



Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

CAREER PLANNING:
ASSESSMENT
AND
INFORMATIONAL
INTERVIEWS

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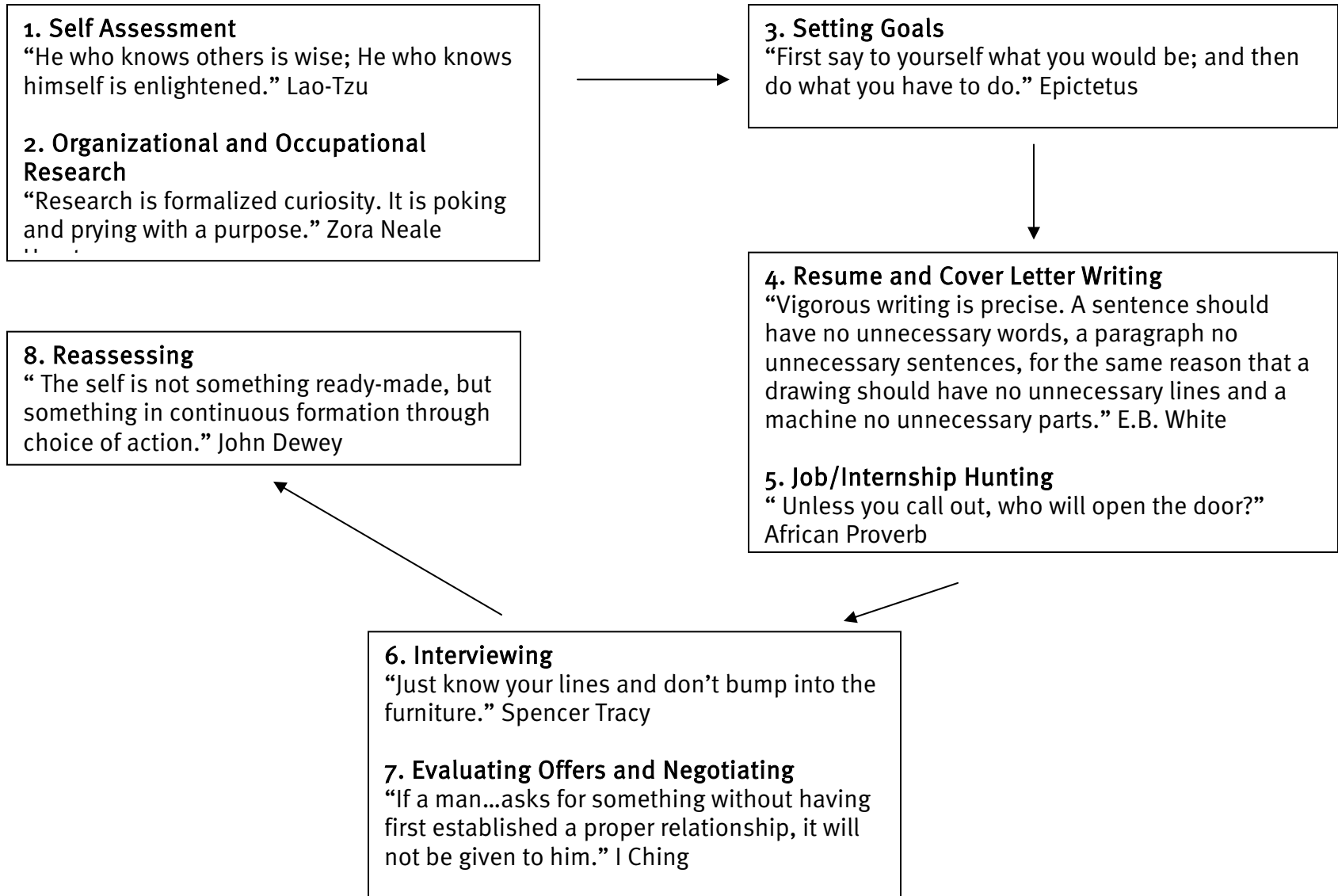
CAREER PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions you'll have to make. You'll spend at least eight hours a day at work, therefore it is essential that you make a well-informed decision. Career planning is a *lifelong process* that can include identifying an issue area in which you are interested, choosing a role or function you want to perform, getting the knowledge and skills necessary for your career, preparing for and conducting a job search, getting a job, growing in your job, and even possibly reassessing your career choice.

