

A Journey Begins...

“If you don’t know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else.

”Yogi Berra (Legendary New York Yankee)

This popular saying attributed to Yogi Berra suggests that we should have a pretty clear picture of where we are headed. And college, for most of us, is the last step toward a fulfilling and exciting career. But the fact is that the employment market and job-seeking techniques have changed significantly over the past ten years and will continue to change; it is not as easy as it once was to map out a clear career path. However, a clear direction can still provide enough flexibility to respond to the changing needs of today’s job market. In fact, building flexibility into your career plans is a requirement for achieving a successful career.

Consider the ways in which the job market has changed—and what it may mean to your planning:

- You will likely be employed by many organizations in your lifetime. The idea of working for a single employer is no longer the rule but rather the exception. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor found that on average, people hold close to eleven jobs between the ages of eighteen and forty-two. U.S. Census Bureau, “Table 597. Average Number of Jobs Held From Ages 18 to 42: 1978 to 2006,” *U.S. Department of Labor: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 2007*, <https://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/10s0597.xls> (accessed July 13, 2010). This trend means today’s graduates need to be very flexible in their career plans and that they should make an effort to identify and develop transferable skills in order to navigate the changing employment market.
- Five years from now, you may be working in a job that doesn’t even exist in the present. As new technology accelerates and national and global priorities (such as going green or national security) take on a new sense of urgency, new needs are identified and new jobs will be created to fill those needs. Think about this: fifteen years ago, a search

engine optimization (SEO) specialist was a job in only a handful of Web-centric companies. With the meteoric growth of Google, SEO is now a common role in just about any marketing department—and a job in relatively high demand. In the same way, the aging population has created new opportunities in elder care, the events of 9/11 has created a whole new category of jobs in homeland security, and new discoveries and approaches in science have created fields like biotechnology and nanotechnology. Today’s students and job hunters must become lifetime learners to keep up with new trends.

- The physical location of a job is no longer as important as it once was. Other than jobs that require you to serve customers in a specific location or region, or jobs that require specialized equipment (as in manufacturing facilities), companies increasingly have off-site employees who stay connected via the Internet. This means that students and job hunters should be able to demonstrate the ability to work independently and produce results without consistent, direct personal supervision.
- The growth of job posting sites online has created a glut of applicants for most posted positions. You have access to millions of job opportunities via the Web, but so do hundreds or thousands of other job seekers. Each employer must cull through hundreds of résumés received for each job posted on the Web. Strategies for standing out in this crowded field become very important.

These factors combine to create a job environment that is different from what most people might expect and what your parents likely experienced. The way you prepare for a career needs to be more flexible and more personalized. Technology will play an important role in your career development. Linking your demonstrable skills to the needs of a job will be a key to your success.

The Dream of a Lifetime

We all have life goals or objectives—some are clearer than others, but they are there. You may think of your objectives in terms of finances (to hold a job that allows you to be financially independent, for example), or perhaps your goals are more personal (to be married and have a family). They might be specific (pay off my student loans within three years of leaving college) or very general (to do good). Regardless of what they may be, they are all important because they influence the decisions you are making today about your future.

Understanding what motivates your goals and aspirations is essential because you are then better able to prioritize your thoughts about the future and identify new options that you may not have thought of before that will bring you fulfillment. Beware of accepting dreams others may have for you as your own (“I want to finish college to make my parents proud” or “I want to complete my associate’s degree because my boyfriend says I can get a better job”). These are not necessarily bad dreams to pursue, but they will lead to genuine fulfillment only if they are your dreams.

Assignment:

In the following table, list four or five most important dreams you have for your future. Include your professional, personal and economic goals. Take some time to think about why these dream are important to you. Revisit your answers frequently over the week next or two and fine-tune them. What do they tell you about what is important to you? How are they linked to each other?

MY DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

My dreams for the future	Why they are important to me

What Will Be My Life's Mission?

Since you were a child and first definitively stated, “When I grow up I want to be a _____,” you have been making decisions in order to fulfill your dreams. Most likely you are in college today as a step toward fulfilling a lifetime goal. But very few of us are still passionate about our childhood dream. As we grew up, we discovered new options; were influenced by people we met; or perhaps even learned that being a fireman, nurse, circus clown, pro baseball player, or princess is not all we thought it might be. Your evolving life dreams may continue even today and should be embraced. But for most people, the motivators behind the dreams—the answers to “Why they are important to me” change very little over time. If as a child you wanted to be a princess so your kingdom would have a kind ruler, today you may want to be a teacher to help children learn—and both of these dreams, at their core, are motivated by the desire to help others.

Take a close look at your “importance” statements in on the chart. What do they tell you about the direction you want to take in your life? What are your priorities? Will some dreams need to be put on the back burner while you pursue others?

Using your dream statements as a guide, write a two- or three-sentence mission for yourself. A mission statement can be very helpful in helping you make decisions, but it should be reconsidered and refined periodically. You don't need to share it with anyone, but you should refer to it a few times a year and ask yourself, “Am I living up to my mission?” and “Am I taking the right steps toward this mission?”