**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 compatible with your strengths and interests.

**Explore**

Begin to research career paths related to theatre and dance, so that you can proactively incorporate relevant experiences into your Messiah education. Target opportunities where you can apply and further develop your skill sets while growing 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.
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 associated 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.

- Become familiar with the **different degree options** available in the Department of Theatre and Dance. If you’re unsure if your major is a good fit for your strengths, 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 sometime during your first year on campus.

How can I learn about my options?

- Consult the **career planning resources** specifically for theatre and dance majors on the Career Center’s website. This includes common career paths for your major.

- Find out what **alumni** are up to through the department’s website.

How can I be proactive?

- Visit the **Career Center** early, and start customizing your **personal career and professional development plan** with the help of a career coach. Each person and major is unique!

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?

- Begin building relationships with your advisor and faculty within your department, beyond the classroom setting. Take advantage of office hours and department activities. Become familiar with the [Department of Theatre & Dance’s website](#).

- 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.

- Get started on developing your **portfolio** where you will begin archiving highlights from your work and accomplishments.

- 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 theatre in the following ways:
  - Job shadow a [Messiah alum](#) or personal contact to get an insider’s view into a career.
  - Conduct at least three [informational interviews](#) with professionals in your field of interest.
  - As often as possible, attend local performances and productions.
  - Attend the Career Center’s [Pizza with Professionals](#) events and other workshops that are relevant to your interests.
  - 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 to discuss your vocational path.
  - Connect with upperclass students in your major to hear about their experiences.

- Become familiar with [FalconJobs](#), a centralized database of part-time and full-time employment opportunities. Log-in with your Messiah email and ID number.

**How should I get involved?**

- 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. [Examples: Alpha Psi Omega Nat’l Theatre Arts Society, Messiah Film Society, Student Activities Board, Swing Club, Acclamation Dance](#), and opportunities with [local Harrisburg organizations](#).

- 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? Perhaps, become involved in the [Summer Theatre Arts Academy](#).

- Practice [articulating](#) the [transferable skills](#) you are developing – this will be important when articulating your qualifications to future employers or graduate schools.

**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?
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 “brand.” 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 your major, research the field(s) you’re considering. Think about how your academic background will prepare you for making unique contributions to your field of interest.

What constitutes “relevant experience?”
- Employers and graduate schools are looking for candidates with relevant experience, yet every professional field is unique. Do research and talk with professionals who share your interests to know what type of experience is valued in your targeted field.
- Determine and take action toward gaining experiences that will help you grow personally and professionally, such as—an internship, leadership position on campus, studying abroad, service learning or volunteering in the community, and dance/theatre productions.

What professional competencies are important?
- Think creatively about how your experiences, major, and the skills you’re demonstrating might be transferable to your targeted field. How are these being conveyed through examples in your portfolio?
- Practice communicating your professional image through social media, 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 and graduate school fairs throughout the year. Keep in mind that recruiting for certain types of theatre/dance-related positions doesn’t always occur through traditional methods! Personal and professional connections are extremely important.
- Connect with professional associations and conferences in your field. Several examples are noted for theatre and dance at the bottom of the hyperlinked resources. Ask faculty members for additional referrals.
- 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 according to what is appropriate for your field of interest.
- Stay on top of current events, trends, and hot topics in your field through journals, magazines, and the news.
- 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.

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 aspects. 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 towards a future career.

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, mentors and the Career Center (stop by to schedule an appointment).
- Work with a career coach to devise a job search or graduate school application strategy. Stay on track by developing a timeline.
- Gather information on realistic salary expectations.
- 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 Messiah College Professional Network.

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, portfolio 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, and the Theatre Department’s “Careers” page.
- Consider applying for an Into the City career immersion program through the Career Center.
- 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.
- Attend job and graduate school fairs on campus and in your geographic area of interest. Review a tip sheet!
- Consult career and graduate school resources on the Career Center website noted above.
- Connect with job boards through professional association websites.
- 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 and portfolio accurately convey my transferable skills and experiences?
- How have I demonstrated the skills that will be marketable to my target?