Module 4: Identifying and Researching Career Options
Transcript

Introduction (video clip 1)

This module will focus on the second step of the Career Planning Process, which is the step in which you’ll figure out what career options exist, research careers of interest, obtain job market information, evaluate how well each career meets the criteria you’ve established, and ultimately decide on a career path.

You may remember from the “How to Make a Career Decision” module, which focused on Step 1 of the Career Planning Process, that in order to find a good fit, you’ll need to balance passion and practicality in your career choice. Remember, self-knowledge plus knowledge of the job market equals a good career choice. It’s important to choose a career that fits your interests, abilities, and values, and it’s also important to make your choice well-informed about the job market and the likelihood of that career meeting all of your employment needs.

So, in Step 2 of the Career Planning Process, you’ll begin by using your interests, abilities, and values to identify possible career options you might like, then obtain job market information through the research you conduct on those careers.

Identifying Career Options (video clip 2)

There are thousands of different careers that exist today. Would you be able to name them all? I didn’t think so. We’re limited in our career choices to what we know about, and what we know about is largely based on what we’ve been exposed to – things like what our family members and other people we know do for a living, the careers we tend to actually “see” people doing in our communities, like teacher or doctor, or careers that are featured on TV shows we’ve watched. Usually, what we’ve been exposed to only represents a small fraction of the careers that are actually out there, so an important part of the career planning process is exposing yourself to additional career options.

Does that mean that to choose a career path, you need to know about every career in existence? No. That would not only be overwhelming, but also unnecessary since many of the careers out there have no potential to be a good fit for you anyway. But where do you get started finding out what careers exist that MAY be a good fit for you? You can use your interests, abilities, and values to help you find them.

(Activity slides 1-4)

(Activity) What careers have you been exposed to? On the next few pages, list the careers that you’ve learned about or that you’re aware of because of the source listed. This will allow you to assess what you know (and don’t know) and start thinking about how what you’ve been exposed to has influenced what you see as your career options.

Using Your Interests, Abilities, and Values to Identify Career Options (video clip 3)

There are tools available to help you find career options based on your interests, abilities, and values. One type of tool is a career assessment, such as Sigi, which is offered through the Boise State Career Center. Sigi starts by assessing your interests, abilities, and values, and then uses that information to generate lists of possible career options for you. Going through Sigi is a great way to familiarize yourself with what career options exist without having to look at a list of EVERY career. Sigi also provides information on each career to allow you to begin researching your options, which we’ll talk about a little later. You can get access to Sigi by meeting with a career counselor or coming to a Sigi workshop at the Career Center, or if your instructor arranges for your entire class to do it.
Another tool that you can access on your own is O*NET, which is an online career information database sponsored by the US Department of Labor. Go to onetonline.org to get started. You’ll notice that there are many ways you can search for careers on this site, but to use your interests, abilities, and values to identify options, use the Advanced Search section. Feel free to play around with any of these, but the best ones to start with will be the ones titled “interests,” “work values,” and “skills search.”

When you select “interests”, it will take you to a page with the six Holland personality types, which were covered briefly in Modules 1 and 2 and more thoroughly in Module 3. If you’ve completed one or more of those modules and have a good idea of what your type might be, you will be able to enter one, two, or all three letters of your 3-letter code here. Note that it sorts your results by “Job Zone,” which represents the typical level of education, training, and experience required, with 1’s requiring the least and 5’s requiring the most. Careers that require a bachelor’s degree are usually 4’s, and those careers can require up to several years of experience, so don’t forget that you’ll need to get this experience while you’re in school!

If you’d like to find out for sure how your interests translate into a Holland personality type, you can also use the free interests assessment available on the O*NET website, called the My Next Move O*NET Interests Profiler. Go back to the homepage and click on the “My Next Move” link, and then select the “Tell us what you like to do” option to get started. This assessment will give you both your Holland Type and careers to explore.

Back on the homepage under the Advanced Search, clicking on “work values” will bring you to a list of six categories of work values. Like in the interests section, once you select one, you’ll have the option of adding a second and third.

