

Career Connections Series

Still Undecided about a Major?

It is important draw a distinction between **UNDECIDED** and **INDECISIVE**. Indecisive refers to an approach to life. Struggles with low self-esteem or anxiety can result in indecisiveness. However, being undecided suggests that as you gather the information you need you *will be able to* reach a decision. Of course, you realize that career planning is a life-long process and you will make many career decisions as you build your life-long career. But considering your initial plans for the world of work requires at least some tentative planning.

What do I do if I'm Undecided?

Review the information you have gathered about yourself from self-assessments. Are there aspects of your personality, skills, values or interests that you think need further exploration? This is not uncommon for college students. Because you may have spent nearly all your time in school without many opportunities to have held a full-time job, you may have difficulty clarifying interest, values and skills.

To aid in gaining a clearer picture of your "vocational self-concept," **try to engage in experiences or activities that may help you clarify what you enjoy and do well.** Developing a vocational self-concept is a life-long process, but there are things you can do now to facilitate your self-assessment. Ideas include: seeking employment or volunteer work or an internship experience in a field of interest, talk with friends or relatives about their perceptions of your skills review inventories and assessments done in class, or talk with a counselor.

Another type of information necessary in making a career decision involves learning about the world of work. Learning about occupations or even about college majors can feel like an overwhelming task. Many students secretly hope that the answer to their career questions will magically appear from a career counselor, a self-help book, a parent's suggestion, or even a care exploration class. Unfortunately, no one can tell you what the best career choice is. The responsibility is yours to explore and discover what types of career fields are available and which occupations seem suited to your own unique personality.

If you are still struggling with a lack of career information, there are several things you can do:

1. Review your interest pattern or Holland code to help you begin exploring related majors and/or occupations.
2. Examine some of the printed resources in the career library, such as the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) or the Encyclopedia of Careers to help you identify occupations of interest;
3. Conduct informational interviews with people in occupations of interest (this can provide first hand information, help you make contacts, and sometimes turn up internship or job possibilities);
4. Begin talking with people about their careers in many settings. Ask friends and relatives to talk with you about what they like and dislike about their jobs. Learning how others view their careers may help you clarify what occupational values you may hold.

But what if I seem to have all the information I need, both about myself and the world of work and I still cannot decide?

If you have done your career "homework" and still feel confused about your career decision-making, there may be some pieces of information that you have not addressed. Sometimes it is difficult to know ourselves thoroughly if we are too invested in pleasing someone else. This someone may be a parent, a girlfriend or boyfriend, or anyone whom we value highly. Sometimes people try to accommodate to the wishes of others and find it difficult to listen to their "inner voice" of who they are if that voice conflicts with pleasing someone else. Sometimes these conflicts can be worked out through some self-reflection. At other times a counselor can be helpful.

Other reasons decision-making can be difficult include having a unique pattern of interests and values that do not blend together easily. If your self-assessment reveals an uncommon interest pattern or divergent needs, you may need to consider designing a more "creative career" for yourself rather than trying to fit into a regular occupational description (see Bolles, What Color is Your Parachute, or The Three Boxes of Life, both Ten Speed Press). Sometimes divergent interests can be accommodated by meeting some desires through work and others through leisure. Many possibilities exist.

Finally, career decision-making can be difficult if our decision-making is hampered by undue anxiety. This can stem from a perceived lack of time or nagging doubts about our abilities. You may find it helpful to discuss these issues with a supportive other or a counselor.