

5 Low-Key Career Ideas for the Holiday Break

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One of the fastest ways to get a roll of the eyes (or worse!) from your college student is to suggest that she work on career planning activities over the December-January holiday break. After all, she might say, it's called a "break" for a reason.

Fair enough ... to a point. Then again, your student isn't going to gain much from three straight weeks of television or video games, either.

So why not look for a middle ground, and try a few simple—and subtle!—strategies to encourage your student to devote a **little** break time and energy to career concerns?

Here are five low-key ways you can do just that for (and with) your student:

1. Ask questions to pinpoint critical skills

It's been several months since the school year began. What courses did your student take during the fall semester, and what out-of-class experiences (on campus and off) did he pursue?

Perhaps more importantly, what new skills did he gain as a result of these activities? In particular, did your student learn or further build the *soft skills* today's employers demand from new college graduates?

- Communication skills (written and verbal)
- Interpersonal skills
- Teamwork skills
- Analytical skills
- Leadership skills

What skills did your student use that came easily to him, and which experiences did he feel especially connected to and passionate about?

Pose some questions that focus on what your student can do back at college to gain experience that will help him boost the skills he enjoys using the most. It can be as simple as setting a goal to find out what volunteer opportunities are available through campus organizations, or designing a list of questions he can take to the campus career center to find out how to search for an internship.

With just a few casual questions, and some close listening, you can help your student understand how activities lead to skills and passions—and skills and passions lead to future jobs.

2. Invite a key person to your home

Do you have someone in your life—a relative, friend, work colleague, or associate—who is working in a career that seems to interest (or might interest) your college student? If so, invite this special someone to stop by for a visit while your student is home.

Sometimes, all you have to do to be helpful to your student is make potential career connections possible—and then stand back and watch them unfold naturally!

3. Encourage targeted Web surfing

Will your student be using the Internet over the break? (Does the sun rise in the east?!) If so, encourage her to spend a bit of surfing time on career-related sites.

She could, for example, read through interesting job descriptions on a site like [Monster](#), or see what careers her college major might lead to on a site like [“What Can I Do with a Major in...”](#) at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington.

4. Suggest a trip to the bookstore

Step inside any major bookstore—such as Barnes & Noble or Borders—and you’ll find a “Careers” section that stretches far beyond job search and resume writing books.

So if your student has only a vague idea of what career he would like to someday pursue, the bookstore can be the best place to discover specific possibilities. Does your student love animals? Then *Careers for Animal Lovers & Other Zoological Types* (McGraw-Hill, 2000) might be a great addition to his personal library. Is he passionate about the environment? Then he’ll love a book like *Great Jobs for Environmental Studies Majors* (McGraw-Hill, 2002).

5. Get beyond “What’s Your Major?”

Everyone and their brother will be asking your student the all-time most-popular (and perhaps most-annoying) holiday break question: “So ... what’s your major?” And they might well follow up with the second-most-annoying question: “What will you do with **that**?”

As you may or may not know firsthand, your student’s major doesn’t really predict or limit her future career in most cases. Typically, employers are less concerned with your student’s major than they are with her demonstrable skills and abilities, personality traits, experiences, and goals.

So whether your student has chosen a major or is still exploring options, help her understand that her major is only a small part of what she has to offer to future employers. Indeed, if your student returns to school knowing she has skills that lead to many career options—no matter what her major—you will have given her one of the most valuable holiday gifts imaginable: optimism and peace of mind.