Finding the Right Career Path for You:  
*A Grad Students Guide to Understanding What YOU Want*  

Courtesy Heather Law and Marilyn Wilson  
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http://gecd.mit.edu
Questions

What questions do I ask to begin knowing the best path for me?

Where do I start?

What information do I need?

What is my ultimate career goal?
There Isn’t a **RIGHT** Answer

- The process of figuring out your career isn’t concrete
- My goals:
  - Help you stop comparing to others
  - Help you solve your own puzzle
  - Get you thinking about the process in a different/hopefully helpful way
  - Career Office GSC and ODGE Prof. Dept Other resources
Become a Career Development Master!

- Understand the process to find Career Clarity
- Understand and use your strengths
- Be confident about your career path
- Know the best way to a great future
Goals For Today

• Create hypothesis:  
  *What are good career paths or career steps for me?*

• Career Decision Making:  
  *How do I decide?*

• Testing:  
  *How do I test my hypothesis while still at MIT?*
Questions To Inform Your Career Hypothesis

When you came to MIT for graduate school:

• What were you thinking about your career?
• Where did you ultimately see yourself after graduation?
• What were you expecting out of your graduate school experience regarding your career?
• Were you even thinking about your career?
"Behind one door is tenure - behind the other is flipping burgers at McDonald's."

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Does it feel like these are your only options?
Most Likely You Know About…

ACADEMIA!

This is because:
- Your advisors know it best
- Your advisors know how to advise you on academic positions
- It is the world you are exposed to for a long time (5+ years)

For some people Academia is a great career path because it can be:
- Intellectually stimulating
- Interesting colleagues
- Job security - if tenured
- Casual work environment
Who Cares The Most About Your Career?

YOU and ONLY YOU!!

Remember that people may care about you but they are not the most invested in your career. YOU ARE!

Not your:

• Parents
• Siblings
• Advisor
• Spouse

• Friends
• Anyone that gives you advice
• Peers
Have other’s had thoughts about what you should do?

Roger Kenneth Smith, PhD?! You put PhD on the birth certificate?!

It’s never too early to give them an advantage. Would you rather have it say, “Esquire”?
The Real Question Is.....

• What do you **YOU** want to do?

Serious Thinking And Reflection Can Help
What Other Careers Do You Know About And Why?

• Most likely you know about careers you have been exposed to.
  – What other careers have you been exposed to growing up?
  – What do/did your parents do?
  – Who were influential people in your life up until this point?
    What did they do for work?
  – What is influencing your career choice?
  – What careers have you:
    • Thought about?
    • Heard about?
    • Read about?
Jot Down A List Of Career Ideas

Remember:
- No judgment. This is for your eyes only.
- Think outside the box
- Think broad (Academia? Industry?)
- Think specific (Teaching, Research, Working with People)
How To Find More Ideas?

• Find out what other grads (alums) have done!
• Use:

  - LinkedIn
  - Online Resources For Career Ideas
  - MIT Alumni Directory
  - Doctoral Student Exit Survey

What Else Can I Do After I Graduate???
Check to see where PhD's go after graduation

http://gecd.mit.edu/resources/data
What are others doing in your field(s) of interest?

http://alum.mit.edu/
Alumni Profiles - Learn what Alums are doing in their own words
Hypothesis Testing

- You have the list of ideas
- How do you know what is right for you?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EjGUmMVFIA
Decision Making

• You can’t make a good decision without information
• Decisions are a function of information

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• What information do you need about the career ideas on your list?
Decision Making

• How have you made important decisions in the past?
• Think about the following:
  – How did you decide where to go to undergrad and graduate school?
  – How did you determine what major?
  – How did you decide on what research to focus on?
  – What has helped you make decisions in the past?

INFORMATION IS KEY
Identify The Big Decisions

What questions are you trying to decide on right now:
• What do I want to do:
  – For the summer?
  – For next semester?
  – After I graduate?
  – With my life?

Clarify question and take it one at a time!!
What Information Do You Need?

What questions would help you gain clarity on what you will do?
For example:

• Would I want to work for a non-profit?
• Would I be interested in doing research in industry?
• Would I enjoy teaching graduate and undergraduate students?
• Would I be good at doing (XYZ)?
• Would I want to live in California?

What Questions Do You Have?
Research Your Hypothesis

How do you get the answers to your questions?

• Talk To People - Network
  – Find out what it is really like to take career path you are interested in
  – Ask experts to help answer your questions

• READ About Positions

• Get Experience
Networking: What Do You Say?

- Develop a 30 second personal statement or “elevator speech”
  - This introduces yourself informally
  - A practiced speech will help you become more polished
  - Very useful at meetings, receptions, networking events where you meet many people.
Sample Networking Intro

Hi, my name is _________.

After initial introductions:
I am getting ready to graduate from MIT with a PhD degree in Biology in June. I am really interested in learning about the opportunities to work in Industry. Do you happen to know anyone in that works in industry that I might be able to talk with?
Practice

• In pairs practice your pitch

• Each partner will think about who they know that they could connect you with
Practice With Everyone You Meet

• Be sure to talk to everyone you meet
• Get in the habit of talking to people about their careers and your interests
Learn By Doing

• Not only can you learn by talking, you can learn by doing.
• Is it possible to gain experience in other areas while getting my PhD?

SHORT ANSWER = YES
Getting Experience - Outside MIT

• Internships
  – Many advisors will let you take a month off in the summer to do an internship in industry.

• Consulting
  – Some grads will work with external organizations to provide consulting services.
  – Great taste of other careers, working for industry, etc.

• Professional Associations
  – Join
  – Become board member or join committee
  – Attend conferences, networking meetings, etc.
Getting Experience - Outside MIT

- Externships
  - Take advantage of IAP and work/shadow an alum
  - alum.mit.edu
- Learn about Consulting Experiential Programs
  - BCG, McKinsey short programs
- Shadow Alums
- Site Visits
  - Visit labs, industry settings, etc.
Getting Experience—At MIT

• Volunteer
  – Check out the Public Service Center

• Competition
  – Check out competitions at MIT for more exposure

• Leadership/Organizational Opportunities
  – Join Career Fair Committee
  – GSC
  – Science Policy Initiative
  – Student Group

• Attend company presentations and info sessions
• Attend lectures, conferences at MIT in different fields
TAKE RISKS

• It may feel uncomfortable… Do it anyway!
• Practice, practice, practice
  – Makes you more comfortable
• Extend yourself even if it makes you nervous
  – More reason to do it!
Thank You!

Graduates students can meet with a counselor in Career Services at the GECD

Room 12-170 -- 617-253-4733

For Appointments/drop-ins:
http://gecd.mit.edu/services/appointment
**The Career Planning Process**

**Job Search**
Resumes, interviews, researching options, networking

**Focusing**
Which organizations are a good fit? What do I need to be competitive? Who can connect me to these organizations?

**Exploration**
What's out there? What options do I have? What jobs fit my skills? What careers and industries can use them?

**Self Assessment**
Who am I? What are my interests? What kinds of skills do I have? What are my work-related values? What is my work style?

Adapted from Peter Fiske: To Boldly Go: Practice Career Advice for Scientists, Workshop at MIT, April 1998
Modified from Stanford University Career Planning and Placement Office