

MENTORING **SPARK**

Quick ideas to light up your doctoral conversations.

► CAREER PLANNING



SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Though some students pursue an advanced degree with a future job in mind, or have a current career path in mind, many do not. Some students pursue a graduate degree because it provides a stepping stone or additional time to determine their career paths (*e.g. in academia, industry, government, non-profit, or entrepreneurship*). In addition, students may have limited ways to think about which career outcomes are important for them. This can result in difficulty focusing on (*and committing to*) research goals and/or may create stress. This **Spark** is intended to help students think of job exploration as a process, and to provide guidance on exploring potential jobs after graduation.



► LEVEL 1

LEVEL 1: JOB EXPLORATION

LEVEL 2: JOB ACQUISITION

LEVEL 3: CAREER SKILLS



FACULTY FYI

This **Spark** is one of three designed to help students think about job explorations, job acquisitions, and job skills. Many graduate students look to their advisors for support regarding job openings and career options. In addition, the future work done by the graduate student reflects on the advisor; consequently, advisors may want to help students find a good match.

For clarity, we are using the following definitions: **Job exploration/career discovery:** students engaged in opportunities to learn about a variety of careers.

Job acquisition skills: skills to actually apply, interview, and be hired. **Career skills:** skills needed for the career.



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Help students think about Career Planning in terms of career exploration/discovery, job acquisition skills, and career skills – and the ability to consider each “chunk” separately.
- Help students link their network (*see Network Sparks*) with learning about different types of careers related to their graduate studies and research.
- Help students build an understanding that the variety of jobs and careers available in the sciences and engineering evolve with every generation; encourage students to network with people at a variety of points in their career – *i.e., early career professionals and mid-/late-career professionals*.

It is important for students to begin thinking about the timing of their job search early...

A RESOURCE FROM:



Use this QR code to access this and other Mentoring Spark tip sheets:



CONTINUED ...



DIGGING DEEPER

- Contact the career services center (*name can vary by institution*) for their services, especially related to self-paced career exploration software/websites.
- Peers who are on the job market can share insights about their career exploration process.
- Though the internet and AI are good resources for some information about different types of jobs/careers, they do not necessarily reflect all of the pros and cons accurately. When using these tools, vet the resulting information through trusted people.

Please visit the RDI Mentoring Sparks website for examples and links to these tools and resources!



EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

1. Have students write down the type of career they think they are interested in (*and why*); list what resources they will use to learn more about the career(s). Have students include specific reasons for the interest, including factors outside of the work itself (*e.g., location, size of business, type of work being done, etc.*).
2. Even for those who “know” they want a career in academia, government, industry, etcetera, challenge them to explore (*i.e., research via websites, people who work in that sector, news articles, etc.*) at **least three types of careers** in each of two major sectors.
3. Have students map the types of careers within their network (see **Networking Sparks**), review their map for gaps in careers that interest them, and report back to your research group.
4. Have students attend webinars or talks about different types of careers. Set a target number of attendances for each semester (*which should be different for different students depending on their existing career experience*).



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Encourage students, early in their graduate career, to think about their next role, while balancing that time with their work and studies. It is important for students to begin thinking about the timing of their job search early, but not at the detriment of looking for a job in lieu of graduating in a timely fashion. In addition, help students to consider which electives may be important early enough in their degree progress to be able to take the electives without delaying their graduation.
- Help students make connections between their coursework, research, and future work — not just the technical part, but also how their work can fit into different careers.
- **GOAL Setting:** Agree on a goal related to job exploration, such as investigating pros and cons of different career sectors.



REFLECTION & NEXT STEPS

- **Student:** Consider your networking circles in relation to your career exploration. Consider purposeful expansion of your network to fill any gaps.
- **Student and Faculty:** Consider what the “just right” focus bandwidth of interests for a career is and how that can help job acquisition skills and skills needed on a job.

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