Under the Advanced Search again, clicking on “Skills Search” will bring up a fairly long list of skills for you to consider. Treat this like an abilities self-assessment – read each item, think about whether it’s something you’re good at, and check the box if it is. When you get to the end, click “go” to see careers that would utilize the skills you selected.

On any of the careers that come up as an option in any of these sections, the job title will always be a link. Clicking on a title will take you to information about that career. Click on titles that sound interesting to you as well those you don’t know anything about, and skim the information to decide whether it’s something you want to come back and look into further or not.

Be aware that because there are SO many different jobs out there, every career assessment and every career information database groups similar types of occupations together into a single category in order to create a manageable list of the occupations that exist. While you might think this is a bad thing if your goal is to find out about all the relevant careers that exist, it is actually a good thing because it allows you to get an overview of your options much more easily. Once you’ve picked out a few types of careers that seem promising, you can do further research to find out about the more specific career paths within that field.

(Activity slides 5-7)

(Audio) Pop quiz! To make sure you know what to look for when you go to use O*NET, answer the following questions.

Using Your Major to Identify Career Options (video clip 4)

You might remember from the How to Make a Career Decision module that it’s usually a better idea to first decide what kind of career fits you best, which will allow you to then make an informed decision about your major. Of course, in the real world, it doesn’t always work out that way, especially if you haven’t had enough experiences to really know what you want in a career, but you do know what you enjoy learning about. If you’ve already selected a major but not a career path, or have some majors you’re interested in, the Career Center does provide a resource for you to browse potential career options by major. It’s called “What Can I Do with This Major?” and it can be found on the Career Planning page in the Students section of the Career Center website. Clicking on a major will bring up a list of some of the
most common careers students who study that subject tend to pursue. Be aware, though, that this is NOT saying that this major will fully qualify you for all of these careers. Most require specific kinds of experience in addition to your degree, and some may require additional education as well, such as a graduate degree. One great thing about this resource, though, is that it provides suggested strategies for how to prepare for the careers in a given category. It also tells you what types of employers would typically hire someone for those jobs.

Additionally, there is a links page for each listed major. This page lists resources for further research into the careers mentioned, including professional organization websites and individual webpages created to provide information about career options in a certain field.

Researching Career Options (video clip 5)

Once you’ve familiarized yourself with the available career options that could potentially fit your interests, abilities, and values, it’s time to research your options, gather job market data, and evaluate how well each option fits your criteria for an ideal career. There are a few levels of research you’ll engage in – exploratory research, evaluation research, and in-depth research.

Exploratory research is the kind you’ll do when you’re just trying to learn about what career options exist, and it usually consists of reading brief descriptions of careers, such as you might do while looking through the careers suggested for you in Sigi or O*NET. You won’t learn everything you need to know at this point – just enough to decide whether the career sounds interesting enough to come back and look into further. As you’re conducting your exploratory research, most of which you’ll probably do online, your goal should be to create a list of careers that you want to research further.

Evaluation research is the kind you’ll do on the list of careers you generated from your exploratory research. Just like the name suggests, the goal here is to gather enough information about each career to evaluate how well it might fit the criteria you established in Step 1 of the Career Planning Process, and narrow your top career options to only 1-3 careers. This research is usually also done mostly online.

In-depth research is exactly what it sounds like – in-depth. This is where you’ll learn as much as you possibly can about your top options so that you can make a decision about which one is the best fit for you. While you might do some of this research online, most of it will be done in-person using strategies like informational interviewing, job shadowing, and eventually, volunteering or internships.

In addition to finding out what you need to know to determine how well a career fits your criteria, don’t forget to gather job market data and compare it to your values. Is the career field growing or declining? How many people work in the field? How many annual openings are there projected to be? How many openings will there be where you want to live? If you want to live in a specific place, what companies there hire people for that job, and how often do they hire? How difficult is it to get a job? Next, you’ll learn about resources for obtaining this information.

