

Career Planning for the *Florida GED PLUS* Student

Experts estimate that today's graduates will experience 3 to 11 lifetime career changes.

Trying to figure out career plans and college majors is not an easy process. The vast majority of students who go to college do so to plan for a successful career. However, amidst the stress of the college application process, career planning is often put on the proverbial "back burner." Finding the right career is a time-

consuming process that is best done as early as possible.

This Technical Assistance paper is designed to provide the **Florida GED PLUS** instructor with resources and information in order to assist students in the career planning process. Web-based resources are also included that describe different career opportunities, including education and skills required as well as real-life scenarios from professionals in the field.

Career Planning: Taking the First Step

As they complete the **Florida GED PLUS** program, students may feel a little overwhelmed by the aspect of graduating and attending college. "Have you figured out yet what you want to be when you graduate?" This is the eternal question for high school completers. Students ask themselves questions such as: What major will I select? What college will I be attending? What career is best for me? What job fits my interests and skills? How long will it take me to get through college? Can I handle all of the college coursework?

It's important for **Florida GED PLUS** students to start thinking about their career choices as early as possible. This doesn't mean that they have to know exactly what they want to do after college, but it does mean that they need to begin mapping out their future. There is more to attending college than just attending classes.

Many colleges and universities require that incoming freshmen complete an orientation program. Often included in this type of program is an introduction to the college's career center. Although career centers may have different names from campus to campus, they all have the same basic goal – to assist students in planning their future careers. Students need to be aware of the services available at the career centers. There's more to career planning than merely selecting a major in college. A career center should be a focal point of the college student's life. However, career planning starts before college; it begins in the **Florida GED PLUS** classroom.

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Funds for this project were provided through the Adult and Family Literacy Act, Division of Workforce Education, Florida Department of Education

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Helping Florida GED PLUS Students Plan for Their Career

What Can Instructors Do ?

Although most colleges have career planning centers with career counselors available, there are many ways in which the *Florida GED PLUS* instructor can assist students in initiating their personal career plans.

Most career planning programs focus on four basic areas:

- Discovery – Self-Assessing and Career Matching
- Career Exploration - Researching Careers and Programs
- Experiences and Experiments – Confirming Career Choices
- Job Search – Choosing the Next Step

Discovery

Students can begin their Discovery process in the *Florida GED PLUS* classroom. To get students started in the process of self-assessment, instructors may wish to have them answer the following questions:

- What do I like to do?
- What do I like about it?
- Is there anything I don't like about it?
- What do I do well?
- What do I receive praise for?
- What do I struggle with?
- What do I wish for?

These questions provide a basis for the development of a career plan that includes basic goals for what students want as a career, as well as the training, education, and skills needed to achieve those goals.

In the Discovery phase, students should take assessments to explore their interests, values, and skills. The results can then be related to different types of careers. This self-assessment phase is important because students may have unrealistic goals for themselves. An example would be entering the field of nursing when one is uncomfortable around individuals who are ill or when one cannot handle the sight of blood. Becoming an accountant may not be the best career for someone who dislikes math.

There are many different types of career assessment tools available on the Internet from interest and skill surveys, such as Career Key or the Strong Interest Inventory to personality types such as the Kiersey Temperament Sorter. Instructors may wish to use these

types of tools in the classroom with their students as an initial step into the self-assessment phase. There are also many different types of surveys and software programs to help students learn about their interests, skills, values, and personality, and how to match those skills to careers. Books, magazines, pamphlets from professional associations are other informational resources that should be made available for students.

Discovery includes not only exploring majors and careers, but also oneself.

Career Exploration

There are between 7,000 to 10,000 different occupations and the number is growing. Students don't need to explore all of them, but they do need to list the career options which best align themselves with their interests and strengths and then explore those specific careers.

Identifying different types of careers and the skills and types and length of education required can provide students with more realistic goals for themselves. Selecting a career goal of being a lawyer is not realistic if a student only wishes to attend a community college for two years. Many students are unaware of the length of time that certain majors and careers require.

While many adult students already have definite career goals set, completing a self-discovery and career exploration phase while attending the *Florida GED PLUS* program can assist them in ensuring that their career goals and selected major are a match to their interests, values, and skills.

Once students are in the college setting, they will need to determine whether or not the courses that they are taking will result in their getting the job of their dreams. Career counselors at colleges can assist a student in better understanding the career they have chosen by contacting individuals in that field. Talking with individuals in a student's selected career can provide a more realistic outlook on whether or not the student really wants that career as an end goal and what courses should be taken while in college. When speaking with individuals in the field, students need to let that person know that they are seeking information, not job hunting.

In the *Florida GED PLUS* classroom, instructors can also assist in this phase of career planning by inviting speakers from various career paths to the classroom and having them talk about their jobs and what types of skills and training are required. Field trips to college

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career centers or One-Stop Centers are also beneficial during the exploration stage of career planning.

Many students complete college only to find out that they are unhappy in their chosen field or that they have not taken courses that are most beneficial to their career area. This phase of career planning requires time and effort – both at the GED and the college levels. The important thing is to provide students with as much exposure to as many careers as possible.

