

# CAREER EXPLORATION GUIDE



Middlebury College  
*Center for Careers and Internships*



# GETTING STARTED

Career exploration is a process. While some students know what they want to do after graduation, the majority of Middlebury students spend time and get lots of help along the way as they consider and discover their career options. The Center for Careers and Internships (CCI) welcomes you in this journey of exploration.

You do not need to have all the answers, but we do ask you to embrace exploration, risk taking, and discovery. Most career paths are winding with unexpected turns that are impossible to predict; sometimes the best ideas and opportunities arise out of uncertainty and chaos. Be open to possibility and consider this journey one more exciting chapter in your life.

In this guide we have laid out some steps and resources that may help you as you contemplate different career options that may be a good fit for you. You may be ready to dive straight into this activity, or you may be better served by starting with the Self-Reflection Guide or having an exploratory conversation with a CCI advisor. Choose whichever strategy will work best for you. CCI is here to help you explore what's next.

## THE PROCESS DEFINED

There are lots of different internships and jobs you could try. Before you commit to pursuing a specific career path, we suggest that you spend some time learning more about the world of work. Generally, this can be done in three ways, usually in this order: read and research; confirm by talking to people doing the work; try it. This guide can help you begin or continue your career exploration. Here are the basic steps:

1. Identify a field that interests you. If you need help identifying potential paths, we recommend you start with self-assessment. Complete the Self-Reflection Guide, which will guide you through the assessment process with exercises, reflection questions, and suggestions for resources, and then make an appointment with a career advisor.
2. Use online resources to read and learn more about the career field. Six great resources are highlighted in the next section of this guide.
3. Identify people who work in the career field and have a role that interests you, and ask them to talk with you about their experience. We offer two resources to find these people, and good questions to ask once you have tracked them down.
4. Reflect on what you've learned about the career field and assess if it's a good fit to try out.
5. Repeat your research for any other career fields that interest you.
6. Establish next steps, such as writing a résumé or cover letter, or practice interviewing. Keep moving forward with your career planning by applying to internships or job postings, or design your own!

# RESOURCES

As a Middlebury College student, you have access to six online resources that offer different opportunities for exploring career paths.

## Resource Features

	Industry and Occupation Overviews	Industry News and Trends	Majors to Careers	Resources for Job or Internship Search	Graduate School Information	Relevant Employers
Major Guides			✓			✓
CCI Career Path Pages	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
What Can I Do With This Major?			✓			
O*NET	✓			✓		
Midd2Midd			✓	✓	✓	✓
LinkedIn		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Major Guides

Each major is described in its own handout, which includes learning goals for the major, how to translate learning through professional competencies, and a sampling of internships and jobs for grads who have chosen that major. ***Stop by the CCI lobby in Kitchel House to grab your copies today.***

## **CCI Career Path Pages**

We have categorized career fields into seven career path pages that allow you to explore top resources, industry news, and alumni spotlights. CCI advisors curate the best resources and regularly update a news feed to keep you informed about upcoming deadlines and events. The seven paths are arts, media, and communications; education; finance, consulting, and business; government, policy, and law; health professions; science and technology; and social impact. *go/careerpaths*

## **What Can I Do With This Major?**

This site is excellent at helping you connect majors to careers. Learn about the typical career areas and the types of employers that hire people with each major, as well as strategies to make you a more marketable candidate. *go/exploration*

## **O\*NET**

O\*NET provides comprehensive 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. O\*NET generates reports that include information about certain occupations, including 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, or preferred work environment, or those that have a “bright” outlook (this covers fields or occupations that are emerging or experiencing rapid growth). *www.onetonline.org*

## **Midd2Midd**

Midd2Midd is an online platform that allows you to contact professionals from the Middlebury community, including alumni and parents. Everyone involved has signed up because of their interest in working with students. Midd2Midd enables you to search by major, employer, industry, location, help topic, and more. It also features email and videoconferencing tools to facilitate your communication and outreach. *[go/midd2midd](#)*

## **LinkedIn**

Use LinkedIn to connect to alumni and other professionals. In addition, use LinkedIn to discover what types of jobs are frequently pursued by grads with specific majors, and the variety of geographic areas where alumni live and work.

*[www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)*

## PEOPLE RESOURCES

Once you have done some preliminary research, another way to learn about a career path is to connect with people who have experience in that field. Below is advice on how to find these people and how to approach your conversation with them.

### Existing Network

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

- Family
- Friends of family
- Friends of friends
- Former job or internship supervisors
- Other Middlebury students
- Friends
- Family of friends
- High school teachers
- Middlebury professors
- Who else?

See the **Questions to Ask** section (on page 9) for advice on how to ask these people about their career path.