Online Research (video clip 6)

The best place to start your research is usually a career information database, which is a site where you can look up information on any type of career. We’ve already talked about two of them – Sigi, which is part career assessment and part career information database, and O*NET, but there are several more you’ll get to learn about as well. All career information databases cover the basic things you’ll initially want to know about a career, like what the typical tasks or job responsibilities are, where you’d work or the kind of work environment you’d be in, and what the typical education and training requirements are. Some also provide information on job outlook and salary.

While Sigi is restricted-access, as a career information database, it functions very similar to the major open-access career information databases out there. One of the unique features of Sigi is that it provides a salary chart for each career with
data for several states as well as the national average, broken up into percentiles to give you a better idea of what you might make at different stages in your career. You can change the states that appear to whichever you’d like.

There are three major open-access career information databases out there, all of which are either produced or sponsored by the US Department of Labor, O*NET, the Occupational Outlook Handbook, and Career OneStop.

O*NET, as you already heard, is a great place to conduct exploratory research. The information on each career is formatted similar to what a lot a job postings look like, allowing you to quickly skim bulleted lists of tasks, skills required, and characteristics that would make you a good fit for that career.

The Occupational Outlook Handbook, found at bls.gov/ooh, is produced by the US Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, and is where they publish their employment data, making it a great starting point for your job market research. In the job outlook section, there is a summary explanation of the current need for that occupation and the reasons for the employment projections. There is even the option to download a spreadsheet with a very detailed breakdown of employment data by industry and work setting. The Occupational Outlook Handbook also provides great descriptions of career fields that break down some of the more specific options within that field.

Career OneStop, found at careeronestop.com, is a good open-access source of salary data by state. Like Sigi, it reports salary data in percentiles, and has state data for most occupations. It will show you how the state you selected compares to the national numbers. Additionally, it has state-specific employment data that shows you how many people are employed in that career in the state you selected, as well as the projected number of annual openings, compared to the national numbers.

(Activity slides 8-10)

(Audio) Before we go on to talk about more online resources, get a little practice navigating the Occupational Outlook Handbook and Career OneStop.

Online Research Continued (video clip 7)

Another restricted-access career information database is the Idaho Career Information System, also referred to as CIS or eCIS. This resource, provided by the Idaho Department of Labor, contains Idaho-specific employment and salary data along with general career information. Employment and salary data is divided up by region of the state, giving you access to much more specific information that will help you in your career planning. Additionally, CIS is linked to the Idaho Department of Labor’s directory of Idaho businesses, so when you’re looking up a career, you can click on the “Idaho Businesses” link and access lists of businesses that might hire someone for that job, giving you an idea of what your actual employment options might be if you pursued that career (as well as a list of places you might intern!). You can log in and use CIS as a Boise State student by using the eCIS link on the Career Planning page in the “Students” section of the Career Center website.

But what if you’re not planning on working in Idaho after graduation? Where can you get similar data for other states you might be interested in? The best place to start is the state’s department of labor website. Because this is the government agency that tracks employment data at the state level, their websites are often a great source of information. The Idaho Department of Labor, for example, publishes reports on top growing careers and industries in the state on its website, labor.idaho.gov. Some states also offer their own state-specific Career Information System, so contact your state’s Department of Labor to find what’s available and how you can gain access to it. A link that will direct you to any state’s department of labor can be found on the Career Center’s Career and Job Market Research page.

Speaking of our Career and Job Market Research page, that’s where you can go for additional information and resources to help with your job market research. This page can be accessed from the “Make College Count” section of our website.
When you’re ready to learn even more about the career options you’re evaluating, the next place you should go should be the websites of the professional organizations for the career field you are researching. Professional organizations are groups of professionals who work in a specific career field and communicate with each other about their profession, share resources, and set standards for the industry. Invaluable information about the career field written by the people actually working in it can be found on their websites. In many cases, there may be a section of the website for students with resources and information on how to successfully prepare for the career. Since there are as many professional organizations as there are occupations, you’ll have to do some searching to find them. You can use the “links” section of “What Can I Do with This Major?” to find some of the big, national organizations (if you know of a major commonly associated with the career field you’re researching), you can use the links provided in one of the career information databases, or they can usually be found easily through a Google search. If you know you want to work in certain state, also look for state chapters of national organizations.

