

CAREER CHATS:

TIPS FOR HAVING INFORMED CAREER CONVERSATIONS

PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

This document was created to help you navigate conversations regarding selecting an academic program as it related to career choice. Of course, time is not always available for in-depth discussions, and nobody is expecting you to become a career counsellor. Yet our conversations can assist the many student who choose to withdraw from their program do so because of “poor program fit”. The following categories of prospective students are not mutually exclusive, but each category may generate a different line of questioning and thereby help avoid hidden assumptions.

Asking open and reflective questions, raising prospective students’ awareness (self, program, and career), and demonstrating how to make sense of program information is invaluable. We hope you find this document useful and look forward to any feedback you may have.

WHAT IS CAREER DECISION-MAKING?

It is the process of making a well-informed choice that is determined by several factors:

- Self-awareness of abilities, interests, work styles, etc.
- Level of experience in the workforce
- Language ability and academic preparation
- Prior challenges, obstacles or unmet expectations in previous employment
- Familiarity with the Canadian workplace, labour market, and job requirements

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. **Q:** What made you decide to explore post-secondary education at this time in your life?
A: Check out the categories on subsequent pages for additional resources related to this question.
2. **Q:** Which programs are you considering and how much do you know about the programs?
How have you researched the program/field?
A: Refer to the program descriptions and show students how to review the information carefully, perhaps with a demonstration. You might also refer to a program contact or an Open House. If you notice the student is choosing seemingly unrelated programs, you can refer them for career counselling.
3. **Q:** What would be important for you to know about a program to help with making a decision? E.g., some people want to hear about the course content, while others may want to know the different jobs that graduates pursue.
A: Depending on the student’s answer to this question, you can direct them to program descriptions, “Career and Pathways”, or more broadly, students can search programs by area of interest online: algonquincollege.com/future-students/programs/areas-of-interest.

QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS WHO ARE...

UNEMPLOYED OR CHRONICALLY UNDEREMPLOYED

1. What jobs have you had in the past? What did you like and dislike about them?
2. What has been most challenging for you in finding meaningful work?
3. How do you think completing a program at Algonquin College could help you overcome those challenges?

Try to understand how their responses relate to the programs they are considering.

Prospective students generally appreciate an honest, yet diplomatic response. If completing a college program does not address the obstacle, then they may require either employment support or career counselling to address the concern.

NEW TO CANADA

1. What past educational and work experience do you have? Have you had your transcripts evaluated by an agency such as World Education Services or International Credential Assessment Service?
2. Are you looking to stay in the same field in Canada or change fields?
3. Do you have a short-term employment goal that is different from your long-term goal?
4. Have you received any services from the Ottawa Immigrant Serving Organizations (e.g. Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization or LASI World Skills)?
5. Have you explored the admission requirements for programs you are considering?

Many newcomers have come from countries with very different educational and labour markets than Canada; you may need to provide some information on the differences regarding credentials, e.g. **Certificate vs. Graduate Certificate**

1. If someone hasn't explored WES or ICAS provide them with information on these services. Having credentials assessed can grant access to programs that require previous education or admission requirements.
2. If the person is looking to stay in the same occupation, you could refer them to information regarding licensing, professional associations or designations. Many of these sites have a section for internationally educated professionals. Ask if the person has accessed employment supports for newcomers - a good first step before choosing additional education.
3. Sometimes short-term employment goals will vary greatly from longer-term wishes, especially if income stability is the primary motivating factor.
4. Explore what services they have received, what they found helpful/unhelpful and what suggestions they were given. If they have not used these services, encourage them to do so and, if possible, explain the benefits.
5. If they have not explored admission requirements, demonstrate how to find and interpret this information.

QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS WHO ARE...

DIRECT ENTRY

1. Why are you interested in post-secondary at this time?
2. How much of going to school at this time is somebody else's goal for you?
3. Have you had any experiences related to this program? **e.g. High school courses, co-op, volunteer work**
4. How much time have you spent researching this program? What do you recall most about the program?

1. Questions 1 & 2 get to the motivation factor, i.e. how much of this is their own desire vs. meeting societal, peer or family expectations. If their motivation is largely external, you may ask how they have dealt with academic challenges or bouts of low motivation in previous studies.
2. Familiarity with the subject matter or required skills is crucial in some programs more than others. A total lack of familiarity might suggest considering a General Arts & Science Program, gap year exploration, or volunteer work.
3. Some students pick a program in haste, so taking time to figure out just how much they read and understood about the program can be a tremendous help.

MATURE STUDENTS/CAREER CHANGERS

1. Describe any previous post-secondary education.
2. What kinds of skills and tasks have you enjoyed working in the past? Which would you rather avoid?
3. What are your expectations upon graduation?
4. What is most important to you now as you consider this change?

1. Previous post-secondary experiences, both positive and negative, could help inform your discussion around the rigor of the program.
2. Building on strengths or understanding their motivation to develop new skills can help with program fit.
3. Help the client manage employment expectations for new graduates and possibly explain non-linear career options (e.g. not all graduates of X program become Y, some end up doing...)

INTERNATIONAL

1. Have you had any previous post-secondary education?
2. What criteria are you using to pick a program?
3. Who is influencing your career choice?

1. Does the student's prior education make sense given their program expectations and career goals?
2. Their response to this may return to the point of realistic expectations based on perceived income or ease of finding work in their country of origin (which may be vastly different than in Canada).
3. While in Canada, career choice is largely viewed as individualistic; in some countries and cultures it is not. Students' decisions may largely be determined by family members or private recruiter who have little knowledge or incentive to understand the Canadian labour market. You can explore their level of awareness of programs and careers, or you may ask how they plan to be successful in a program or career that they may not be truly interested in.

RESOURCES

General

Upgrading

Upgrading options to obtain admission requirements

algonquincollege.com/access

(online only option)

ilc.org

Newcomers

Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO)

ociso.org/employment/

LASI World Skills

ottawa-worldskills.org/

International Credential Assessments

World Education Services

wes.org

International Credential Assessment Service of Canada (especially if the prospective student is trying to use international high school transcripts for admissions)

icascanada.ca

Labour Market Information

Graduate Employment Reports

algonquincollege.com/employment/graduate-employment-reports

Government of Canada

jobbank.gc.ca/trend-analysis

Government of Ontario

ontario.ca/page/labour-market

Ottawa Employment Hub

ottawaemploymenthub.ca

Funding

Ontario Student Assistance Program

ontario.ca/page/osap-ontario-student-assistance-program

Second Career Funding

ontario.ca/page/second-career

Algonquin College Financial Aid

algonquincollege.com/financial-aid

Employment Supports

algonquincollege.com/employment

www.ontario.ca/page/employment-ontario

Career Planning

algonquincollege.com/careerclarity

jobbank.gc.ca/career-planning

ontario.ca/page/choose-career