### Alumni

Alumni can be your greatest resource! Many Middlebury alumni are happy to hear from and meet students and will help in any way they can. You can find and learn about alumni using two tools: MiddNet and LinkedIn.

### Midd2Midd

Midd2Midd is a volunteer career advisory of more than 3,000 alumni and parents who have agreed to serve as a resource for you. These individuals want to answer your questions and share information and insights about their work. When using Midd2Midd, you can search for relevant volunteers using any of the approximately 30 filters, including keyword, industry, expertise, help topic, location, major, and others. It's most helpful to start broad (for example with industry rather than with specific companies) and then narrow in. Other tips include the following:



- Before you contact an alumnus/a, do your homework. Check that they still work at the organization listed on their profile. You should know if the organization offers internships or entry-level jobs, and be able to query the alum about how to navigate the application process. You might request a referral to someone else inside the organization. Try and keep your conversation more than just about internships or jobs and explore other things about the kind of work the alum does. See page 9 for a list of possible questions.
- The contact system in Midd2Midd uses blind email, which protects your and the alum's contact information. When you send or receive messages, they appear in your Midd2Midd inbox. Copies will also appear in your personal email inbox. Midd2Midd also features videoconferencing tools to make it easier to connect with an alum.
- Initial email correspondence should be formal, polished, and professional; no "text speak." Do your research prior to making contact. Make sure to use networks like LinkedIn to do more research on the person and organization so your email can stand out as personal and targeted.
- Be prepared to follow up if you have not heard back from a volunteer in a reasonable amount of time, typically a week. A combination of patience and persistence works best.
- Always send a thank you note within 24 hours after talking with an alum.

## **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is a professional networking site, and it offers many ways to explore career paths. If you do not already have a LinkedIn profile, we recommend you start building one and send requests to connect to people who are already part of your network. Once you have a

profile and some connections, you can do a search for keywords that reflect your interests (e.g., industrial psychology, energy efficiency, aquaponics, immigration law, health policy, food science, etc.). The results are broken down into four areas:

**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.

Once you get the results of your search—either via Midd2Midd, LinkedIn, or another source—start to review some individuals' profiles and take note of their career paths. Make a list of alumni who you think would be interesting to talk to 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.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

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

### **Possible job titles/roles**

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

### **Work environment**

- What is the work environment like? How would you describe the culture?
- 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 skills are necessary or helpful (e.g., foreign language, specific computer program, writing, math, data analysis)?

- Which interpersonal skills are necessary or helpful (e.g., communication, teamwork, leadership, problem solving)?
- What skills have you developed through your work?
- What personality traits are a good fit for this type of work (e.g., takes risks, likes to work independently, prefers working in a team, thrives in a fast-paced environment)?

### **Information/knowledge**

- What knowledge or interests make a person well suited for the work?
- What have you learned through your work?

### **Values**

- What personal values are encouraged or reflected in your work? (e.g., a life without stress, building or strengthening relationships, making money, creating beauty, constant challenge, autonomy)

### **Education and 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 are the types of graduate programs that are helpful or necessary in order to be qualified and/or competitive?

### **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 is a typical entry-level salary in this industry?
- What other benefits are typically offered as part of the total compensation package?

### **Employment and advancement outlook**

- What are the anticipated hiring trends for the field or occupation on national, state, or local levels?
- 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**

Ask yourself the following questions as you reflect on what you have learned from reading and talking to people about the career paths that interest you. This also might be a good time to refer to what you learned in the Self-Reflection Guide.

1. Do you think you would enjoy the work?
2. Would you be using skills you do or do not enjoy? Would you be developing desirable new skills?
3. Are you interested in the content or information you would be learning?
4. If you have a future career goal, will this path help you move in that direction?

5. Will this career path allow you to have the kind of lifestyle you want?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Will this career path allow you to live out your values through your work?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What other questions have helped you make decisions about your path? Ask yourself those questions as well!

# POSSIBLE CAREER PATH

Possible job titles/roles:

Work environment:

Skills and personality traits:

Information/knowledge:

Values:



Education and training:

Types of employers:

Earnings and benefits:

Employment and 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 path that interests you, take some time to reflect on what you learned:

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

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 option and how might you overcome them?

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

9. Are there other career paths 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 below to help you get organized and reach your goals.

## My Action Plan (goals)

**Today, I'll ...**

Resources I need:

**This week, I'll ...**

Resources I need:

**By the end of the month, I'll . . .**

Resources I need:

**By the end of the semester, I'll . . .**

Resources I need:

**By the end of the year, I'll . . .**

Resources I need:





Center for Careers and Internships  
Kitchel House  
152 College Street

802-443-5100  
[cci@middlebury.edu](mailto:cci@middlebury.edu)