Experiences and Experiments

The Experience and Experiment stage provides students with a chance to decide whether or not they've truly chosen the right career. This phase of career planning generally occurs while a student is attending college. Internships, job fairs, and summer jobs are all examples of activities that students should participate in during this stage. For some students, continuation of their education is necessary to reach a goal. These students will need to consider what graduate schools to attend and what entrance exams are required.

Remind students that as they work toward their career goal, they may change their minds at any time. During this stage, networking is highly important. Real-world experiences can provide students with different viewpoints on what they really want from the workplace and from their personal careers. Workshops that emphasize job-seeking skills are important as students look towards graduation – both at the GED and college levels. Although students may plan to attend college, their career goals may change upon graduating from the GED program. Therefore, job-seeking skills are highly important at all stages of career planning.

Job Search

Upon completing their academic training, students are ready for the Job Search phase. Students should have a professional resume completed and excellent interviewing skills by this time. They should also invest quality time with career counselors and network with individuals they have met throughout their educational career. Although the GED instructor will probably not be directly involved in this phase of career planning, it is important that students realize the types of choices that will need to be made in order to reach their career goals.

The career planning process can take six months, four years, or even a lifetime for students. Because most students will change careers throughout their lives, it is important that the *Florida GED PLUS* program provide

them with the skills necessary to develop ongoing career planning skills - the types of skills that begin in the GED classroom and continue.

What Will Students Find at a College Career Center?

Career centers provide students with the skills necessary to develop a career timeline or career action plan. The steps in each college's timeline are similar to those outlined for the *Florida GED PLUS* program.

Career counselors within the centers assist students in accessing self-assessment tools, materials and resources on careers, information about employers in the area, lists of job openings, up-to-date labor market information, local job fairs, and information on other educational institutions. Career centers may also help students in networking with area businesses, locating internships and/or part-time employment, and developing job-seeking skills through workshops, such as resume writing and interviewing skills.

Career centers are excellent resources, not just for the freshman, but for the student throughout his/her career, both educational and professional. Most colleges offer all of these services for free to students who are enrolled at their institution. *Florida GED PLUS* instructors may wish to explore career centers at local colleges and set up a field trip for students to assist them in being more comfortable in accessing such services.

Putting It All Together

To assist students in career planning, *Florida GED PLUS* Instructors should provide a program where students:

- Develop a beginning career plan that includes basic goals on what they want as a career and the training, education, and skills needed.
- Assess their skills and interests.
- Research occupations that interest them and the educational requirements, salary, working conditions, job availability, etc.
- Compare their personal skills/interests with the occupations selected in order to obtain a good match.
- Choose career goals to implement development of a career plan.
- Select a college or technical center that best meets their personal needs and career goal.
- Explore financial aid support if needed.
- Learn how to apply job-seeking skills, such as preparing a resume and practicing job interviewing techniques.

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Resources and Websites

Bolles, Richard N. *What Color is Your Parachute? A Practical Guide for Job-Hunters and Career-Changes.* (2006). Ten Speed Press: Berkeley, CA

Career Biographies. University of Michigan. Teen Internet. <http://ipl.si.umich.edu/div/pathways/career.html>

Career OneStop. A comprehensive site that includes information on careers, educational institutions, job searches, and a comprehensive job bank. <http://www.careeronestop.org/>

Career Search. Schools in the U.S.A. Select a career and obtain information on the career, as well as the skills, background, and education required. http://www.schoolsintheusa.com/career_search.cfm

Career Search. Princeton Review. Learn about what it takes to get into a career. <http://www.princetonreview.com/cte/search/careerSearch.asp?msg=Please+use+the+buttons+provided>

Education Planner. American Education Services. Learn about how to plan for your educational future. http://www.educationplanner.com/education_planner/discovering_article.asp?sponsor=2859&articleName=Select_a_Career

Florida Choices. Florida Department of Education. A free resource for students to use as they plan their future. <Http://www.firn.edu/doe/workforce/publicat.htm>

Further Your Education.com. Learn about adult education, transferring to a four-year college, distance learning programs, or even education in the military. <http://www.furtheryoureducation.com/index.shtml>

Job Profiles.com. <http://www.jobprofiles.org/index.htm>

Jobs People Love. Sasknetwork.com. <http://www.sasknetwork.ca/html/Home/lmi/occlist.htm>

JobWeb. National Association of Colleges and Employers. Lots of resources for the entire career planning process are at <http://www.jobweb.com/>

Learn what it is like to work in a career by accessing information from some of the following websites. A Day in the Life. http://www.vault.com/nr/ht_list.jsp?ht_type=1

Mapping Your Future, Inc. A step-by-step guide for career planning for high middle school through college through adulthood. <http://www.mapping-your-future.org>

O*NET Online and O*NET Career Exploration Tools. User-friendly access to occupational information and tools for exploring different careers <http://www.onetcenter.org/online.html>
<http://www.onetcenter.org/tools.html>

People Profiles. Salary.com. http://salary.com/careers/layoutscripts/crel_display.asp?tab=cre&cat=Cat10

Real People Profiles. WetFeet.Inc. <http://www.wetfeet.com/Content/Real%20People.aspx>

University of Milwaukee Career Development Center http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/CDC/career_guide.html

You're a What? Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Handbook. <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/ooqindex.htm#F>