

Preparing You for a Future of Meaningful Work

This tool is intended to assist you in effectively managing the process of career exploration, planning, and decision making. In order to prepare for success after graduation, it is essential to take initiative, be intentional, and have goals in mind. Through exploration and “testing out” ideas of interest, your plan may shift or change – that’s completely natural! Stay flexible, and take advantage of the rich resources and support persons who are ready to walk alongside you on your path to purposeful work.

Department of

Social Work

Career and Professional Development Plan



Assess

Self-awareness is crucial as you become a social worker. Assess, articulate and develop your strengths, interests and values. Begin to explore options that are compatible with your strengths and interests.

Explore

Gather information on career areas of interest so that you can make informed decisions about your future. Intentionally involve yourself in activities that will allow you to explore and grow personally and professionally.

Experience

Enhance critical professional competencies in order to successfully connect your professional goals with real world opportunities. Take your experience to the next level by participating in meaningful opportunities that will differentiate you from the rest.

Transition

Synthesize your collective experiences from your academics and out-of-class involvement. Begin to articulate a plan and take action to translate your skills and experiences into meaningful post-graduate opportunities.

For access to online version with hyperlinks:

<http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/careerplan/documents/CareerandProfessionalDevelopmentPlan.pdf>



Assess

Who am I & where am I going?

Gain insight into your unique strengths, interests and skills, particularly as they relate to your major and various career options. Identify resources from the list below to begin building this important foundation to decision making.

What resources are available?

- [Self-assessment inventories](#) are available through the Career Center to help you begin narrowing down your interests, strengths, and values.
- If you're unsure if this major is a good fit for your strengths and interests, consult the [Choosing a Major](#) guide.
- Attend the **Career Center's fall Open House** to learn about services and opportunities. You're encouraged to schedule a "getting started" appointment with a career coach.

How can I learn about my options?

- Read [Days in the Lives of Social Workers](#) and learn about opportunities in social work in settings ranging from schools to prisons.
- Become familiar with relevant career paths by checking out "[Explore Career Options](#)," and specifically, "[What can I do with a major in Social Work?](#)" on the Career Center's website.
- Check out a comprehensive overview of the social work profession via the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) and [O*NET](#).

How can I be proactive?

- Visit the [Career Center](#) early, and start customizing your **personal career and professional development**

Reflection Q's

- *How would I describe my skills, interests, and values?*
- *Considering past and present experiences, what energizes me most? Be specific!*
- *How are these aspects of myself shaping my decisions about a major and potential career path?*
- *What options for involvement outside the classroom might allow me to gain experience while further developing my transferable skill sets?*

plan with the help of a career coach. Each person and major is unique!

- Begin building relationships with your advisor and professors within** your department, beyond the classroom setting. Take advantage of office hours and department activities. Become familiar with the SW [department's website](#) and the [four-year plan](#).
- Create a first draft of your [resume](#); what gaps do you need to fill? Use this as a guide to start constructing an **action plan** that includes relevant, sought-after experience by employers and graduate schools.
- Undergraduate social work education builds on a strong liberal arts base. Learn about the value of a liberal arts education as it relates to the workplace by checking out information on "[transferable skills](#)" you are learning. These skills are **very marketable to employers** and graduate schools, so be intentional about developing them.

Explore

Take your ideas for a test drive.

Gather information on career areas of interest so that you can make informed decisions about your future.

Intentionally choose activities that will allow you to explore and grow personally and professionally.

Where and how can I gather more info?

- Meet with a [career coach](#) to discuss resources and opportunities that will help you further explore your career-related interests. Brainstorm ideas for **complementing your classroom learning with relevant experience** to start filling the gaps in your [resume](#).
- Learn more about career paths that relate to your interests in the following ways:
 - **Job shadow** a Messiah alum or personal contact to get an insider's view into a career related to social work.
 - Conduct at least three [informational interviews](#) with professionals in your field of interest.
 - Attend the Career Center's **Pizza with Professionals** events and other workshops.
 - Attend the annual **Career & Graduate School Expo** to gather information and talk with recruiters.
 - Invest time in **building relationships** with educators on campus with whom you share specific interests/passions. Consider seeking a mentor with whom you can discuss your vocational path.
- Become familiar with [FalconJobs](#), a centralized database of part-time and full-time employment opportunities. Log-in with your Messiah email and ID number (without the zeros in front!).

Reflection Q's

- *What experiences might be valued by a prospective employer or grad school?*
- *How can I apply what I'm learning in the classroom through meaningful experience?*
- *Am I focusing on quality rather than quantity?*

How should I get engaged?

- Explore options for [involvement](#) outside of the classroom through offices such as [Student Involvement & Leadership Programs](#), the [Agapé Center for Service & Learning](#), [Study Abroad](#), [College Ministries](#), [Residence Life](#), [Multicultural Programs](#) and much more. Consider choosing one area to get involved.
- Strategically choose [activities](#) on campus that will allow you to [gain experience](#) and further develop your transferable skills. **Employers and grad schools value quality over quantity**, so choose meaningful opportunities.
- Consider doing an internship through Messiah's [Internship Program](#). **Data shows that employers highly value relevant experience, regardless of major!**
- Establish a profile on [LinkedIn](#). **See what Messiah alumni are doing** by joining the [Messiah College Professional Network](#).
- Begin thinking of **how you will spend your summer**. What experiences, paid and/or volunteer, will help you build on your experience and continue to develop marketable skill sets in your field of interest?
- Practice **articulating** the [transferable skills](#) you are developing – this will be important when articulating your qualifications to future employers or graduate schools.