This booklet, along with Wagner's *Composing Your Career* framework, will help you with career planning by exploring and identifying your skills and values, as well as your interests related to issue areas and job functions.

CAREER PLANNING OUTLINE



GUIDING QUESTIONS AND RESOURCES FOR CAREER PLANNING

1. **SELF-ASSESSMENT:** The public service fields that attract you, the skills you have, and the values to which you subscribe provide the basis from which you will make career choices.

- What are my fields of interest? (e.g. children, hospital administration, housing, international development)
- What work values are important to me? (e.g. advancement, creativity, independence, recognition, stability)
- What skills do I have that I like to use? (e.g. analyzing, budgeting, motivating, researching, writing)
- How might my personality type and preferences affect my search? (e.g. extraversion v introversion)

Resources: OCS career counseling, *Skills and Values Identification* guide and exercises, *Tracks* exercise

2. **ORGANIZATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL RESEARCH:** Research can unlock hidden markets that could be a good fit for you based on your self-assessment.

- What kinds of organizations are out there doing the kinds of work I'm interested in?
- What kinds of jobs exist in those organizations?

Resources: OCS career counseling, OCS career directory, *Tracks* exercise, employer info sessions, resource library, website links, career panels, specialization sessions, faculty, Alumni Career Advisement Program (ACAP), classmates, *Informational Interviewing* guide

3. **SETTING GOALS:** Think through the steps needed to get the job you want.

- Based on my self-assessment and organizational/occupational research, what are my career goal possibilities?
- What might a typical career track in this field look like?
- What will I do while at Wagner to help me get there?

Resources: OCS career counseling, faculty, relevant coursework, group projects, student organizations, internships, professional associations

4. **RESUME AND COVER LETTER WRITING:** Resumes and cover letters should develop enough interest on the part of an employer to warrant an interview with you.

- How do my skill sets, work history, and academics meet the needs of a potential employer?
- How can I, in writing, convince an employer that I can do the job, will do the job, and fit into their world?

Resources: OCS *Resume Writing* and *Cover Letter* guides/workshops, OCS career counseling

5. JOB/INTERNSHIP HUNTING: The job search is an *active*, not a reactive, process.

- How do I find out who's hiring?
- How can I create my own opportunities?

Resources: OCS career directory, OCS listserve, website links, employer info/recruitment sessions, resource library, career fairs, NYU Main OCS services, WSA listserve, periodicals, networking events, classmates, faculty

6. INTERVIEWING: How you manage the interview process will determine whether or not you get an offer.

- How can I articulate that I can meet the employer's specific needs?
- What and how should I prepare for an interview?

Resources: OCS *Interviewing* guide/workshop, OCS career counseling

7. EVALUATING OFFERS AND NEGOTIATING: Once you have proven your value to an employer, it's appropriate to evaluate whether the offer is a good fit for you.

- How do I decide if this is the right offer?
- What is negotiable?

Resources: OCS *Salary Negotiation* guide/workshop, OCS career counseling

8. REASSESSING: It's appropriate to periodically evaluate the worth and value of your choices.

- Am I still committed to my earlier goals?
- How can I take my career to the next level?

Resources: OCS career counseling, faculty, professional development workshops

ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

Self-assessment is the process of gathering information about yourself in order to make an informed career decision. It is the *first step* of the [career planning process](#). A self assessment includes a look at your *values, skills, interests* and *personality*. It can reveal your strengths and help you to recognize your challenges.

In addition to determining what you are good at and value, an assessment helps you to find out what kind of *activities* and *environments* you enjoy. You can also use the results of a skills assessment to identify which skills you may need to *develop* for a particular career.

Finding a match between your values, skills, interests and personality and the work you are considering is at the *essence* of career planning. It not only increases the likelihood of job satisfaction, but it is one of the most important steps you can take before writing a resume or beginning your job search.

In this section you will find information to help you:

- identify potential career tracks
- identify your skills and values *

CAREER TRACKS

Many of us know that we are committed to a career in public service, but figuring out what that means can be difficult. This exercise is great for people who are looking for a bit of focus. The exercise comes in three phases: Brainstorming, Analyzing, and Synthesizing.

