Preparing You for a Future of Meaningful Work

This tool is intended to assist you in effectively managing your 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.

Assess

Assess, articulate and develop your strengths, interests and values. Begin to explore options that are congruent with your awareness of self.

Engage

Purposefully engage in opportunities and with resources that will set you on the path to personal and professional development. Target opportunities where you can apply and further develop your skill sets, grow your experience base, and explore areas of interest.

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, internships and other experiential learning, service, leadership, and co-curricular involvement. Begin to articulate a plan and take action to translate your skills and experiences into meaningful post-graduate opportunities.
Welcome from the Department

Greetings from the Messiah College Communication department! Whether you have declared communication as a major or you’re just checking it out, we are excited to share these resources with you. Our goal here is to help you connect coursework in the department with the incredible array of applied experiences associated with a communication degree. Our graduates are using this highly adaptable and marketable major in public relations, advertising, event planning, writing, teaching, film, new media, broadcasting, journalism, web based communications, youth ministry, public speaking, grant writing, and in many other exciting occupations.

We are eager to listen to you, point you to resources, and help you create an educational experience that will enable you to secure employment in the communication related position of your choosing. Please use this document as a resource and a reminder of ways you can best prepare yourself for post-college work. Our prayer is that as you journey through college, you will discover ways to apply your unique gifts, interests, and education to serve others and to further God’s kingdom.

Blessings,
The Communication Department
Assess

Who am I & where am I going?

There are several options available to assist you in the process of assessing and developing your strengths, interests and values related to your field of interest. Identify resources from the list below to begin building this important foundation to decision making.

What tools are available?

- **Self-assessment inventories** are available through the Career Center to help you begin narrowing down your interests, strengths, and values.

- Begin to construct an [electronic and/or paper portfolio](#) in the COMM 107 course, where you can begin to store artifacts, including papers, projects, research, and other accomplishments from your classroom work and out-of-class activities.

How can I find relevant opportunities?

- Check out the “[Explore Career Options](#)” section on the Career Center’s website.

- Learn what alumni and other professionals are doing with their degrees through the [Communication Department newsletter](#), the Communication Department’s [Facebook page](#), guest speakers in the COMM 107 course, and through [FalconNet](#), the alumni directory. You can see films made by Messiah students at [www.youtube.com/filmdigimedia/messiah](http://www.youtube.com/filmdigimedia/messiah) and check out [Professor Reid Perkins-Buzo’s blog](#).

- Explore options for [involvement outside of the classroom](#) through offices and organizations such as Admissions, Public Relations, the Agapé Center for Service & Learning, Alumni and Parent Relations, Development, *The Bridge*, Student Activities Board, Student Government Association, WVMM, *The Swinging Bridge*, Phone-A-Thon, and more.

What resources should I be accessing?

- Visit the [Career Center](#) early, and start constructing a customized career and professional development plan.

- Get to know your advisor and professors within your department beyond the classroom. Take advantage of office hours and department activities. Become familiar with the department’s website.

- Create a first draft of your [résumé](#); what gaps exist? Use this as a guide to start constructing an action plan that includes relevant, sought-after experience.

- Check out the book *Careers in Communications*, by Shonan Noronha, or *Career Opportunities in the Film Industry*, by Fred & Jan Yager.

- Become familiar with the “transferable skills” you are learning. These skills are very marketable to employers and graduate schools, so be intentional about developing them. For instance, employers rate communication, interpersonal, teamwork, and critical thinking skills as key qualities they seek in potential employees (Nat’l Assoc. of Colleges & Employers).

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?
Explore & Engage

How do I choose?

Don’t just become involved. **Intentionally** choose activities that will allow you to grow personally and professionally. Target opportunities where you can apply and develop transferable skill sets gained as a communication major while exploring potential areas of interest in the field. Consider the following options to stay on track.

Who can help?

- Meet with a Career Center professional to discuss where you’re at and any adjustments that should be made to your customized career and professional development plan. Brainstorm ideas for complementing your classroom learning with relevant experience to start filling the gaps in your résumé.
- Take the initiative to build relationships with your academic advisor, faculty members, and RD. Discuss and gain ideas about potential career interests and plans to gain experience. Invest in faculty members with whom you share specific interests/passions. Meet with them regularly.

How do I choose from so many options?

- Strategically choose co-curricular activities that will allow you to gain experience and further develop your skills. **Employers and grad schools value quality over quantity**, so invest in meaningful opportunities. Seek feedback from your supporters noted above.
- Begin talking with your advisor, the Career Center and/or the Internship Center about experiential learning opportunities (internships, professional development experiences (PDE), job shadowing, etc.). **Data shows that employers highly value relevant experience!**
- Particularly if you are considering graduate school, consider presenting at the annual Humanities Symposium or assisting a professor with research for practicum or independent study credit.

Reflection Q’s

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

What can I do to test out my career interests?

- Conduct an information interview or initiate a job shadowing experience with a professional in your field of interest.
- Research career fields of interest to you. What is the nature of the work and work environment? What skills and experiences are highly desirable? What are some of the behind-the-scenes tasks? The Career Center has a number of great resources to help answer these sorts of questions.
- Consider connecting with a Messiah alum through the online alumni directory, FalconNet. Consult with the Career Center about how to do this.
- Consider following trends and news of companies of interest through social networking sites like Twitter and LinkedIn.
- Begin thinking of how you will spend your summer. What experiences, paid or volunteer, will help you build on your experience and continue to develop marketable skill sets?
Experience

How can I differentiate myself?
It’s time to take your experience to the next level. Increase your marketability and uniqueness through investing in your experience base. Consider the options below as you develop and enhance your “brand.” If you don’t plan to pursue a career specifically in the “communication” related field, research the fields you’re considering. Think about how your communication background will prepare you for making unique contributions to your field of interest.

