

How Parents Can Help in the Career Development Process

A student's four years at St. John's are a time of profound personal and professional growth and development. This handout is intended to give you some helpful suggestions for how you can help in their career development process.

Listen to your student's career concerns and ideas.

Provide support, feedback, and information as new interests and goals develop. Talk about your own work, industry, and employer. Discuss different business cultures and offer to have your student job shadow you or a colleague to experience different types of workplaces. Do not be afraid to share your own values, interests, and goals, but take care to respect their interests, especially if they differ from yours.

Help your student maintain a strong, positive self-image.

Self-confidence is critical to the job search process – it's tough to convince an employer that you're the best person for the job if you don't believe it yourself! What skills, values, personality traits, and enduring interests have you observed in your student? Let them know you admire these specific qualities and recognize that they represent great assets to a future career.

Provide personal contacts for your student.

Colleagues, neighbors, friends, and relatives are great resources for informational interviews. These face-to-face connections with employers can be vital, as up to 80% of jobs are never advertised. While you may come up with ideas for informational interviews, however, leave the actual interviewing up to your student – it's an important part of their career development process.

You can also encourage your student to:

Make the most of SJC Career Services.

Make sure your student is familiar with the variety of services and programs available through the Career Services Office, including: Individual career counseling/advising (walk-ins and by appointment); Alumni, graduate school, and employer forums; Resume and cover letter critiques; Career assessment tools; Mock interviews; Hodson internship program; Agora career services software. We're happy to meet with students at any point in their SJC career (and earlier is always better!).

Take advantage of internships.

Internships are now a pre-requisite for success in finding a good position. Students who are in most demand by employers have often had two or three internships before graduation, and have built work skills and knowledge throughout their time in college. These experiences can be paid or unpaid and can give your student a great taste of the real world of work. Internships will help them learn about potential careers, gain experience, build a network, and become more competitive in the job or graduate school search. The Hodson internship program is a great way to do this!

Build a network and establish relationships with grown-ups.

Students who build strong relationships with grown-ups—faculty, administrators, alumni, and other parents, will be way ahead in the career game. Connections count, and students will also have a stronger source of support when it comes time to make and navigate tough decisions, and ask for recommendations.

Participate in extracurricular and volunteer activities.

Community service, intramurals, clubs, and other leadership activities while in school can help broaden and define career and leisure interests and round out their resume. These are opportunities to build skills that employers want. The key is to use these experiences to demonstrate commitment, skills development, and learning. Challenge your student to balance these opportunities with a strong emphasis on academics.

Contact employers directly.

Encourage your student to find a number of companies or organizations that fit with their interests, research them through their websites, and then contact them directly about working for them. Direct employer contact (or “cold calling”) can feel like a shot in the dark, but it’s actually one of the most effective job search strategies students can employ.

Find time for career planning/job search activities.

With many demands on their time, students often put off career planning “until tomorrow”. Encourage your student to use the Career Services Office early and often. They should not wait until senior year to start exploring careers, examining options, building skills, and developing application materials. Being a full-time student and a full-time job seeker is a challenging experience, but if they start early and make it part of their routine, it will become more natural and they will be more productive.

As a parent, you can also help our office! If you know of internship and job openings, you can post them in our online database in Agora (or we can post them for you). You can also register as a career mentor on Agora to offer advice to students. For more information about Agora and instructions for how to register: <http://www.sjca.edu/agora/>.

Source: Adapted from materials by University Career Services at UVa; Career Trekking, “A Parent’s Guide to Career Planning” (2010), and “Career Advice for Liberal Arts Parents (Curran, 2009).