Experience

How can I differentiate myself?

It's time to **take your experience to the next level!**

Increase your marketability and uniqueness through acquiring real world, relevant experience. This is also the time to develop and enhance your professional "image." In other words, **what do YOU have to offer** to a prospective employer or graduate school? If you're not thinking of pursuing a career in a field traditionally related to social work, research the field(s) you're considering. Think about how your social work education will prepare you for making unique contributions to your specific field of interest.

What constitutes "relevant experience?"

- ❑ Employers and graduate schools are looking for candidates with relevant **experience**. The beauty of getting your BSW is the built-in experience you receive in your practicums.
- ❑ **In addition to your prescribed field experience**, determine how you'll add to your personal and professional growth, such as – an internship, leadership position on campus, research, studying abroad, or service learning.
- ❑ Visit the [Internship Center](#) to learn about excellent opportunities for additional **workplace experience**.

What professional competencies are important?

- ❑ **Think creatively** about how your experiences, major, and the **skills** you're demonstrating are transferable to your targeted field.
- ❑ **Practice communicating your [career brand](#)** in writing ([resume](#)) and verbally ([mock interview](#)) with a career coach.
- ❑ **Utilize [drop-in hours](#)** or schedule an appointment to receive personalized feedback.
- ❑ **This is so important:** expand your [network](#) and connections with professionals in your field, [Messiah](#)

[alumni](#), and at other campus and Career Center [events](#). Continue doing [informational interviews](#)!

What tools and resources will help me get connected professionally?

- ❑ **Attend job fairs.** Start early; remember, you don't have to be in the job-seeking phase to attend! Many relevant employers and highly ranked graduate schools for social work attend the Messiah College **Career and Grad School Expo!**
- ❑ Connect with **professional organizations**, such as the [National Association of Social Workers](#) and [National Association of Christians in Social Work](#).
- ❑ Develop "[networking cards](#)" with basic contact info and a summary of your goals and qualifications. Have these available as you meet new contacts who may serve as critical resources in the future.
- ❑ Start building your [professional wardrobe](#)!
- ❑ Stay on top of **current events, trends, and hot topics** through resources like [Social Work Today](#).
- ❑ If you're **considering graduate school**, read through the [Grad School Planning Guide](#). Also, attend events such as the **Personal Statement Workshop, Practice Admissions Exams, and Graduate School Luncheon**. Remember, having a BSW from a CSWE accredited school of social work (like Messiah) allows you to complete a 60-credit MSW in just 30-40 credits!

Reflection Q's

- *What specific experiences are highly desirable in my targeted field?*
- *Have I "tested out" my area of interest to know it's a good fit?*
- *Can I articulate the skills that will be marketable to my target?*
- *What type of leadership position might I consider?*

Transition

The next move is yours!

Transitioning to post-graduate life, whether that involves graduate school, employment, a gap year, or full-time service, includes many decisions. Keep in mind that career development is a lifetime process. That said, consider it your “first destination.” As a steward of your strengths, carefully consider what you have to contribute to your next step.

What are my transition goals?

- ❑ Work with a career coach to devise a job search or graduate school application **strategy**. Stay on track by developing a **timeline**.
- ❑ Use the [CSWE website](#) to obtain a complete listing of graduate social work programs. Find the [rankings here](#).
- ❑ Discuss your **goals** and ideas with and receive feedback from your faculty, mentors and the Career Center (stop by to schedule an appointment).
- ❑ Gather information on realistic [salary](#) expectations.

What do I have to offer?

- ❑ Reflect on **the totality of your experiences** both inside and outside of the classroom. What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you have to offer a prospective employer or graduate school? In what **practical ways** have you demonstrated these strengths? **This is essential preparation for resume writing and interviewing.**
- ❑ **Refine and tailor** your application or admissions materials, including your [resume](#), cover letter, [essays](#), [LinkedIn profile](#), and [interview](#) responses to include **specific examples** and accomplishments from your experience.
- ❑ Secure employment or graduate school [references](#) from those who can speak to your proven strengths and potential. **Don't ask for recommendations at the last minute!** Plan ahead and give adequate time.

Where can I find opportunities?

- ❑ Use an **eclectic mix of resources** in your job/grad school search strategy. Review the [Job Search](#) and [Graduate School](#) Guides for more detail.
- ❑ View **job opportunities** posted to Messiah students and alumni through [FalconJobs](#).
- ❑ **Networking!** Invest in relationship-building and connecting with professionals in your field of interest. The [Messiah College Professional Network](#) is a great place to start.
- ❑ Continue taking advantage of **job and graduate school fairs** on campus and in your geographic area of interest. Review a [tip sheet](#) to best prepare!
- ❑ Consult career and graduate school resources on the [Career Center website](#).
- ❑ Use targeted social work resources such as the [NASW JobLink](#) if job searching.
- ❑ **Social media:** Follow employers of interest on Twitter; engage in discussions within professional groups on [LinkedIn](#).
- ❑ Remember to **follow up**, say “[thank you](#),” and track progress.

Reflection Q's

- *What are my top strengths I have to offer an employer or graduate school?*
- *Does my resume accurately reflect my transferable skills and experiences?*
- *How have I demonstrated the skills that will be marketable to my target?*