

Career Tips for Parents

CHOOSING A CAREER / CHOOSING A MAJOR

Accountant, Peace Corps volunteer, journalist, college professor...Ultimately, your student should make the choice. Of course, you may want to mention factors to consider, such as job market demand, salary ranges, long-range opportunities, skills required, etc. Just because something is “hot” now doesn’t mean it will be in 10 years or that it would be a good fit for your student.

EXPERIENCE

You may want your son or daughter to work in your hometown every summer. But a lifeguard or job in a coffee shop does not compare favorably to an internship (paid or unpaid) in the career field he or she aspires to enter. Future employers will seek relevant experience. Some students have little to write about on a resume if their summers were spent in school, traveling or in low-level jobs. We strongly suggest that students seek career-related experience for their sophomore and junior summers even if they must live away from home. (Those needing financial support can combine an unpaid internship with a paid job such as restaurant server, etc.)

LEADERSHIP & TEAMWORK ACTIVITIES

Many employers rate leadership and teamwork activities as even more important than GPA. Students who were very active in high school activities may be less involved in college. However, employers regard high school as “ancient history” for a college senior. It is more valuable for a student to be involved in a few meaningful leadership and team roles than to be a member of many campus organizations.

DOUBLE MAJOR / MAJOR AND MINOR

Most employers do not place a premium on a double major. It may require an extra semester or summer school to obtain a second major, and a double major does not particularly enhance a student’s marketability. Exceptions would be a second major or a major and minor chosen for a specific career, such as English and Chemistry for technical writing, or Health Policy and Business for hospital administration. Of course, some students may choose to do a double major primarily for academic/intellectual reasons.

GRADUATING EARLY

It could be a disadvantage to complete a bachelor’s degree in less than four years if it results in less work experience, fewer leadership activities, and less maturity at graduation.

GPA

While some students who get off to a rocky start eventually pull up their grades, it is difficult to do so. CLEP and AP credits and study abroad courses do not count in computation of the UNC-CH GPA. Some employers use GPA cutoffs in considering applicants. Others stress the student’s overall background: experience, number of hours worked during the school year to finance college, leadership activities, etc. We hope you will encourage your son or daughter to make academics a high priority beginning with the first year. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that it will take some students a while to adjust to the rigorous academic demands of Carolina.

TAKING TIME OFF

It is not common for students to take time off after graduation before attending graduate school or beginning their career. Some of the alternatives that students pursue include traveling, teaching abroad, or working for a year in an unrelated position, such as a resort or ranch. Though these experiences can be personally enriching, it is important that students understand both the positive and negative implications that such a decision can carry. While some employers may put a lot of value in such a post-graduation experience, others may not. If a student does choose to take time off after graduation, it will be important to be able to communicate to prospective employers how this time off has made him/her a stronger, more qualified candidate.

REALLY LISTEN

Research has shown that parents are the number one influence over their child's career choice. Learn what's important to your son or daughter. Try to separate what you'd like to see your child choose as a career versus what he or she wants to do.

BE PATIENT

Realize that every young person has his or her own timetable. Some may not be ready to make career decisions as early as others.

ENCOURAGE EXPLORATION

First year students and sophomores should explore several fields of study and career options. (This is especially important for those considering medicine or law, as professional school admission is so competitive. Every year some seniors come to UCS after rejection from graduate school to develop an alternative plan. They would be in a stronger position if they had developed a plan B earlier. Informational interviews, volunteer work, part-time employment, and internships are helpful for exploring various options.

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO USE UCS

Encourage your child to visit UCS early to see which services are available. They can also bookmark our webpage so they will always be aware of workshops and special events, such as the Internship Fair, Part-time Job Fair, Career Panels, and Networking Nights.

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH CURRENT LITERATURE

Read about career planning and entry-level job opportunities. Employers' expectations are high, and the job market is constantly changing.