I. Brainstorm

Download, photocopy, or cut out of the newspaper any job posting that appeals to you on one of two levels:

- A. You're drawn to this kind of an organization. You like its mission. You'd like your work to have an impact on this issue, population or area. You like the agency's approach to the work. And you could see yourself, someday, working for an organization like this. Don't worry about where it's located or whether you like the job description that's attached to the organization. Just focus on the agency's overall purpose. Circle the part you like and put it in a folder.
- B. You're drawn to this kind of job description. You like the way the responsibilities are bundled. You like the skills needed to perform the function of the position, and you could see yourself, someday, doing something like this in your day-to-day. Don't worry about the agency the description is associated with or whether you have the skills to perform the job. Just focus on the actual job description. Circle the part you like and put it in your folder.

Do this until you have a bare minimum of 50 selected items. The more you collect, the better. Remember, when brainstorming, we don't evaluate along the way, we just collect ideas. Once you have at least 50, continue to the next phase.

II. Analysis

Take the selected items out of your folder and see if you can find any patterns or common themes. Some things to look for might include: issue, population to be served, approach to the work, geography, kind of organization, unit or department within an agency, and role.

III. Synthesis

Using the data gathered from your brainstorming and analysis phases, create at least one and no more than five potential job tracks for yourself. A job track is a way to put parameters around and frame your potential career interests, and can include any of the following that have meaning for you: issue or field of interest; subcomponents of the issue that are of interest; approach to the work; kinds of organizations that do this work; where these organizations are located; size of the organizations; potential departments within organizations; roles that you aspire to play; and the requirement of skills, education, experience, and knowledge to fulfill those roles.

Take stock of your qualifications and experiences as they relate to your potential tracks. Your tracks should connect to Composing Your Career and lead to a plan of action to maximize your time at Wagner. Your track should inform which courses you should take, the professors you should get to know, how you use your assignments, the events you go to, the groups you join, the people you seek out, the internship/job experiences you look for, and how you present yourself in a resume, cover letter, and an interview. Remember to reflect along the way to determine if this track feels like a good fit for you. If it does, continue on this path. If not, seek out additional tracks.

SKILLS AND VALUES IDENTIFICATION

The skills you have and the values to which you subscribe provide the basis from which you will make career choices. Skills and values are also important criteria for employee selection. They convey a great deal about how well you fit into and fulfill the needs of various employers and their organizations.

Everyone has a set of skills and values. These have been acquired through experiences at work, school, and through living. In these exercises, you will identify your skills and values and their meaning for the career decisions you will make. The goal is to assist you in becoming "skilled" in understanding your own abilities and how to further develop them in order to better compete in the job market.

VALUES IDENTIFICATION

Why is it important to understand your values?

Values indicate a strong personal preference for what is important to you. Values provide answers to important questions such as: What do I really care about? What kinds of activities, people, and environments do I most want in my work life? Understanding your values will help you to focus on career objectives that are important to both you and your employer, making for greater productivity and job satisfaction. Values are significant motivators that provide the drive to accomplish the important goals in your life. ***Conflict between the work we actually do and the work we value are often at the root of decisions to change careers.*** Knowing your values firsthand will ensure that your career is starting with the right focus.

Values and skills are intimately related.

If we value what we do, we engage more enthusiastically in developing the skills needed to establish meaningful and productive careers. For example, if you value working with people, you will want to develop the communication, leadership, and relationship building skills that will facilitate your professional growth in that kind of work.

Organizations also have values.

Organizations express their values in the type of businesses in which they are involved, the products or services they offer, and their work ethic. The term "organizational culture" presumes a body of values which drive an organization. The more you know about your own values, the better you will be at determining which work environment best fits your personal and professional needs and the skills you want to use and develop there.

Identifying your values will help you to:

- Identify the kinds of activities, people, and environments that you most desire in your work.
- Determine which work environments best fit your personal and professional needs and the skills you would like to develop there.
- Focus on career objectives that are important to both you and potential employers.
- Identify the motivators that provide the drive to accomplish the important goals in your life.

The Work Values Inventory

The Work Values Inventory is a list of 42 work values and lifestyle considerations that have been found to be important in work environments. To complete the inventory you should:

1. Read the list of values quickly but carefully.
2. Rank each of the 42 values in terms of how important they are to you. Use the following scale:

1..... 2..... 3..... 4..... 5
no importance average importance very important

For example, if “Advancement” is “very important” to you, then you would write a 5 in front of that value; if it is of “no importance” then write a 1 in front of the value, etc.

