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.

Assess

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, test out interests, 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:
Welcome to the Politics Department! This Career and Professional Development Plan has been tailored to students who have chosen to explore a vocational path through the Politics major. Politics graduates do myriad things with their degrees. This is part of what makes our major so exciting. At the same time, this realization can be overwhelming for many students. This is why it is important for you to gather as much information as possible about the countless ways in which you can put your Politics degree to use. For example, talk with faculty members and alumni, utilize the vast array of resources provided by important centers on campus, such as the EpiCenter and the Career Center, and be sure to take full advantage of both co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities.

Our graduates have pursued careers in both the public and private sectors. Among our numerous alumni, we count attorneys, government agency analysts, international development workers, program directors in non-profit organizations, foreign service officers, government relations managers, businesspeople, campaign staffers, and journalists. Regardless of the vocational path that you ultimately decide to pursue, you can count on being well-prepared by the rigorous courses that are offered by our department, all of which involve lots of reading, writing, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

Do not be overwhelmed by this brochure. It is not given with the expectation that you already know exactly what you want to do with your life, or even that you will know exactly how your life will unfold upon graduation. This pamphlet is simply intended to provide you with specific advice about how to engage in thoughtful exploration, planning, and decision making, and that advice will serve you well regardless of where you go in life. As long as you make your decisions thoughtfully, you should rest assured that they are the right decisions for you.

Paul Rego, Ph.D.

Chair, Department of Politics
Assess

Who am I & where am I going?
Gain insight into your unique strengths, interests and skills, particularly as they relate to your major in Politics 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 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?
- Become familiar with relevant career paths by checking [Career Planning Resources for Politics Majors](#) on the Career Center’s website as well as the “Careers” section on the Politics Department website.
- Connect with resources through the [American Political Science Association](#) (see the “Careers” section).
- Evaluate options described in the APSA [Careers in Political Science](#) booklet.
- Attend the “Opportunities in Politics” chapel in September and the annual “Career Conversation in Politics” to learn more about careers in the discipline and more ways to explore them at Messiah.

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!
- 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 Politics Department’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.
- Start following potential employers with whom you may like to intern on Twitter and LinkedIn.
- Become familiar with the transferable skills you are learning, as well as competencies important to politics-related fields. These skills are very marketable to employers and graduate schools, so be intentional about developing them.

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

Take your ideas for a test drive.

Gather information on potential career paths 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](#).

- **Explore career paths** that relate to your interests in Politics in the following ways:
  - Conduct research on career paths through resources such as the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) and [O*NET](#).
  - [Job shadow](#) a [Messiah alum](#) or personal contact to get an insider’s view into a career. Use [LinkedIn](#) to connect!
  - 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 to discuss your vocational path.
  - Get to know an upperclass Politics student – ask them about their experiences and advice.

- 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 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](#), the [Collaboratory](#), [Work Study](#), and much more. Consider choosing at least 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 at least one internship through Messiah’s [Internship Center](#); in particular, try a [Politics-related internship](#). [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 “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 (view samples), leadership position on campus, research, studying abroad, or service learning.

What professional competencies are important?

- Think creatively about how your experiences, Politics major, and the competencies you’re demonstrating might be transferable to your targeted field.

- 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!

- Consult Diane Schmidt’s Writing in Political Science (4th ed.). It’s good for more than papers – employers strongly desire writing skills!

What tools and resources will help me get connected professionally?

- Attend job and graduate school fairs throughout the year. Start early; remember, you don’t have to be in the job-seeking phase to attend!

- Consider applying for an Into the City career immersion program through the Career Center.

- Attend the annual Career Conversations in Politics event to connect with Politics alumni.

- Connect with professional associations and conferences in your field – such as the American Political Science Association and others.

- 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 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.
- Participate in events on campus related to important transitional topics in order to identify larger priorities.

What do I have to offer?

- Reflect on the totality of your experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. What knowledge, Politics-specific competencies, 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. Also, ask them to recommend you on your LinkedIn profile. Don’t ask for recommendations at the last minute! Provide at least 3-4 weeks notice.

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.
- 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 accurately reflect my transferable skills and experiences?
- How have I demonstrated the skills that will be marketable to my target?
REFLECTIONS FROM POLITICS ALUMNI ...

My time as a politics major proved to be one of the most influential times of my life. For many, politics inherently revolves around a particular point of view, but the professors at Messiah pushed me to go beyond a gut reaction to how government should be, and provided me with the skills necessary to help make government more efficient and productive. If you want to learn how to think critically, write clearly, and make assessments based on evidence, not a subjective point of view, then become a politics major at Messiah College.

- Jeff Reczek, ’07, Program Examiner on Health Issues for the President’s Office of Management and Budget; Master’s in Public Affairs, Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs, Syracuse University

With the encouragement and individual direction from department staff, I’ve invested in a wide range of opportunities that have complimented my classroom studies and academic work. Not only have my internships and study abroad experience expanded my understanding of politics, they’ve furthered my ability to engage at a professional level. I was prepared to step into the workforce post graduation, and truly value Messiah’s commitment to experience learning.

- Vanessa Brubaker, ’10, Development Services Associate at Delta Development

My professors had very high expectations for me and pushed me to always take it to the next level, both academically (i.e., taking on some rigorous paper topics!), professionally (applying to myriad internships, fellowships, etc.), and in terms of leadership in the community (suggesting volunteer work or other invaluable opportunities).

- Jamie Davies, ’05, Policy & Research Analyst, Thomas B. Fordham Institute (Columbus, Ohio office); Masters in Public Affairs, Princeton University

What Our Graduates Are Doing

- Law School: 12%
- Graduate School: 26%
- Graduates in Related Fields or Schooling: 90%
- Employed in Major-Related Field: 72%
72% Employed in Major-Relevant Field

- Professional Internships: 3%
- Education: 6%
- Service-Related: 6%
- Law: 8%
- Government: 29%
- Non-Profit: 20%
- For-Profit: 29%

*Based on 2004-2010 alumni survey data

- For-Profit: marketing, finance/investment, media, HR, economic development, lobbying, private consulting, communication
- Non-Profit: unions, think tanks, faith-based organizations, media outlets, various international groups
- Government: U.S. Agencies (i.e. The Department of Homeland of Security), U.S. Military, U.S. Congress, PA General Assembly, Political Campaigns
- Law
- Service-Related: Teach for America, the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps
- Education: teaching, research, high school, institutions of higher education
- Professional Internships: international non-profit organizations, U.S. Congress