

## Career Connections Series

### Still Undecided about a Major?

It is important draw a distinction between **UNDECIDED** and **INDECISIVE**. Being Indecisive refers to an approach to life. Struggles with low self-esteem or anxiety can result in indecisiveness. Alternatively, being undecided suggests that you have not yet decided, but that as you gather the information you need you *will be able to* reach a decision. Career planning is a life-long process and you will make many career decisions along the way. Counseling may be helpful in either situation, but is especially helpful if you are indecisive.

#### **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 most your time in school with few work opportunities, you may have difficulty clarifying interests, values and skills.

To gain a clearer picture of your “work identity” **try to have life experiences to help you clarify what you enjoy and do well.** Developing a work related identity takes time, but there are things you can do to help. Seek employment, volunteer work or an internship experience in a field of interest. Talk with friends or relatives about their perceptions of your skills. If you are an Illinois State University student, consider taking the Career Choice class (IDS 106). This class will provide career assessments and assignments to help you clarify your values and help you do some research about careers. You might also talk with a counselor at the Student Counseling Services or at the Career Center on campus.

**Learn about the careers you are interested in** from people you know, such as family, friends, or even professors in related classes. Seek out information from the web! 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 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. You can learn your Holland code from career assessment tools on-line or in career counseling.
2. The internet offers great resources for career information. Helpful career exploration links can be found in the Career Section of the Student Counseling Services web page, Career Self Help at [www.counseling.ilstu.edu](http://www.counseling.ilstu.edu) . You can also examine printed resources in the career section of your local bookstore, or Milner Library at Illinois State University.
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). Information about networking and gathering information is available on the Student Counseling Services web page in the career web-shops!

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 decisions, there may be some issues you have not yet addressed. For example, 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 the wishes of others and find it difficult to listen to their "inner voice" if that voice conflicts with pleasing someone else. These conflicts can usually be worked out through self-reflection or counseling.

Decisions can also be difficult if you have 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 typical career (see Bolles, *What Color is Your Parachute*, or *The Three Boxes of Life*, both Ten Speed Press; or Laurence Boldt, *Zen and the Art of Making a Living*, Arkana Press). A creative solution may involve a combination of work and leisure to fulfill different parts of your interests and values.

Finally, career decision-making can be difficult if we are anxious or distracted by problems. We may feel rushed to decide, behind schedule on our career path, have nagging doubts about our abilities, or be afraid of taking the next step. It can be helpful to discuss these issues such as these with a supportive friend or a counselor.

Whatever the reason, if you feel it would be helpful to discuss your career decision-making consider talking with a counselor at Student Counseling Services, or with a professional at the Career Center. Sometimes investing a little time in yourself can really help you make successful career decisions.