When you finish, list the top 10 scores on the last page of the Work Values Inventory survey under SUMMARY VALUES on page 16. List the 10 values in order of importance (top of list = “most important”). Under the heading IMPORTANT WORK VALUES list the 5 values that have the most importance for you.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. ___ Advancement | The opportunity to take on additional responsibilities. |
| 2. ___ Aesthetics | Be involved in studying or appreciating the beauty of objects or ideas. |
| 3. ___ Achievement | Desire to produce results that are considered significant. |
| 4. ___ Assertiveness/
Aggressiveness | Demonstrate forceful energy Aggressiveness and initiative; bold self-confidence. |
| 5. ___ Belonging | Have a sense of being a contributing part of an agency or group; a sense of affiliation. |
| 6. ___ Change/Variety | Show you can adjust to frequent changes in work content and setting; seldom do routine or predictable work. |
| 7. ___ Competition | Show you are good at engaging in activities where there are clear win/lose outcomes, and mostly win! |
| 8. ___ Creativity | Create new ideas, programs or structures departing from those ideas already in existence. |

9. ___Excitement Demonstrate a high degree of (or frequent) enthusiasm in the course of your work.
10. ___Fast Pace Show you can work in circumstances where there is a high pace of activity, and show you can do work rapidly.
11. ___Flexibility Can adapt readily to new and changing work requirements.
12. ___Friendships Can develop close personal relationships with people as a result of your work relationships.
13. ___Help Others Desire to help other people in a direct way, either individually or in small groups.
14. ___Help Society Work toward the betterment of the world you live in.
15. ___High Motivation Show you have a strong desire to succeed.
16. ___Independence Be able to determine the nature of your work without significant direction from others; comfortable working alone.
17. ___Influence People Enjoy being in a position to influence the attitudes and opinions of people.
18. ___Intellectual Status Be regarded as a person of high intellectual prowess or as one who is an acknowledged expert in a given field.
19. ___Knowledge Your work environment values always learning more and increasing your knowledge base.
20. ___Leisure Work allows for significant time off to pursue non-work related activities.
21. ___Location Work in a place that provides excellent physical environment.
22. ___Make Decisions Have the power to decide courses of action, policies, etc.

23. ___Mental Challenge Show you can constantly face and resolve complex problems.
24. ___Perseverance Can persist in an undertaking despite opposition or discouragement.
25. ___Physical Challenge Show you can work hard, despite the fact your job can make considerable physical demands upon you at times.
26. ___Power and Authority Demonstrate you can effectively control the work activities or the destinies of other people if required.
27. ___Precision Work Show you can work in situations where there is very little tolerance for error.
28. ___Profit/Gain Show you have a strong desire to accumulate a large amount of money or other material gain.
29. ___Public Contact Show you are comfortable with lots of day-to-day contact with people.
30. ___Recognition Want to be recognized for the quality of your work in some visible or public way.
31. ___Risk Taker Show you can assume duties that involve risk taking of some sort.
32. ___Security Show you want job security and you want reasonable financial rewards.
33. ___Stability Have work routines and job duties that are largely predictable and not likely to change over a long period to time.
34. ___Status Enjoy the respect and admiration of others because of the kind of work you do, and like having an important title or position within the agency.
35. ___Strong Interest The activities of the agency must be deeply engaging and intrinsically interesting.
36. ___Supervision Have a job in which you are directly responsible for the work done by others.

37. ___ Team Orientation
You work well with other people on shared tasks or projects.
38. ___ Tenacity
You show diligence to finish goals or tasks.
39. ___ Time Freedom
Have work responsibilities where you can work according to your own time schedule; no specific working hours required.
40. ___ Willing to Travel Extensively
When necessary, you are willing to travel and live on the road.
41. ___ Work Under Pressure
Can work under time pressures and in circumstances where the quality of your work may be judged critically by supervisors, customers or others.
42. ___ Work with Others
Can have close working relationships with a group, and work as a team member toward common goals.

Please list the 10 values you have selected in the space provided below on the left. To the right, please rank, in order of importance (1 = most important, 2 = next important, etc.) those 5 values most important to you in your work.

Summary of Values

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. _____
- 7. _____
- 8. _____
- 9. _____
- 10. _____

Important Work Values

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

SKILLS IDENTIFICATION

Why is it important to understand your skills?

