

# Where to go from here

by John Barrow, Ed.D.

It's getting to the time of year when a lot of students are getting increasingly worried about what they're going to do the rest of their lives. Maybe they did poorly first term in chemistry and biology, so they're wondering whether their plans for medicine will work out. Or maybe they don't like psychology or sociology as much as they thought they would, so they're questioning their thoughts of graduate school. Or maybe their plans have never been that clearly defined but now they have to make some decisions about a major. Being in such a state of

indecision can be quite depressing. Sometimes it's hard to see one's way out of the maze. The following thoughts might give some of you an idea as to how to confront these problems.

First, you might examine how a career plan comes about. Many students have ingrained ideas that at some magical point a person says to himself "I know exactly what I want to do the rest of my life!" They feel immobilized - waiting for that flash of light to show them the way. In fact, this is not the way career plans develop. Most of us arrive at our choice of work through a lengthy series of related decisions,

not by simply making a single choice. If you stop to think about it, you've probably already made a number of decisions of considerable importance to your future choice of work, including your decision to attend university. This does not mean that you should stop evaluating particular careers but it does mean that you may not have to put yourself under the pressure of making a final decision now. If you plan your university work wisely, you should be able to leave a number of options open. You'll no doubt order these in your mind, but this more flexible plan can allow you to incorporate new data

as you go along.

A second and related thought is that this kind of planning requires action on your part. My feeling is that you cannot simply sit back and hope the cobwebs will clear from your mind. Hard work is required to know yourself, to know the "world of work" and to make decisions. Knowing yourself takes a lot of thought. You might try surveying all of your past experiences that have some bearing on occupational preferences - look at things like courses you have taken, part-time or volunteer jobs you have held, hobbies, reading, and other leisure time activities.

What do you like the best? In what activities do you perform best? Thinking is no good in a vacuum so you have to continually get new data by acting. For example, if you think you like working with kids, you might do some volunteer work at the children's hospital or try outreach tutoring. If you think you might like psychology or political science, try a course in it. A good trial experience is one of the best means of assessing your interest and competence in an area of work or study.

Knowing the "world of work", includes learning the variety of different occupations that are possible and finding out what people in particular occupations actually do, how much they are paid, how and where they are trained, etc. There are a number of written sources of occupational information, including some excellent general descriptions of occupations which we have in the Counselling Centre. These can be useful in learning more about specific occupations of interest or in searching for ones which might be appealing. A good selection of university Calendars is available on the first floor of the Killam library. Students interested in professional and academic areas might find it interesting to browse through journals and periodicals in their fields of interest. The kinds of articles, advertisements, job announcements, etc. can tell a lot about the occupations. Surveying the job notices put out by Manpower can provide useful information on qualifications necessary for different kinds of work. A good way to get some first-hand information is to talk with people employed in work that interested you. Ask them for specific descriptions of experiences and anecdotes rather than letting them give you jargon and generalities. You must remember, of course, that you are getting one person's opinion in these interviews, so you should concentrate on learning facts rather than accepting their conclusions at face value. If you keep your eyes and ears open, your day-to-day experiences present you with a lot of opportunity to increase your knowledge about occupations. Watch what goes on in the hospital if you have to go for tests. Ask people with whom you happen to talk, about their courses, jobs, careers, etc. The last point is that you can never know for sure how something will turn out until you try it. Knowing yourself and having as much data as you can will reduce the risk, but there is risk with every decision. At some point, you have to weigh the pros and cons and commit yourself to one

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