SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
Center for Career & Professional Development

CENTER FOR CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Your Four-Year Pirate Career Plan

While career seems far away when you start college, if you "begin with the end in mind" you can use your time at Southwestern strategically to position yourself for a successful future. It takes time to explore career options and build the marketable experience that employers and grad schools seek, so we recommend a step-by-step process that breaks down the big questions of "What do I want to do with my life and how do I get there?" into manageable chunks each year. The Center for Career & Professional Development (CCPD), as well as your academic advisor, faculty, coaches, family and fellow Pirates, can help you reach your desired destination.

Year 1: Learn the Ropes (Self-Discovery & Foundational Skills)

Welcome aboard, Pirates! Your first year is for learning "how to college", making friends, and getting adjusted to college academics. But it's not too early to start planning for your future. Lean in to exploring options, building relationships, and developing essential skills.

EXPLORING YOURSELF AND YOUR INTERESTS

- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Take the TypeFocus self-assessment during Welcome Week to explore what makes you tick, how you get along with others, career options and major possibilities.
- ❒ Schedule time to talk with your advisor, professors and peers about majors that interest you, enroll in a variety of courses.
- ❒ Follow CCPD social media (@pirate2pro on IG, "Center for Career & Professional Development" on LinkedIn) to learn about special events, internship/job fairs, career tips and career spotlights.
- ❒ Participate in 2+ career-related "Curious Conversations", "Career Treks", employer panels and/or other workshops (free and open to all students) to explore career possibilities.
- ❒ **Pre-Professional Focus: Attend Pre-Health Preview or Pre-Law Preview in the fall if you're considering these careers.*

NETWORK BUILDING & SKILL BUILDING

- ❒ Use network-building skills you learn in the FYS Purpose workshop to find your people. Try out 1-2 student organizations or teams. Get to know your professors in office hours.
- ❒ Attend the On-Campus & Part-Time Job Fair and find a job or volunteer experience to build career-readiness skills of communication, teamwork, problem-solving, professionalism, technology, leadership, etc. while growing your network.
- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Connect with a CCPD advisor at least once.

CAREER TOOLS

- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Create a professionally-formatted résumé that you can grow and refine. Email to CCPD for feedback.
- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Set up LinkedIn and PirateConnect profiles and begin building your network, including connecting with CCPD team.

SUMMER 1

- ❒ Work, shadow, volunteer, research (e.g. SU SURF) or have "curious conversations" to explore interests and build skills.

Year 2: Sea Trials (Career Exploration & Skill Building)

After you've settled in to college and built a firm foundation academically and socially, this year is time to grow your professional experience and test career options. Today's internships often serve as "entry-level" roles in organizations, and most students graduate with at least one internship experience. Internships, research, and other high-impact experiences are key to career success.

CAREER RESEARCH & NETWORKING

- ❒ Declare major/minor based on interests and strengths.
- ❒ Attend at least one Internship & Career fair (offered each semester) and research participating employers.
- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Conduct at least 4 "curious conversations" with alumni, parents or other professionals (e.g. through the SU Career COMPASS program)

EXPERIENCE & SKILL BUILDING

- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Take part in the SOAR Summit to build career-management skills and grow your network and/or participate in 2+ career-related "Curious Conversations", "Career Treks", employer panels and/or other workshops.
- ❒ Apply for internships, research positions, or volunteer roles to gain marketable skills and test the fit of careers. Meet with a CCPD advisor to plan your search strategy.
- ❒ Continue involvement or take on leadership responsibilities in clubs/organizations.
- ❒ **Pre-Professional Focus: Attend Pre-Health "Check-Up for Sophomores" if you're considering a healthcare career. Apply for SU HEALTH St. David's Georgetown Hospital Shadowing Internship.*

CAREER TOOLS

- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Update résumé with new experiences. Share with CCPD for feedback.
- ❒ Refine LinkedIn profile, continue connecting, and start building your brand (posts, comments, outreach).

