



Career Planning and Goal Setting

Why Is Career Planning and Goal Setting Important?

Throughout your university career, once you graduate and as you continue in the world of work, you will face many decisions. These will range from which options to take, where you hope to volunteer, if you choose to travel or go abroad, and ultimately where you hope to work and live. If you are aware and conscious of your choices and decision throughout this process the likelihood you will be happy and satisfied in your choices greatly increases. The work you do now will continue through your life as you navigate your career.

Terminology

Career is defined as a field or pursuit of progressive achievement in an area. Career can include education, hobbies, and community service in addition to work.

Career Planning is an intentional process of conceptualizing, exploring and finding a satisfying career.

The Career Planning Process includes Knowing Yourself, Exploring Your Options, Getting Focused and Taking Action.

Stages of Career Planning

Knowing how to make good career decisions will help you to achieve a satisfying and productive career.

KNOW YOURSELF

Self-awareness forms the foundation for effective career planning and is an activity that can be revisited at different points during a student's program and career. It involves answering questions such as:

- Who am I?
- What are my interests?
- What kind of skills do I have?
- What are my work-related values?
- What is my work style?
- What are my ambitions?

What are some of your important values?

EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS

Exploration of possible careers, companies and/or institutes is also an important activity at this stage. Students utilize information interviews to gather first hand current information from other professionals about career options and opportunities. They involve answering these questions:

- What is out there?
- What options do I have?
- Would I prefer business, non-profit, or public-sector?
- What jobs fit my skills?

What would you do if you could only succeed?

GET FOCUSED

Decision Making

Once you are aware of your various options, it is important to evaluate which of your options is the best fit for you. Two styles of decision making are presented below.

Rational Method

The Rational Method includes two ways that people can and do make decisions. The first involves evaluating your options and choices by comparing your self-assessment data with what you discovered during your career exploration.

How did you make a recent decision?

Once you have explored your options and analyzed this information through a decision making process, you are ready to act. The easiest way to put your research and reflection into action is through goals or plans that allow you to follow steps to achieve what you want out of your life.

Setting Goals

Can setting, elaborating and reflecting on goals enhance your performance?

Write down your goals

What is important to me? Where am I going? To write your goals down on paper can be an essential tool to support your potential success. Doing so can help you to:

- clarify your needs, wants and priorities;
- provide direction and reference;
- encourage the power of commitment and accountability;
- increase motivation;
- celebrate your successes.

Have a clear objective

“Where do I want to be?” A motivating goal needs to be challenging enough to stimulate us, but not too difficult so as to be demoralizing. It should be just outside your comfort zone: stretching but not highly stressful. Be precise about what you want to achieve. As well, consider or list the benefits you would gain by achieving your goal.

What is a MAPS method?

The **MAPS** method of setting goals allows students and professionals to follow a formula to achieve career success. This formula can be applied to both short-term and long-term goals. **MAPS** stands for:

- **Measurable:** goals are quantifiable;
- **Achievable:** goals are practical, possible & positive;
- **Positive:** will not adversely affect other key areas of life;
- **Specific:** exactly what is to be achieved or accomplished and by when.

Identify one short term goal that you are willing to complete within the next few months that will help you to achieve your career goal.

Rewrite that goal as a MAPS goal

TAKE ACTION

Whereas a goal is where you want to be, a plan is the strategy you employ to get there. Planning turns goals into tangible "bite-sized" steps of action. A plan details the activities necessary to accomplish the stated goal and identify both short term and long term goals.

The plan organizes your dreams so that you can move forward with confidence and helps you take charge of your career plan. Remember, a plan is not a life sentence. As your interests and expertise change, adjust your plans and goals.

Develop an Action Plan

Working backwards, write down the tasks that need to be completed to achieve your goal

Action Plan:	Date
Sub goal:	
Sub goal:	
Sub goal:	
Sub goal:	

Effective planning involves the following elements:

- Define clearly the steps you will take. ("How do I get there?") Think of all the possible things you could do to take you closer to achieving your goal. Break down any large steps into smaller components, so it doesn't seem so difficult to achieve.
- Identify the end point for each step and give yourself a small reward for achieving it!
- Arrange the steps in a logical, chronological order and put a date by which you will start each step. Put these dates into your diary or onto a calendar. Try to set yourself weekly goals: what research you will do into jobs, what skills you will concentrate on learning, etc. It's also a good idea to get into the habit of planning a timetable each evening listing your tasks for the next day or two.
- Action generates the impetus for further action: if you want something done quickly, give it to a busy person. The best time to do something is usually NOW!
- You need to consider if your plans are attainable and what would happen if you failed to achieve your goals. Try to map out alternative paths to your goal, then if one becomes blocked another is available: build flexibility into your planning. People tend to strongly underestimate how long a project will take, especially if working in a group because they tend to visualize everything going to plan with no problems. As well, be open to changing your plans as you progress. New information may become available as you progress through your plan which may suggest additional or alternate steps. Effective planners have a goal in mind but are open to adapting their plans.
- Anticipate the type of problems you might encounter at each step. What are the barriers in the way of achieving your goal? Think about ways to deal with those problems.
- Review your progress. Keep a diary or blog of your daily activities and record your progress as things happen: this keeps your plan as concrete as possible. A good time to start your review is about two weeks after you have begun. Review how far you have got towards your objective, identify any mistakes you made and what you can learn from them, look at any new ideas or opportunities that may have presented themselves and then revise your plan to incorporate these.
- Mix with positive people who will encourage you to keep going! Create accountability by telling your friends or significant others about your goals. They will provide support when the going gets tough and will also give you an incentive to keep going as you'll feel embarrassed if you have to tell them you've given up!