People vary in the types of skills they possess. Employers also differ in the kinds of skills they require. While people have many different kinds of skills, they usually take them for granted, and as a result have difficulty identifying and communicating them to others. This makes targeting a career more difficult than it really has to be and can negatively impact your ability to sell yourself in the job market because employers are interested in matching your skills with those required in the functional areas of their agencies.

Getting your career off the ground or changing the focus of your career will be greatly enhanced by understanding your skills. Knowing your skills will allow you to identify those you possess and those you will have to work toward developing in order to actualize your career goals and meet the needs of employers.

Identifying your skills will help you to:

- Create a sharper career focus through comparing your existing skills with those required in various areas of employment.
- Understand which skills need further development in order to successfully compete in the job market.
- Write a resume that advertises your skills.
- Articulate in an interview the skills that match those required by potential employers.

Skills Identification Exercise

There are 54 skills listed in the Skills Survey. The survey does not include technical skills such as computer or language skills.

How to complete the survey.

1. Read each skill quickly but carefully.
2. Enter a **check** next to the **top 12 skills that you have developed through your work, education, etc.** Check those skills which you feel you are competent in, whether you like using them or not.
3. Next, go through the list again and circle 5 **additional skills that interest you and that you would like to develop** at school and through work. These skills should not be in your first list of 12 skills.
4. On the last page of the skills identification survey, page 23, **list the 12 "checked" skills under the heading "Existing Skills."** Do not rank them.
5. List the 5 skills you have **"circled" under "Skills to Develop."**
6. From the "Existing Skills" list select up to 7 skills with which you feel you are competent **and** that you would like to continue to use in your work. List these 7 skills under the column "Work Skills." Rank your "Work Skills" in order of importance (1 = most important, 7 = least important).

After finishing this exercise you will have a profile of your skills. This includes those skills with which you already demonstrate competence, those you would like to develop, and those you want to minimize in the workplace. You can use this knowledge to determine how well you fit with the skill requirements of different functional areas and potential employers, or you can use this knowledge to further develop your interest in an area. You are now prepared to compare your Work Skills with those skills required by employers. If there is considerable overlap between your Work Skills and those listed by potential employment, it would be a good idea to incorporate them in your resume and be able to discuss them in an interview. If there is little overlap between your skills and a potential employer, you will need to take advantage of the opportunities to develop those skills while at Wagner.

Skills Identification Exercise

Below is a list of 54 skills. Please check 12 skills you have developed through work, education, and other experiences. Next, circle 5 additional skills that you would like to learn or develop. List the 12 skills under “EXISTING SKILLS” on page 23. Then list the 5 circled skills under “SKILLS TO DEVELOP.” Finally, from the “EXISTING SKILLS” list, select the 7 skills with which you feel you are competent and would like to continue to use in your work. Rank these in order of importance (1 = Most Important, 2 next important, etc.)

1. ___ Speak Before Group Deliver a message or point of view to an audience with the intent of informing or motivating.
2. ___ Evaluate and Assess Determine the needs of a situation and/or determine value or quality of concepts or materials.
3. ___ Implement and Follow Up Take necessary action to ensure the completion of a project.
4. ___ Sell Describe features and benefits of a service or product to match the needs of a potential client. Convince prospect to use services.
5. ___ Budget Plan or schedule expenses or operating costs.
6. ___ Determine Policy Develop guidelines and strategies to carry out courses of action.
7. ___ Write Compose written forms of communication demonstrating skill in the use of language, grammar, and punctuation.
8. ___ Invent Originate or devise a new service or process through experimentation.
9. ___ Analyze Examine in detail; or separate data, an idea or an object into its parts.
10. ___ Plan Formulate a series of steps to meet goals and objectives.
11. ___ Motivate Stimulate individuals or groups to take action for optimal results.
12. ___ Use of Memory The power or process of recalling to mind facts, faces, or patterns from the past.
13. ___ Observe Watch closely or be acutely aware of behavior, information, or objects.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 14. ___ Supervise | Direct the performance of workers and monitor work projects. |
| 15. ___ Interview | Elicit views or probe for information through verbal questioning. |
| 16. ___ Listen | Focus carefully on a speaker's verbal and behavioral communication to determine an authentic meaning. |
| 17. ___ Synthesize | Combine separate parts or elements to form a new whole, as in a concept or theory. |
| 18. ___ Build Consensus | Express ideas or information in a way that appeals to the interests of others. |
| 19. ___ Edit | Revise and improve written material for final use. |
| 20. ___ Organize | Pull together elements into an orderly, functional and structured whole. |
| 21. ___ Consult | Provide a high level of expertise in the evaluation of needs and problems to recommend solutions and a plan of action. |
| 22. ___ Advocate | Represent and support goals of an organization or cause. |
| 23. ___ Use Intuition | Rely on insight or hunches beyond the reach of the senses. |
| 24. ___ Design | Form a scheme or plan in the mind and carry it out into a written form, outline, service, or invention. |
| 25. ___ Categorize | Organize information or objects into groups or classifications. |
| 26. ___ Initiate | Put an idea, plan, or task into action without direction from others. |
| 27. ___ Meet the Public | Represent an employer to the public; receive or greet others; demonstrate a product or service to the public. |
| 28. ___ Train/Instruct | Teach or explain specialized information to others by demonstration, explanation, or practice. |
| 29. ___ Improvise | Act and prepare on the spur of the moment, using information or materials at hand to fill an immediate need. |

