

As a parent of a Nebraska Wesleyan student, you play a significant role in your student's career decision making process. One of the most valuable things parents can do to help a student with career planning is listen: be open to ideas, try to help your student find information, and be non-judgmental.

Here are 10 ways you can help:

1. Encourage your student to visit the Career Center.

Next time you visit campus, drop into our office to pick up a business card from one of the career counselors. When your student is feeling anxious about their future, offer the card and say "Please call this person. They can help you."

Reassure your student that the Career Center is not just for seniors, and meetings with a career counselor should take place frequently in their college career. The sooner a student becomes familiar with the staff, resources, and programs, the better prepared he or she will be to make wise career decisions.

The NWU Career Center offers a full range of major exploration and career development help, including:

- The Strong Interest Inventory and other self-assessments
- "What Can I Do with a Major In?" resources on all majors offered at NWU
- A network of alumni eager to talk about their careers and experiences, called the Career Assistance Network
- A library of books covering a wide range of careers, as well as graduate school admission tests
- Workshops on résumés, cover letters, interviewing, job search, and much more
- A job search platform, Handshake
- One-on-one career coaching

2. Advise your student to write a résumé.

Writing a résumé can be a "reality test" and can help a student identify weak areas that require improvement. Suggest that your student use our handbook complete with samples, found at career.nebrwesleyan.edu. Once ready, recommend that the final product be critiqued by a NWU Career Center professional.

3. Challenge your student to become "occupationally literate."

Ask, "Do you have any ideas about what you might want to do after you graduate?"

If your student seems unsure, you can talk about their qualities you see as talents and strengths. Also recommend:

- Taking a self-assessment inventory, such as the Strong Interest Inventory, offered in the Career Center
- Talking to favorite faculty members about career options with their major
- Researching a variety of interesting career fields and employers. A great place to start is onetonline.org

Career decisions should be a process, not a one-time, last-minute event. Discourage putting a decision off until senior year.

4. Allow your student to make the decision.

Career development can be stressful. Be patient and sympathetic, even if you don't agree with your child's decisions. It's okay to make suggestions about majors and career fields, but let your student be the ultimate judge of what's best.

Myth: A student must major in something "practical" or marketable.

Truth: All majors are marketable. Students in every major gain valuable skills employers seek in hiring graduates.

Myth: Picking your major means picking the career you will have forever.

Truth: That's not the case anymore. "Major" does not translate to "career," and it is not unusual for a student to change majors. Many students end up doing something very different than originally planned, so don't worry when they come up with an outrageous or impractical career idea. Chances are plans will change. It's okay to change majors—and careers.

5. Emphasize the importance of internships.

Career Centers of today do not “place” your child in a job at graduation. Colleges grant degrees, not job guarantees, so having relevant experience in this competitive job market is critical. Your son or daughter can sample career options by completing internships and experimenting with summer employment opportunities or volunteer work.

Why an internship?

- Employers are interested in communication, problem-solving, and administrative skills developed from internships
- Employers look for experience on a résumé, and often hire from within their own internship programs
- A strong recommendation from an internship supervisor can often tip the scale of an important interview in your student’s favor

6. Encourage extracurricular involvement.

Encourage and empower your student to take advantage of the entire college experience. Not only should they be going to classes, but also participating in other experiences that are available to them. Employers and graduate programs seek candidates with relevant, real-world experiences. While grades are of course important, a record of involvement both on- and off-campus will help a student be competitive in a future job market. Students should consider looking for these experiences and opportunities:

- Clubs and organizations related to their interests and skills
- Leadership roles
- Opportunities to practice teamwork and communication
- Global awareness, through study abroad and similar experiences
- Job shadowing
- Research experience

7. Persuade your student to stay up-to-date with current events.

Employers will expect students to know what is happening around them. Your student can stay informed through reading the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal, which are free to access through NWU’s library. When your student is home on break, discuss major world and business issues.

8. Expose your student to the world of work.

Most students have a stereotypical view of the workplace. Take your child to your workplace. Explain what you do for a living. Help your student identify potential employers.

9. Teach the value of networking.

Introduce your student to people who have careers that are of interest. Suggest your child contact people in your personal and professional networks for information on summer jobs. Encourage your child to shadow someone in the workplace to increase awareness of interesting career fields.

10. Help the Career Center.

Let the NWU Career Center know when you have a summer, part-time, or full-time job opening. Provide information on available internships as well. The Career Center can show you how to post these openings on Handshake. Join the Career Assistance Network (CAN) and use your experiences and knowledge to advise students of their career options, provide shadowing opportunities, or participate in a career panel.

Additionally, the Career Center sponsors many on-campus events such as Backpack to Briefcase, Meet the Firms, and other networking opportunities for students. The Career Center will also look at résumés, cover letters, and personal statements before your student sends them off to a potential employer or graduate program. Encourage your student to use all of these great resources.

Adapted from an article by Dr. Thomas J. Denham, MCDP of the Career Counselor & Motivational Speaker of Careers In Transition LLC..