(Activity slides 11-12)

(Audio) Before we move on, let’s make sure you know where to find a couple important things in the Idaho Career Information System.

In-Person Research (video clip 8)

Many students make the mistake of choosing a career solely based on online research, and many of them end up regretting it! The internet is a great place to learn about your options, but it’s not going to give you enough exposure to a career for you to know whether you’d actually like it or not. To do that, you’ll need to get out and talk to people in the field, see what they do, and try it out in whatever way you can. We’ll talk about three strategies for conducting your in-depth research – informational interviewing, job shadowing, and volunteering or interning.

Informational interviewing is one of THE most helpful things you can do when researching a career. An informational interview, despite the daunting name, is just when you sit down with someone already working in the career field you’re researching and ask them questions about their job and their field. In addition to getting answers to things you want to know and couldn’t find on the internet, a professional working in the field can often tell you much more about the job market – what it’s really like, and what it really takes to get a job in that field – than even the best job market data can tell you. They can often tell you not only how easy or difficult it is to get a job, but who hires, how often, and what exact qualifications you’ll really need. You’ll also learn what a typical day is like, get honest feedback about the positives AND negatives, and likely get to see the work environment first-hand. Conduct several informational interviews so you get a variety of perspectives. Further, conducting informational interviews is one of the best ways to build your professional network while in school, which you’ll need later to get a job in your field. To learn more about how to set up and conduct informational interviews, see the module on informational interviewing, or visit the Career Planning page of our website.

Once you’ve conducted some informational interviews, if you are still interested in that career, the next step is to do some job shadowing, which is observing someone actually doing the job. It’s often easiest to set this up with the people you’ve interviewed, as you already have a relationship with them. Start small so it’s less of a commitment– maybe with only part of a day. You can always come back and do more if it goes well! Of course, there are some career fields where due to things like confidentiality or safety hazards job shadowing may not be possible, but when it comes to deciding if you’ll really like a career or not, job shadowing is the next best thing to actually trying it out.

That, of course, brings us to the final, most in-depth stage of the research process – trying it out. Keep in mind that you’ll never know for sure if you really like something without actually doing it. You can try out the career you’re considering in one of two ways – interning or volunteering. Of course, in some fields it’s not always possible to officially intern before you’ve completed a certain amount of classes in that field, and you may prefer to start with something smaller anyway. Again, get in touch with the professionals you interviewed to ask them about opportunities to intern or volunteer as a way of trying out the career.
Using Your Criteria to Make a Decision (video clip 9)

If you have not already established your criteria for an ideal career, see the “How to Make a Career Decision” module, which will teach you how to do so. You will want to make frequent use of your criteria in the exploratory and evaluation stages of your research as you narrow your options. Remember, career options that make it through to the next “round” should include all of the items on your “essential” list. Then consider how many of your “wish list” items each career option will include. Your criteria will also help guide your evaluation research, as it will tell you what pieces of information you need to seek out.

Keep in mind that while a career might appear to fit your criteria well based on what you read online, your in-depth research might reveal otherwise. Continue to use your criteria as you move through the in-person research methods described and narrow your options, and before you make a final decision, make sure to revisit your criteria and ensure you feel confident that this career will include all of your “essential” items.

Getting Unstuck (video clip 10)

It's not uncommon to get stuck somewhere in this process and have a hard time making a career decision, so don’t feel bad if it happens to you! When you feel you’re stuck, the first thing you should do is ask yourself why, as this will tell you what kinds of things you’ll need to do to get unstuck. Do you feel like you don’t have enough information to make a decision? Do you have all the info but don’t want to commit to something for fear of making a wrong decision? Are you experiencing a conflict between what you want to do and what your family wants you to do?

If you’re feeling stuck, come and see a career counselor at the Career Center. A career counselor can not only help you figure out how to obtain any information you might still be lacking, but they can also help you navigate and resolve any other issues that may be preventing you from making a decision.

Closing (video clip 11)

Remember that the Career Center is here to help you! To maximize your future employability, connect with us early in your time here at Boise State. Come see us, connect with us on social media, visit our website, and let us help you Make College Count!