concerns by providing non-judgmental and honest feedback.
- Provide opportunity for negotiating differences when they arise in a supportive, non-threatening environment.
- Help your student exercise goal setting and decision-making during this transition time in their lives. This will help them learn how to manage time, money, friendships, residence life, and grades, among others.

- Become aware of how you are modeling in your student your own occupational attitudes and behaviors, and consequently how you may be determining your children's performance in a future worker role. For example, you may negatively reinforce gender role stereotyped career choices, based on your own expectations of levels of education and economical status.
- Be sensitive to your own occupational expectations and/or frustrations as you may project them into your student and favor a particular option limiting the exploration process to a one subjective view.
- Encourage your student to become involved in co-curricular activities to explore their interests and leadership potential and to develop planning, social, teamwork, communication, and analytical skills, as well. These skills are still career related, as they can be transferable to the world of work.
- Support your student's choices by encouraging them to try different courses that may be of their interest. Listen and help your student clarify ideas about possible majors/careers. Grades count, so it is important to set their academic goals early during their freshman and sophomore years.
- Talk to your students about alternative plans and encourage them to take classes that will enhance their marketability, such as computer seminars, foreign languages, oral and writing skills, among others. Their advisers can recommend different courses to further develop these skills.
- Support your students' interests in studying abroad and being exposed to an overseas experience that may be critical in today's global economy.
- Help your student develop contacts and learn the art of networking as different people may provide useful insights about future graduate schools, possible occupations, new referrals, and gathering of information about career planning and job search issues.
- Suggest they make connections with faculty, staff, administrators, and previous employers, as they will become their references for future internships, scholarships, graduate school, and jobs applications.
- Promote volunteering or summer jobs that relates to a chosen career path. These experiences can positively reinforce career interests.
- Suggest an internship or part time job to your student, this will provide hands on experience. Nationwide, 40% of all interns will eventually end up working in the organization in which they interned.
- Give them career-friendly presents especially in their last years. A nice pen, a new tie, dress shoes, a professional briefcase can help students gain confidence during the job search process.
- Encourage your student to begin the career planning process early by taking advantages of the career resources available on campus. Encourage them to visit career services offices to obtain assistance in making their career decisions as well as helping them transition to the world of work. Career services will assist them in gathering information about themselves, the different majors, occupations, and the world of work they will face.
- Encourage them to attend and participate in the different career fairs and events that take place during the academic year. Career services offices in each college provide internships and job placement opportunities.

By offering support, open communication, and encouraging new levels of independence, your students can make satisfying career choices and become reliable contributors to society. They will engage in decision-making and actively explore their occupational options before making a commitment.

Encourage your college student to visit Career Connection (a Unit of the Office of Student Life) located on the second floor at the Younkin Success Center. Students can call (614) 688-3898 to make an appointment to meet with a career counselor/consultant. Visit Career Connection on the web at www.careerconnection.osu.edu to become familiar with our services and career related links.