30. ___ Display	Present ideas and products in an aesthetically pleasing form or public display.
31. ___ Research/Investigate	A systematic search using observation, comprehension of written resources, or interviewing key sources for discovery or application.
32. ___ Coordinate	Arrange the proper sequence of logistics of events or activities.
33. ___ Promote	Use of creative concepts to persuade through media, special events or personal involvement.
34. ___ Coach	Explain, guide, and encourage individuals to achieve goals.
35. ___ Conceptualize	Form new or creative ideas, theories, or processes.
36. ___ Monitor	Oversee and regulate flow of work assignments or projects.
37. ___ Mediate	Resolve or settle differences by acting as an intermediary between two or more conflicting parties.
38. ___ Serve as a Liaison	Act as a catalyst or connection between people or organizations to enhance communication.
39. ___ Altruism	Care about and take specific action to improve the well-being of others.
40. ___ Demonstrate Foresight	Ability to perceive and anticipate future trends or possibilities.
41. ___ Calculate/Compute	Execute mathematical operations.
42. ___ Delegate	Assign tasks to others in order to achieve desired objectives.
43. ___ Facilitate Groups	Support or ease interaction for purpose of reaching an agreement or common goals.
44. ___ Provide Hospitality	Welcome strangers or guests with warmth and generosity.
45. ___ Brainstorm	Unrestrained generation of ideas or possibilities.
46. ___ Manage Records	Collect, classify, and process data using records or a computerized information system.
47. ___ Decision Making	Identify and choose an option among alternatives.

48. ___ Influence/Persuade Convince others to adopt a belief, change an attitude, or take action.
49. ___ Counsel Capacity to listen with objectivity: to facilitate client awareness of issues and provide guidance and advice in making decisions.
50. ___ Produce Events Plan, arrange, and carry out a project or event.
51. ___ Problem Solve Trace and identify the sources of a problem in a given situation.
52. ___ Negotiate Bring about a settlement or agreement by bargaining.
53. ___ Explain Express or communicate a message, information, or an idea in a clear and understandable manner.

List the 12 skills you have checked in the column EXISTING SKILLS below on the left. To the right, please list the 5 skills you have circled under SKILLS TO DEVELOP. Next, from the "Existing Skills" column, select the 7 skills you like to use and want to use in your work. List these 7 skills in order of importance (1 = most important, 2 = next most important, etc.) under the column "Work Skills."

EXISTING SKILLS

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____

SKILLS TO DEVELOP

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

WORK SKILLS

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

How To Use the Results

First, remember to keep the lists of skills and values in these exercises for future reference. The skills listed here will help you identify some of the skills you may want to list when writing your resume or to articulate in the interview. The values list will assist you in keeping your most important goals in mind.

If you have a high degree of overlap with a work area of interest, you should be prepared to include mention of these skills and values in your letters, resumes, and informational interviews with potential employers. If you did not find much overlap you will want to take advantage of the many opportunities available to develop your skills while at Wagner. These include coursework, group projects, internships and part-time employment. If you are not yet sure of an area of interest and the relevant skills and values, there are other sources for further exploration. You can start by attending **career related seminars** at Wagner. Attending **panel presentations** and conducting **informational interviews** will help define the skills and "corporate culture" specific to many different functional areas of business. Take advantage of the opportunities at Wagner to build and acquire relevant work skills.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

During self-assessment, you gathered information about yourself. You used what you learned about your interests, skills, values and personality to build a list of possible jobs and/or issue areas to further explore. After you've done some self-assessment, the next step in the career planning process is to conduct **organizational and occupational research**. Through organizational and occupational research, you can learn more information about career tracks and organizations which perform work in your particular interest areas.

