Family Association

The University of North Dakota • Spring 2006 Newsletter

The Career Path
Help Your College Student Find the Path That Fits
By Terese Corey Blanck and Peter Vogt

In their bestselling book Now, Discover Your Strengths (Free Press, 2001), Gallup Organization researchers Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton cite 30 years’ worth of Gallup research—including almost 2 million participants—that points to a key conclusion about people and careers:

“To excel in your chosen field and to find lasting satisfaction in doing so, you will need to understand your unique patterns. You will need to become an expert at finding and describing and applying and practicing and refining your strengths.”

This task is difficult enough when you’re considering yourself and your own life. It can be even tougher for you as you’re trying to help your son/daughter identify and apply his/her unique strengths in selecting a college major, for example, or determining a career path after graduation. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to become a thought-provoking, inspiring resource for your young adult as he/she embarks on this critical journey:

Set the Stage for Authentic Dialogue
Clear your thoughts about what you might want for your student in the way of a college major or career, and instead be fully present to listen to the path(s) he/she is contemplating. Give your student express permission to talk with you about his/her career-related thoughts and dreams. And let your student know that his/her exploration and decision making will take some time.

Help Your Student Pinpoint His/Her Natural Abilities
You’ve known your student for many years now. Share your observations of what his/her innate talents or gifts seem to be, and encourage him/her to ask close friends for their observations as well. You’d be amazed by the number of people—especially young adults—who feel they have no strengths because what they’re good at comes so easily to them that (in their minds) none of it can possibly be “real” talents! Help your student see—and acknowledge—the strengths he/she may not recognize.

Teach Your Student How to Identify His/Her Interests and Passions
It’s one thing to be good at something; it’s another thing entirely to enjoy that something. Many a young person has been steered into a major or career direction that made sense with his/her abilities but not his/her interests. The result is often disappointment... or worse. As their family, you can do your student a great service by helping him/her identify what he/she really enjoys. What does he seem to focus on almost naturally? What grabs her attention the most? Conversely, what activities does your student absolutely hate?!!
Pathways to Engagement: College Students Benefit from Involvement, Survey Says

Getting involved on campus and in the community benefits students in many ways. Findings from the recent National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) show that college students who are more engaged in civic activities also gain more during college in terms of ethical development and contributing to the welfare of their community. Plus, it can help their grades and their sense of belonging on campus.

“...the more time and energy students devote to desired activities, the more likely they are to develop the habits of the mind that are key to success after college,” says George Kuh, the NSSE director and Indiana U. Bloomington professor of higher education. “...engagement is linked to grades and graduation, outcomes that everyone agrees are important.”

This survey supports what campus professionals have known for a long time; when students get involved, they tend to do better academically, feel more connected to campus and have a healthier social support system. So, when your student tells you that she’d like to join the school newspaper staff, participate in Biology Club outings, tutor kids in an after-school program or play on an intramural volleyball team, consider supporting her. Involvement doesn’t take away from academics; it enhances the overall experience. It’s important for students to find their place on campus and involvement is the key!

Source: The National Survey of Student Engagement website at http://nsse.iub.edu/index.cfm

Save the date!
UND Family Weekend
October 6-7, 2006!

UND Family Association
The goal of the Family Association is to provide you, the family, with information that you want and need to help make your student’s time in college positive and successful. The people behind the program are families and students who understand the excitement and challenges of college. All families of current students are members of the Family Association. However, the Family Association is always looking for families who want to take a more active role in the organization. If you’re interested in serving on the Family Association Advisory Board or just want to share your ideas, please contact:
Heather Kasowski, Special Projects Coordinator
at (701) 777-6468 or 1-800-CALL-UND ext 7-6468 or heatherkasowski@mail.und.nodak.edu

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Help Your Student Keep Academic and Career Decisions in Perspective

Too often, young people treat choosing a major or selecting an initial career path as though it were a life-and-death decision. But of course it’s not. Help your student keep that in mind. The path your student will take on the road to his/her educational and career goals will be winding, not straight.

Be Willing to Say, “I Don’t Know”

Every day, somewhere in this country, a high school or college student says to a career counselor, “I’d like to major in art, but I can’t because I’ll never get a job with that degree.” What a tragedy—and it often unfolds because a well-meaning but less-than-knowledgeable family member has told his/her child, “You’ll never get a job with a ______ degree.”

Where does that kind of (mis)information come from? Often, it’s something only vaguely “heard about” or “read somewhere”—and it isn’t even remotely accurate. So when your student comes to you with an idea for a college major or career, be very careful about sharing with him/her what you (think you) know about that possibility. Challenge your own assumptions and perceptions about various educational and career paths, and teach your son/daughter to do the same.

Excerpts from College to Career: The College Career Experts at www.collegetocareer.net/Articles/Parents/Archives/exploremajorsandcareers.htm