What constitutes “relevant experience?”
- Virtually all employers are looking for candidates with relevant experience, and an internship/practicum is required of all communication majors. You may gain applied experience by doing research with a professor, completing an internship or practicum, engaging in an international experience, or volunteering. Consider, for instance, the LA film internship program, the Contemporary Music Center in Nashville, the London Internship program, and the Messiah Philly Campus. Film students should also consider volunteering to help with seniors’ film projects and assisting with film festivals. Talk with your advisor about how this fits into your schedule.
- Think creatively about how your experiences, communication major, and the skills you’re demonstrating might be transferable to your targeted field. How are you conveying this on your résumé?

What professional competencies are important?
- Learn how to effectively market your qualifications through your résumé and cover letter. Stop by the Career Center during drop-in hours or schedule an appointment to receive personalized feedback.
- Strengthen your interviewing skills by scheduling a mock interview in the Career Center.
- Practice your networking skills with faculty, alumni, and at Career Center events.

- Build a professional web presence through vehicles such as social networking sites (ex. LinkedIn) and e-portfolios. Document your experiences in your electronic portfolio as a way of showcasing your skills and accomplishments.

What tools and resources will help me to get connected professionally?
- Attend job and graduate school fairs and other career-related events throughout the year. Start early; remember, you don’t have to be in the job-seeking phase to attend!
- Connect with professional associations and conferences in your field. Consider memberships in the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), the International Association of Business Communication (IABC), the National Communication Association (NCA), the communication honor society Lambda Pi Eta, the Society for Film and Media Studies, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), and the Radio and Television News Directors Association (RTNDA).

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?
- How am I practicing the skills that will be marketable to my target?
- What will set me apart from the average candidate in my chosen field?
- Have I considered stepping into a leadership position?
Transition

Am I ready?

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

What are my transition goals?

- Research and clarify your top occupational or graduate school choices which are congruent with your skills and interests.
- Discuss your goals and ideas with and receive feedback from your faculty and the Career Center.
- Stay active in the process by engaging your network of personal and professional contacts. Communicate your goals and ideas about what might be next for you. Reach out to additional contacts through the alumni directory, FalconNet, and your social networks such as LinkedIn and Twitter.
- Stay on track for accomplishing your goals by devising strategies and timelines for making them happen.

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? Write them down! This will be the basis for your personal marketing campaign.
- Refine and tailor your application or admissions materials, including your résumé, cover letter, essays, and interview responses to include specific examples and stories 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 (approx. 3-4 weeks).

- Polish your professional portfolio in the Communication Senior Seminar course. This should incorporate a bit about you, your résumé, transferable skills and experiences, and any work samples that demonstrate your abilities in your field of interest (e.g. student films, research papers, media kits, news writing, etc).

Where can I find opportunities?

- Use an eclectic mix of resources. View job opportunities posted exclusively to Messiah students through FalconJobs. Participate in career events related to important transitional topics.
- Attend job and graduate school fairs locally and in your geographic area of interest.
- Consult career and graduate school resources on the Career Center website noted above.
- Take a targeted, strategic approach. For example, connect with job boards through professional association websites. For Broadcasting, search job opportunities posted on the Broadcast Education Association (BEA) and the College Broadcasters, Inc. (CBI) websites.
- Search communication related job search sites
- Remember to follow up by calling to inquire about the status of your application, and write thank you notes immediately following interviews.

Reflection Q’s

- What are my top strengths I have to offer an employer or graduate school?
- Does my résumé accurately reflect my transferable skills and experiences?
- How have I demonstrated the skills that will be marketable to my target?
“The communication major at Messiah prepared me with practical skills for my career path in music business. Working in artist management essentially means that I work alongside bands/artists to communicate effectively to both their fans and industry partners. I love that it combines my passion for music and my strengths of organization, writing, and public speaking. Studying communication at Messiah really helped grow and develop these skills. The courses also provided me with a working knowledge of public relations, marketing and mass media, all of which have served me well!”

-Jennifer Shaver, ’07
Marketing and Brand Manager, Thomas-Vasquez Entertainment

“The Communication major at Messiah College didn’t just introduce me to the rich complexities and paradoxes of human interaction - it transformed the way I position myself within an ever-changing, mediated world. It exposed me to a rigorous academic environment that challenged my naive, sometimes erroneous, presuppositions as much as it encouraged me to follow my ideas wherever they might lead.”

-Nathan Taylor, ’07
Doctoral Student in Communication Studies, Teaching Fellow
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

“Making films is a collaborative process, and for me, one of the most beneficial aspects of Messiah’s program was the tight knit group the film studies students had. Along with the easy access to equipment, we were able to work on each other’s projects constantly, providing me with much more production and collaboration experience than most of my peers in Graduate School.”

-Krista Hamlen, ’09
Graduate Student in Media Arts/Documentary Film, University of Buffalo

“I loved my experience as a Communication major at Messiah College. As a PR student, I was encouraged to gain real world experience throughout my college career. In my internships and classes, I worked on materials that became integral pieces of my portfolio for job interviews. My experiences led to my first two post-college jobs - a testimonial to the power of internships.

Beyond my classroom and real world experiences, the most significant and beneficial part of my Communication degree has been the relationships that I formed - with professors and classmates. The small class sizes and one-on-one attention that I received have created lasting friends and mentors that will last far into my life as a Messiah College alumnus.”

- Rachel Crownover, ’09
Manager of Grants, PinnacleHealth Foundation