

Introduction

Knowledge is a process of piling up facts; wisdom lies in their simplification.

Martin Fischer

When I started overseeing the Career Planning for College Students message board on MonsterTRAK (<http://www.monstertrak.com>) back in 1999, I thought I would spend most of my time responding to relatively routine how-to questions: how to write a good résumé, how to do well in interviews, perhaps how to pick the right major or land a great internship, and the like. I also thought I would get most of my questions from college seniors and, especially, recent graduates. Posts from freshmen and sophomores, I figured, would be few and far between.

I was wrong—on both counts.

Sure, today's college students are asking their fair share of "how" questions where their future careers are concerned. I did the exact same thing when I was in college, especially right before and in the year or so after I graduated from Minnesota State University Moorhead in 1990. But lately—especially after the tragedies of September 11, 2001, the recession that followed, and the war in Iraq—I have sensed a significant change in the tone, substance, and timing of college students' career questions. The routine "how" questions have taken a backseat to the more troubling—and far more complex—"why" questions. Moreover, the "I've got time" attitude has taken a backseat to "I gotta get going ... now." The college students of today aren't waiting until senior year or beyond to focus on their careers like ... well, like I did when I was in college! They are starting as freshmen, or even as high-schoolers, either on their own or, increasingly, with a shove from their parents.

So as I was thinking about the career book I wanted to write for college students—the one you now hold in your hands—two things were crystal clear to me:

- My book would need to meet you where you are at right now—while you are still *in* college.
- My book would need to cover not only the “how to” but also the “why do”—as in:
 - Why do I need to bother learning about my interests, skills and abilities, values, and personality?
 - Why do I have to be careful about how I view my career decisions over the short and long terms?
 - Why do I have to leave college with experience under my belt? (And why do employers expect that anyway? We’re talking *entry-level* jobs here—hello?)
 - Why do I need to work so hard to convince prospective employers of my skills and my self-motivation?
 - Why do I have to learn how to “network” when I can easily find job openings online or in the newspaper?
 - Why do I need to join a professional association in my field (especially when I am already basically broke)?
 - Why do the careers of today unfold the way they do, and why do the employers of today think the way they do?

Career Wisdom for College Students is my best attempt at covering the why along with the how—in a way you can use right now.

I begin in Part I by encouraging you to **Take a Look Around—a Real Look Around!** Perhaps the thought of learning more about yourself and exploring what is *really* out there in the world of work has never even remotely occurred to you. Well, now it has (or it will once you jump into Part I). Your college years represent your very best chance in life to go shopping when it comes to your career. If you are willing to look around a bit, you may quite literally end up pursuing a career tomorrow that you haven’t yet heard of today.

In Part II, **Be Careful of What You Think You Know!**, I challenge you to identify the beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions you have about yourself and various careers, and to see the amazing power that various information source can have over your career decisions. One snotty comment from your otherwise harmless roommate could easily convince you to abandon the art-history major you have chosen; I have seen it happen. The same goes for the advice you get from your parents, the media, and elsewhere. Advice is wonderful—if it is accurate and relevant!

Part III of the book, **Build Your Skills and Experience through Hands-on Activities**, will teach you about the many ways you can pick up essential career-related experience while you are in college. It will also help you identify the critical skills you gain from those activities—the skills employers will be looking for when you are approaching them about jobs after graduation.

We wrap up in Part IV, **Land the Job You Really Want**, by discussing how you can get into the heads of prospective employers—and why it is so critical for you to do so during your job search. If you understand where an employer is coming from and why, you will be able to approach him or her in a way that makes you stand out from your peers, who will be busy *asking for something from* the employer instead of *offering something to* the employer ... like you are.

I use the term “wisdom” in the book’s title for reasons that are purposeful as well as personal: purposeful in the sense that the information in the book targets the *most critical* career issues you need to understand as a college student—the big-picture lessons you won’t learn elsewhere—and personal in the sense that I wish someone had pointed these lessons out to me when I was in college. It would have saved me a lot of heartache—and it would have rescued me from moving back home

with my parents for a few months after graduation, a time when I was one lost and depressed puppy thanks to my career ignorance. As I look back now, my lack of knowledge was understandable. But that did not make it any less painful, and it certainly made me wish I had some help. If *Career Wisdom for College Students* does nothing more than help you avoid the misery I went through—and the confusion I see among students each day on MonsterTRAK’s Career Planning for College Students message board—then I will have more than accomplished my mission in writing the book.

And it is a mission as far as I am concerned. In the world of work you will sometimes hear the phrase, “It’s nothing personal; it’s just business.” For me—whether I am talking to college students through the pages of this book, in my articles, the message board online, or even face-to-face—it is not just business, it is personal. Why? Because it was personal for me when I was in college, it continued to be personal for me when I became a career counselor, and it remains personal for me to this day as I interact with college students who are typically asking for nothing more than some guidance and perhaps a bit of empathy as well. I hope you will find both within these pages—and that you will share the career wisdom you gain along the way with all the (other) college students in your life, both now and in the future.