

Making a decision about what type of work you want to pursue after your education at Amherst College can be difficult. You might be feeling a lot of pressure to figure it all out before you graduate but may not have any clarity about the path you want to pursue. You are not alone! Many Amherst students need help considering or discovering their career options, and the Loeb Center welcomes and supports this type of exploration.

Wish you had your career all figured out? Do not despair!

- *You do NOT need to have your career totally figured out before you leave Amherst. Most people change jobs and even careers many times over the course of their lives. You will probably change your mind about what you want to do more than you can imagine now.
- *Beware of choosing a certain career path just because it's clearer or easier. Sometimes the best ideas and opportunities arise out of uncertainty and chaos. Certainty about a career path does not correlate with long-term job satisfaction.
- *Most career paths are winding with unexpected turns that are impossible to predict. Many, if not all, career paths are also impacted by external factors such as falling in love, having a family, finances, health/illness, etc.

GETTING STARTED

Before you commit to pursuing a specific career path, we strongly suggest that you spend some time learning more about it. In order to know if it will be a good fit for you, you should become familiar with the ins and outs of the work. This workbook can help you continue or begin the career exploration process.

1. **Identify a career field or occupation that interests you.**
(If you don't have any ideas, we recommend you start with some personal self-assessment. Make an appointment with a career advisor or see the Self-Assessment for Career Planning workbook which will guide you through the assessment process with exercises, reflection questions, and suggestions for resources).
2. **Use online resources** to learn more about the career field or occupation.
3. **Find real people** who work in the career field or occupation and ask them about their experience.
4. **Reflect on what you learned** about the field or occupation to try to determine if it's a good fit.
5. **Repeat your research** for any other fields or occupations that interest you.
6. **Establish next steps** so you can keep moving forward with your career plan.

Online Resources

As an Amherst College student, you have access to a number of online resources that offer different ways to go about exploring career industries, fields, and occupations.

Resource Features

Resource	Industry & Occupation Overviews	Industry News & Trends	Majors to Careers	Resources for Job or Internship Search	Graduate School Info	Relevant Employers
Spotlight on Careers	X			X	X	X
Vault	X					X
Career Beam	X	X				X
ONET	X					

Spotlight on Careers:

Summary: *Spotlight is a great starting point to get a broad overview of a career field.*

It is specifically designed for liberal arts students. For each field, you will typically find career path/occupation options, relevant employers, resources for finding jobs and internships, some graduate school information, and advice from real liberal arts alumni working in the field.

Access: Link from the Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning webpage.

Vault:

Summary: *Vault is a good resource if you want to dig a lot deeper into a specific field or industry.*

The Industries & Professions tab will give you information about earnings, work environment, career ladder, required education, etc. The Vault Guides tab leads to approximately 100 free downloadable PDF guides with very detailed information about specific industries and getting a foot in the door.

Access: Link from the Loeb Center webpage. Create an account with your Amherst email.

Career Beam:

Summary: *Career Beam will give you a better understanding of the current issues in certain industries.*

It has great research tools if you are preparing for an interview or want to get up-to-date information on current trends, news, and the job outlook for a wide variety of industries. Under the Research Tools tab on the Career Beam homepage, select Industry Reports and then browse or search for the industry that interests you.

Access: Link from the Loeb Center webpage. Login with your Amherst email and password.

Online Resources

Onet:

Summary: *ONET gives you information that can help you understand if a certain occupation or field is a good fit for your skills, interests, values, personality, and salary expectations.*

It generates reports for certain occupations that include information about the common tasks and salaries, typical work environment, and required skills, knowledge and education. It also allows you to search occupations using criteria such as your skills, values, preferred work environment, or those that have a “bright” outlook (this covers fields or occupations that are emerging or experiencing rapid growth).

Access: Link from the Loeb Center for Career Exploration page.

Google:

Summary: *A general Internet search is a great place to start if you are not finding information in the online resources listed above, especially about a more obscure field.*

There are many field specific websites that may provide you with more targeted information that you can't find in resources that cover a wide variety of fields.

Access: Open to everyone!

People Resources

Once you have done some online research, another way to learn about a career field or occupation is to connect with people who have experience. They can give you the inside scoop on the work and their career path. Below is advice on how to find these people and how to approach your conversation with them once you've connected.

Existing Network

You may already know people who work in a field or occupation that interest you:

- Family
- Friends
- Friends of family
- Family of friends
- Friends of friends
- High school teachers
- Amherst professors
- Other Amherst students
- Who else?

People Resources

Alumni

Alumni can be one of your greatest resources! Many Amherst alumni are happy to meet or hear from current students and help in any way they can. You can find and learn about alumni by using the Amherst College Alumni Directory. Almost all Amherst alumni have a profile created by the College, and many alumni have also added information about their education and employment. As you explore certain careers or occupations, you can use the alumni directory as a tool in several ways:

- *Look for alumni working in certain employment industries or with certain companies/organizations.*
- *Search for alumni working in certain countries, cities, or regions.*
- *Search for alumni with certain Amherst majors and see what they ended up doing for work.*
- *Search for alumni who studied in certain types of graduate programs and see what they did for work before and after their studies.*

Once you get the results of your search, start to review some individual profiles and take note of their career path. Make a list of a handful of alumni who you think would be interesting to talk about their career and/or education. We call these conversations informational interviews – the purpose is to gain information and advice that might be helpful as you think about your career options.