Gathering career information is an important part of the career planning process. It can help you to refine your interests. You may want to know:

- career paths (entry, middle and senior level positions)
- details about job duties
- requirements (education, training, license or certification)
- which organizations do work in this issue area
- trends in the field; recent innovations
- agency structures and work environments
- salary ranges for positions

This information can be obtained through a variety of sources including, but not limited to, books, websites, professional journals and periodicals, annual reports, OCS staff, employer information sessions, career panels, Wagner faculty, alumni and classmates, as well as informational interviews with others.

Although the aforementioned sources are all good ways to conduct research, only one method can provide you with insider information from someone who has *firsthand knowledge* of an occupation and an organization: informational interviews. The following section provides details and guidance for conducting research through informational interviews.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviews are meetings you initiate with someone whose job, organization, or career path interest you. They are a method of conducting organizational and occupational research whereby you acquire information about a field, industry, or particular type of work. Informational interviews are particularly useful when you are making a career shift or have limited work experience. They are also a great way to make professional contacts in a particular field.

There are 3 basic things you want from an informational interview:

- 1. Information**
- 2. Advice**
- 3. To be remembered positively**

While the primary purpose of an informational interview is never to ask for a job, employment leads can be a byproduct of conducting an informational interview.

What INFORMATION can I obtain from an informational interview?

The information you are looking to gather through an informational interview is the kind you won't find on a website, in an annual report, or in a book. Hopefully, it is information that can help you decide whether or not this type of work is for you. You may want to learn what skills are valued in a particular kind of job, who the main players are in a particular field, or if there are common career paths in order to be successful.

What ADVICE can I get from an informational interview?

Informational interviews can be invaluable in discovering next steps you may want to engage in so you can be successful. You can often find out what courses you should take, what additional experiences or activities look good to an employer, and if the interviewee knows anyone else who might be helpful to you.

Why should I BE REMEMBERED POSITIVELY?

Informational interviews are a way for you to develop professional contacts in a particular field. After conducting a few informational interviews, you may begin to recognize that the world is a very small place. Making a good impression will make it easier for your contact to keep you in mind as opportunities arise – whether in their agency or in a peer agency. Your interviewee will only refer you to someone else to talk to if they are favorably impressed by you.

Because a specific job is not at stake, the informational interview is often perceived as less stressful than other interviews. However, this does not mean that you should take an informational interview any less seriously than an interview for a job. In an informational interview, it is up to you to keep the discussion going. You need to be prepared to ask thoughtful questions. And remember, this is part of building your professional network. Ideally, if you leave a positive lasting impression, this new contact may call you later with job leads or pass your information on to someone who is hiring.

Getting An Informational Interview

Who can I approach for an informational interview?

You can interview individuals that are:

- in a policy area that is of interest to you
- in a functional role within an organization that you're interested in
- who work at an organization that you are curious about
- who seem to have a career that matches your goals

You can interview:

- alumni
- your peers at Wagner
- faculty
- friends and family members
- people with whom you have no connection but are interested in knowing more about

Will they want to talk to me?

Most people will find it flattering that you want to hear their stories and want their advice.

NYU Wagner has an Alumni Career Advisement Program (ACAP), the purpose of which is to foster professional relationships within the Wagner community and to connect Wagner alumni with current and former students interested in career exploration. The alumni in ACAP have volunteered to meet with current students specifically for the purpose of informational interviews, and they are waiting to hear from you. (For more information on ACAP, visit Wagner's Office of Career Services at <http://www.nyu.edu/wagner/careers/acap.html>).

How do I arrange an informational interview?

If the person you'd like to interview is someone you know, you may just want to pick up the phone and call.

If you do not know the person well, it is appropriate to write a formal email or letter (see *Sample Informational Interview Request Letter*). Your outreach should include:

- How you found out about them
- Why you're writing
- A request to meet with them for approximately 30-45 minutes at their convenience
- How they can contact you

Sample Informational Interview Request Letter

Dear :

I am a graduate student at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, and I got your name through Wagner's Office of Career Services' Alumni Career Advisement Program (ACAP). Upon graduation, I will receive my Master of Public Administration degree with a specialization in Finance. My goal is to apply this degree along with the experiences acquired through internships and capstone to obtain a position in public finance.

Given that you are a graduate of NYU Wagner and you work at XYZ Public Finance Agency, I am writing to request an informational interview with you. I hope that you will allow me to speak with you either in person or over the phone for approximately thirty minutes to discuss your NYU Wagner and professional career experience. I am particularly interested in hearing about what you do at XYZ Public Finance Agency, how you got there, and if you have any advice for someone looking to enter this field.

My schedule is flexible, and I am happy to work around your availability to meet in the near future. I can be reached at 212-998-0000 or interested.student@nyu.edu. Thank you in advance for your time, and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Interested Student

What if they don't get back to me?

If after two weeks you haven't heard from your potential informational interviewee, send a follow-up email. If after one follow-up you still haven't heard from them and you got that person's information through a previous contact of yours (including ACAP), let your original contact know. Perhaps they can intervene on your part.

Most people will get back to you. If you don't hear from them, let it go. Instead, focus on those that are responsive to your request.

Preparing For And Conducting The Informational Interview

How do I prepare for an informational interview?

Think about the kind of information that will be helpful to you and what you hope to learn from this particular individual. Do as much background research as possible so you can ask insightful questions that will get you useful information. Prepare questions in advance. Dress for the interview as you would for a job interview.

How do I structure the informational interview?

Start by thanking the interviewee for their time. Give them a little background on yourself and your interests. Then, be ready with four or five really good open-ended questions. At the close of your meeting, express again your appreciation for their time, and ask if you can follow-up/stay in touch.

What questions should I ask?

Your questions should be tailored to your needs and the experience/knowledge of the interviewee. Questions often fall into the following categories:

- Career Path:
 - What is your background?
 - How did you get this job?
 - What are typical entry, middle, and senior level positions?
 - What factors are hiring decisions in this field based on?
 - What academic training is most appropriate for someone entering this field?

- Policy area:
 - What other organizations are doing work in this policy area?
 - Who is doing the most innovative work now?
 - What are the trends in this field?
 - What professional associations are connected to this field?

- Organization:
 - What is the work environment like?
 - Who do you interact with/work with most often?
 - What is the agency structure?

- Job function:
 - What are typical responsibilities in this job?
 - If there's such a thing as an average week, what is it like for you?
 - What are you most satisfied/challenged by?
 - What are the salary ranges for entry, middle, and senior level positions in this kind of work?

- And the last two questions:
 - Do you have any specific advice for me?
 - Can you recommend anyone else for me to contact?

Should I share my resume?

Since the purpose of an informational interview is not to ask for a job, providing an unsolicited resume may give the wrong impression to your new contact. However, it is not unusual for the interviewee to ask to see your resume. It is also okay for you to seek advice on how to best present yourself through a resume. If you do get advice on your resume, you can ask your contact if they would like an updated version once you have incorporated their suggestions.

Is there anything else I should pay attention to?

If the interview takes place where the interviewee works, you should keep alert to your surroundings and ask yourself if you could imagine working there.

Also, recognize that the feelings your contact may have about an individual employer may differ from their feelings about the nature of the work.

Following-Up On The Informational Interview

How do I follow-up after an informational interview?

Always email or send a thank you note to the person who provided you with information. Thank them for their time and tell them how you plan to follow-up on their suggestions. If a suggestion, tip, or referral they gave you turns out to be fruitful, let them know. If they specifically asked for your resume, you can send it with your thank you.

Sample Informational Interview Thank You Letter

Dear :

Thank you so much for taking time from your busy schedule to meet with me yesterday. It was a pleasure to meet you and I found our conversation very helpful. In particular, I enjoyed hearing about your work at Acme International Development Agency, the path you took to get your job, and the suggestions you had for me as I embark upon entering this field.

Based on our conversation, it became clear to me that my skills in program development, strategic management, and conflict management will be useful for me to highlight as I look for work in this area. It was helpful to hear that I need to gain field-work experience in my region of interest in order to elevate my candidacy in the eyes of a potential employer, and that grant proposal development is a big piece of the work that I may be called upon to do.

I appreciate your encouragement of my career plans, and as you suggested, I will keep you posted on my progress. In the meantime, should you wish to contact me, I can be reached at 212-998-0000 or at grateful.student@nyu.edu. Thank you again for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Grateful Student