SUMMER 2

- ❒ Study abroad, research (e.g. SU SURF, SU Houston Methodist Research Internships), intern, work, shadow, volunteer, and/or continue having "curious conversations" to explore your interests and build skills.
- ❒ Apply for the Funded Internship Program to support low-paying or unpaid summer internships *(application deadlines in the spring)*.

Year 3: Chart Your Course (Experience & Professional Development)

This year is about firming up your intended route. What course will you take when you set sail from SU? Continue with internships and other experiential learning and begin to identify your top career options. Grow your skills and your network for the best outcome. Some industries (e.g. finance, federal employment) recruit as early as junior year.

CAREER EXPERIENCE

- ❒ Gain leadership experience in clubs, student government, or mentorship programs.
- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Complete at least one high-impact experience (internship or undergraduate research).
- ❒ Reflect on career experiences for insight on next steps: What did you enjoy about them? What didn't you like?

CAREER PLANNING

- ❒ Narrow down interests to 3–5 viable career paths or grad school options with the support of a CCPD advisor.
- ❒ Start researching and preparing for graduate programs or job applications.
- ❒ Attend career fairs and recruiting info sessions to identify tangible opportunities and build connections with employers.
- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** File your preliminary "First-Destination Plan" with your degree audit, and also be thinking about contingency plans.
- ❒ **Pre-Professional Focus: Attend Medical/Dental/Vet School Applicant Information Session, Workshop and Interview Prep sessions. Take MCAT or other health professions schools entrance exams if applying in this cycle.*

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

- ❒ Strengthen writing, presenting, teamwork, and project management skills. Your SU liberal arts curriculum gives you many opportunities to hone these transferable skills valued by employers and grad schools.
- ❒ Attend professional conferences, panels, or networking events to build professional connections in your field.

SUMMER 3

- ❒ Study abroad, research (e.g. SU SURF, SU Houston Methodist Research Internships, NSF REUs), work, shadow, volunteer, and/or continue having "curious conversations" to explore your interests and build skills.
- ❒ Apply for the Funded Internship Program to support low-paying or unpaid summer internships (*application deadlines in the spring)*.
- ❒ Connect with CCPD, open during the summer and accessible virtually, to start planning for your final year.
- ❒ **Pre-Professional Focus: Apply for SU HEALTH programs (Houston Methodist Willowbrook Observership, HMW Healthcare Administration Internship, St. David's Georgetown Hospital Shadowing Internship). Apply to medical school (earliest opportunity).*

Year 4: Set Sail (Transition & Launch)

It's almost time to hoist your sails and get underway, so make your final preparations. Implement your job or grad program search this year. Application processes can take several months, and some industries recruit well in advance, so get started at least by fall.

CAREER EXPERIENCE

- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Complete at least one more high-impact experience (e.g. internship and/or undergraduate research).

JOB/GRAD SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

- ❒ Take required grad school entrance exams (e.g. GRE, LSAT, MCAT if applying senior year).
- ❒ Attend career fairs and recruiting information sessions and research employers/grad programs thoroughly.
- ❒ Request and confirm at least 3 references from professors and/or supervisors who know you and your work well.
- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Connect with a CCPD advisor to craft your customized postgraduate plan.
- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Tailor resumes, cover letters, and personal statements for each opportunity. Share at least 1 with CCPD for feedback.
- ❒ Finalize and submit job/graduate school applications early.
- ❒ **Pre-Professional Focus: Attend Medical/Dental/Vet School Applicant Information Session, Workshop and Interview Prep sessions if applying after senior year or attend Law School Confidential.*

INTERVIEW & DECISION-MAKING

- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Schedule a practice interview with CCPD. Continue to practice as needed.
- ❒ Evaluate and negotiate offers with help of trusted advisors.
- ❒ Send thank-you notes to references/recommenders/networking contacts.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

- ❒ **WAYPOINT:** Complete the Post-Graduate Survey to share your next steps with Southwestern.
- ❒ Celebrate achievements and give thanks to your network, including on LinkedIn.
- ❒ Stay in touch with SU – soon you will be the experts other students seek out. Fair winds and following seas, Pirates.