****Before you contact alumni, refer to the Connecting with Alumni handout on our website for how to reach out to them appropriately. You should also review the Informational Interviewing handout on our website for sample questions and more information.**

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional networking site, and it offers many ways to explore career fields and occupations. If you do not already have a LinkedIn profile, we recommend you start building one and sending requests to connect to people in your network.

Once you have a profile and some connections, you can do a search for key words that reflect your interests (e.g. industrial psychology, chemical engineer, aquaponics, immigration law, computer programmer, food science, etc.) The results are broken down into:

- *People: Discover people in your network who do the work that interests you and take a closer look at their career path.*
- *Groups: Find groups of professionals who are dedicated to the topic that interests you and follow or join the groups to stay informed about what's going on currently in the field.*
- *Companies: Follow companies that you might like to work for. Some companies post frequently about jobs and news that might be of interest to you.*
- *Jobs: Find jobs related to your interests.*

The more you build your network in LinkedIn the more profiles you'll have access to and the more information you'll find to explore your career interests.

Questions to Ask

As you review the online resources and talk to people about their work, there are certain questions that will help you determine the nature of the occupation or field. Use the handout on the pages following the questions if it's helpful to organize your thoughts.

Possible jobs/occupations

- What are some specializations in the field or specific occupations (job titles)?
- What are the typical duties and responsibilities of each specific occupation?
- In which sectors do most of the job opportunities fall? For-profit, nonprofit, government?

Work Environment/Conditions

- What is the work environment like?
- How many hours of work or overtime per week are expected or required?
- What type of supervision or management is typical?
- What is the dress code?
- Is travel required?

Preferred or required skills and personality traits

- Which technical or “hard” skills are necessary or helpful? (e.g. foreign language, specific computer program, writing, math, data analysis)
- Which interpersonal or “soft” skills are necessary or helpful? (e.g. communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving)
- What skills would you be able to develop in the work?
- What personality traits are a good fit for this type of work? (e.g. takes risks, likes to work long hours independently, prefers working in a team, likes fast-paced environments)

Information/Knowledge

- What topics or information would you be learning more about?
- What knowledge or interests make a person well-suited for the work?

Values

- What personal values are encouraged or reflected in the work? (e.g. a life without stress, creating close relationships, making lots of money, creating beauty, constant challenges, autonomy)

Education & Training

- What college courses or majors are required or helpful for preparing for this work?
- What previous work or extracurricular experience is required or helpful?
- What credentials, licensing, or certifications are required?
- What advanced degrees are helpful for necessary? (Masters? Professional School? PhD?)
- What are the types of graduate programs are helpful or necessary in order to be qualified and/or competitive?

Questions to Ask

Types of employers

- What types of organizations, companies, and agencies employ people from this field or with this certain occupation?
- What are the names of some specific organizations, companies, or agencies?

Earnings and Benefits

- What are the beginning, average and top salaries in the field?
- What other benefits are typically offered as part of the total compensation package?
- How much money do you think you need to live the kind of life you would like? How will you find out?

(There are cost of living calculators online but you can also look around you for people in various careers who seem to have enough money to live the life they want and then use salary calculators online to get an idea of the average salary for that occupation. If you feel comfortable, you can ask the person the range of salaries a person makes in his/her work. You can also use cost of living calculators to see how much you might need to live in certain geographic areas).

Employment and Advancement Outlook

- What are the anticipated hiring trends for the field or occupation on national, state or local levels? (How difficult or easy is to find work?)
- How competitive is the field or occupation?
- What is the level of job security?
- What are the opportunities for advancement and how long does it take to advance?

Related Occupations/Fields

- What other occupations or fields are similar or related to this one?

Determining a Good Fit

It will help to refer to what you learned in the Self-Assessment for Career Planning workbook.

- Do think you would enjoy the work?
- Would you be using skills you do or do not enjoy? Would you be developing new skills you want to develop?
- Are you interested in the content or information you would be learning?
- If you have a future career goal, will this position or field help you move in that direction?
- Will this field or occupation allow you to have the kind of lifestyle you want?
- Does the field or position allow you to live out your values through your work?
- What other questions have you discovered help you make decisions about your life path? Ask yourself those questions as well!

Possible Career/Field/Occupation

Career/Field/Occupation:

Possible job titles/occupations:

Work Environment:

Skills & Personality Traits:

Information/Knowledge:

Values:

Education & Training:

Possible Career/Field/Occupation

Types of Employers:

Earnings & Benefits:

Employment & Advancement Outlook:

Related Occupations/Fields:

Notes on field/occupation fit for you:

Reflect on What You Learned

Now that you've gathered information about a career that interests you, take some time to reflect on what you learned:

- 1. Are you still interested in this career now that you've completed your research? Why or why not?**
- 2. Did you discover anything about this career that surprised you?**
- 3. List five characteristics about this career that you like most.**
- 4. List any characteristics about this career that you do not like.**
- 5. What more do you need to learn about this career in order to know if you'd like to pursue it?**

Reflect on What You Learned

6. What other resources could you use to learn more? (people, groups/associations, print/web, etc.)

7. What barriers might you face in pursuing this career and how might you overcome them?

8. What could you do now to begin preparing for this career?

9. Are there other careers that you discovered in this process that you'd like to learn more about?

NEXT STEPS

Don't stop now! What will you do next to continue your career exploration or preparation?

Use the [My Action Plan worksheet](#) on the next page to help you get organized to reach your goals.

My Action Plan

Goal(s):

Today I'll:

Resources I'll need:

This week I'll:

Resources I'll need:

By the end of the month I'll:

Resources I'll need:

By the end of the semester I'll:

Resources I'll need:

By the end of the year I'll:

Resources I'll need: