

Lesson 7: Making Informed Career Decisions



Overview

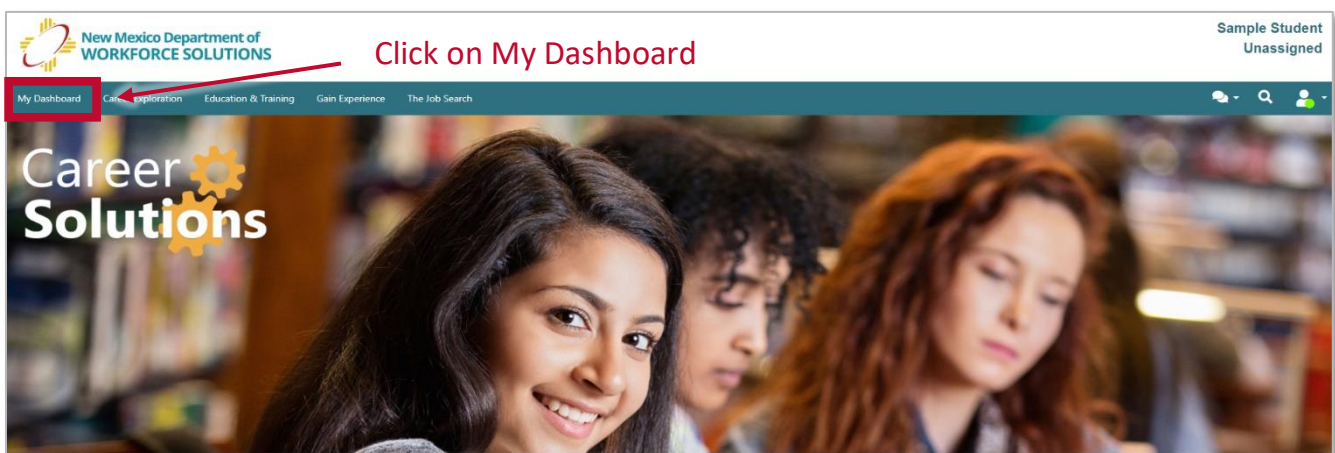
By now, students have collected a great deal of information that can be applied to their career decisions. They have explored personal factors, including their work interests, values, and goals, as well as external factors, focusing primarily on the labor market. To be successful in selecting careers, they will need to develop strategies for incorporating all of this information into the decision-making process. Because each piece of information is relevant and critical, students should be encouraged to review all information to determine the significance of each element in their personal career choice. This is an invaluable exercise that can help ensure that students make informed decisions that meet as many of their personal needs as possible, as well as capitalize on the opportunities available in their local regions.

This lesson contains....

- Information on how to access and use the My Dashboard feature.
- A review of personal and external factors as part of informed career decisions.
- Methods for helping students organize and consolidate career information.
- Strategies for applying multiple forms of career information to the decision-making process.
- A review of next steps for students using insights gained from this lesson.

How to Use This Tool

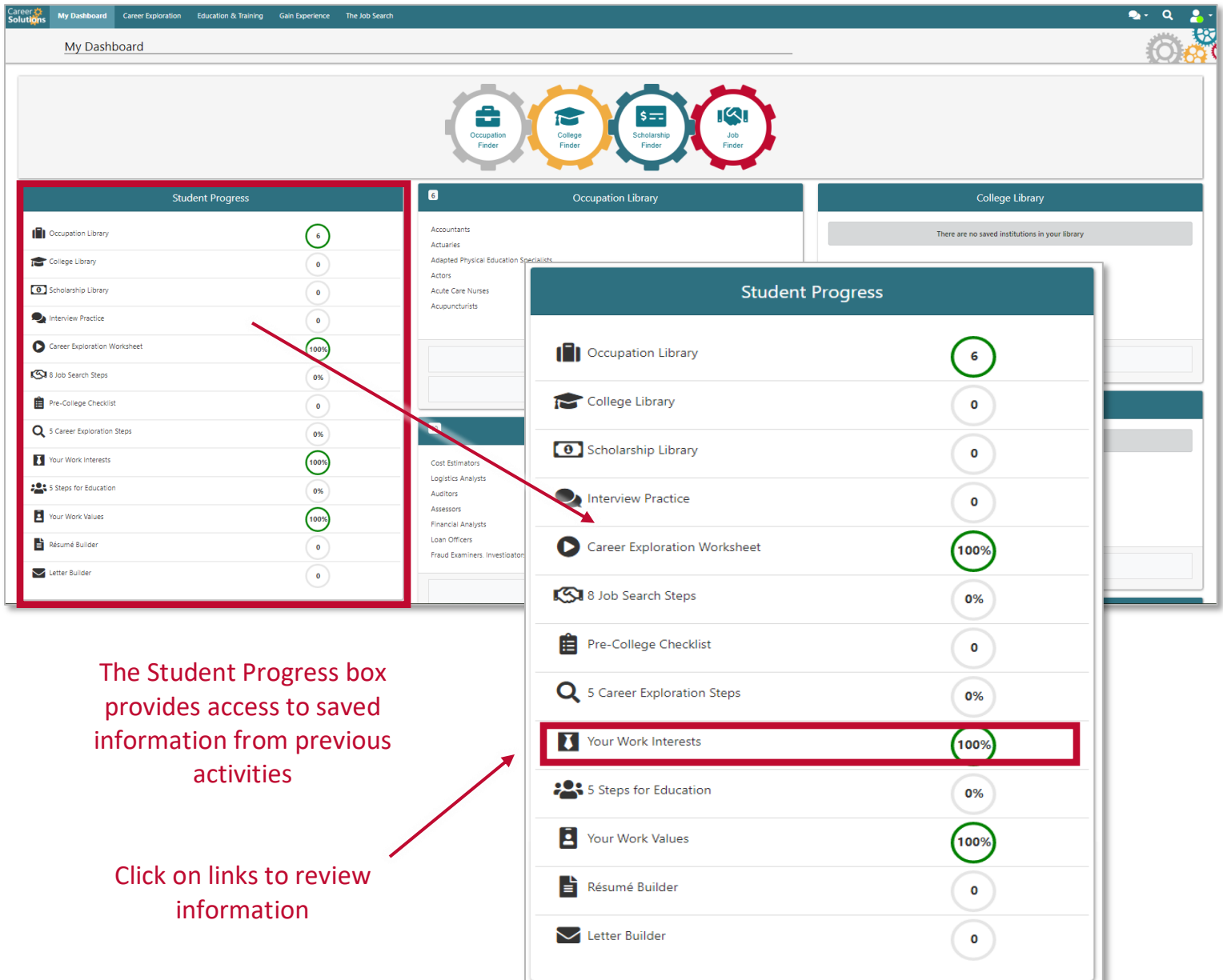
Before beginning, be sure to sign into the system. The My Dashboard feature should appear after signing in. It can also be accessed by clicking on My Dashboard at the top of the screen.



The My Dashboard feature offers a place for students to review the work they have done in the Career Solutions system. There are many blocks (or widgets) on this page that summarize progress and display helpful information. For this exercise, it is recommended that students focus on the following blocks.

- Student Progress
- Occupation Library
- Related Occupations
- Occupation Finder

In the Student Progress box, information pertaining to previous activities can be reviewed. Saved information should be available in the Occupation Library, Career Exploration Worksheet, Work Interests and Work Values.



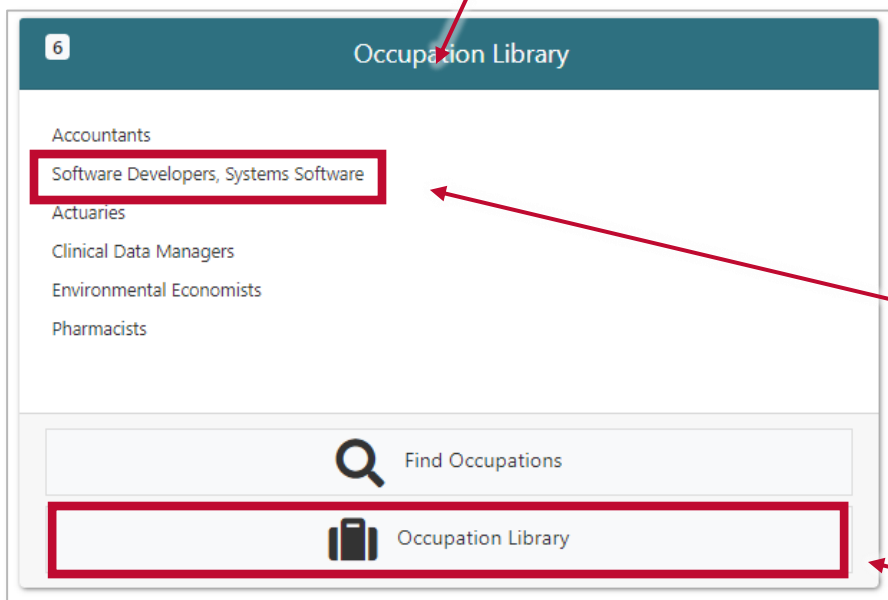
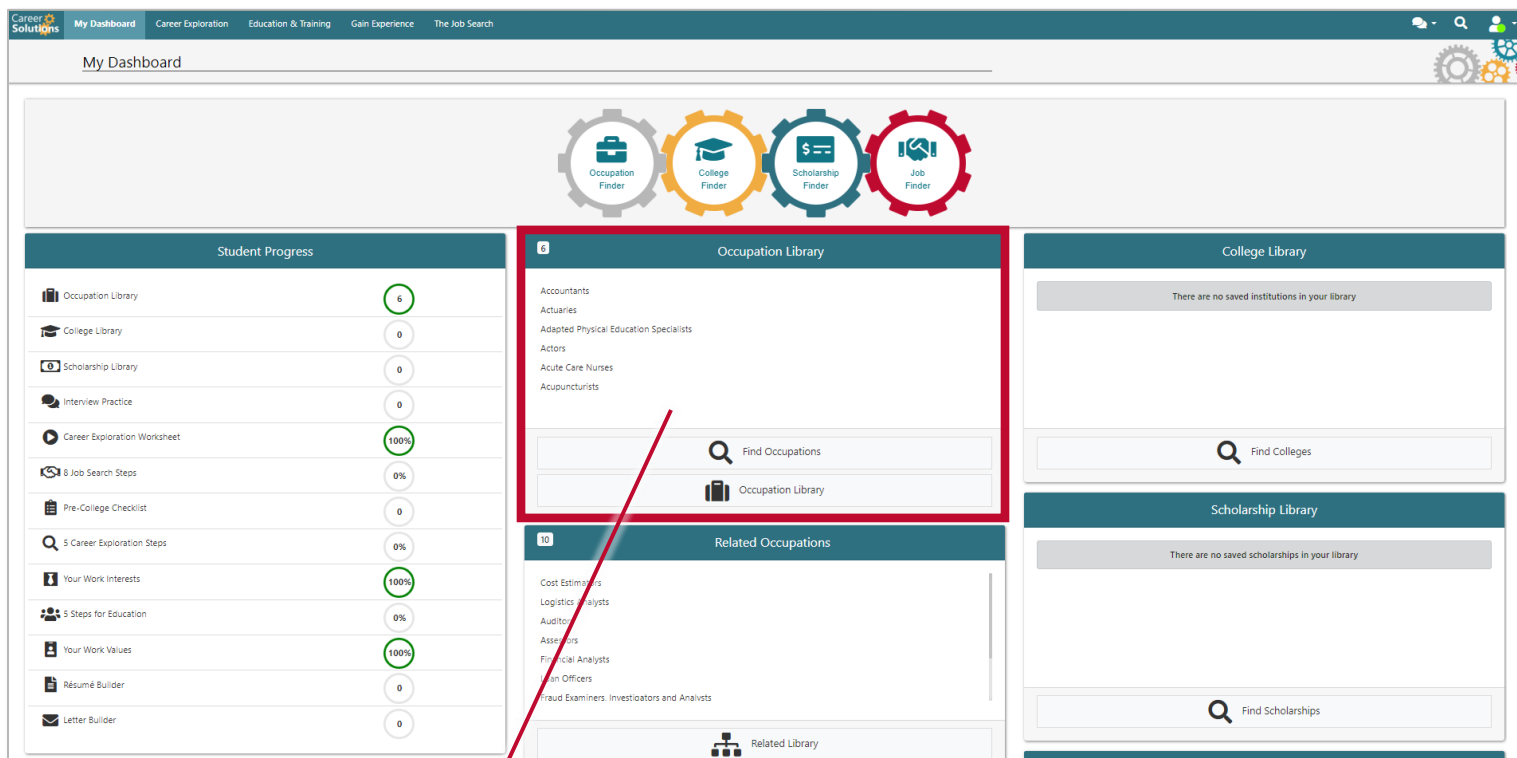
The screenshot shows the 'My Dashboard' interface with a navigation bar at the top containing 'My Dashboard', 'Career Exploration', 'Education & Training', 'Gain Experience', and 'The Job Search'. Below the navigation bar are four gear icons for 'Occupation Finder', 'College Finder', 'Scholarship Finder', and 'Job Finder'. The main content area is divided into three sections: 'Student Progress', 'Occupation Library', and 'College Library'. The 'Student Progress' section is highlighted with a red border and contains a list of activities with progress indicators. A red arrow points from this section to a larger, detailed view of the 'Student Progress' widget. In this detailed view, the 'Your Work Interests' item is highlighted with a red border. Below the screenshot, two red text boxes provide instructions: 'The Student Progress box provides access to saved information from previous activities' and 'Click on links to review information', with red arrows pointing to the 'Your Work Interests' item in the detailed view.

Activity	Progress
Occupation Library	6
College Library	0
Scholarship Library	0
Interview Practice	0
Career Exploration Worksheet	100%
8 Job Search Steps	0%
Pre-College Checklist	0
5 Career Exploration Steps	0%
Your Work Interests	100%
5 Steps for Education	0%
Your Work Values	100%
Résumé Builder	0
Letter Builder	0

The Student Progress box provides access to saved information from previous activities

Click on links to review information

The Occupation Library block displays saved occupations. This block can be used to quickly access detailed information about potential career choices. It also offers quick access to the Occupation Library tool.

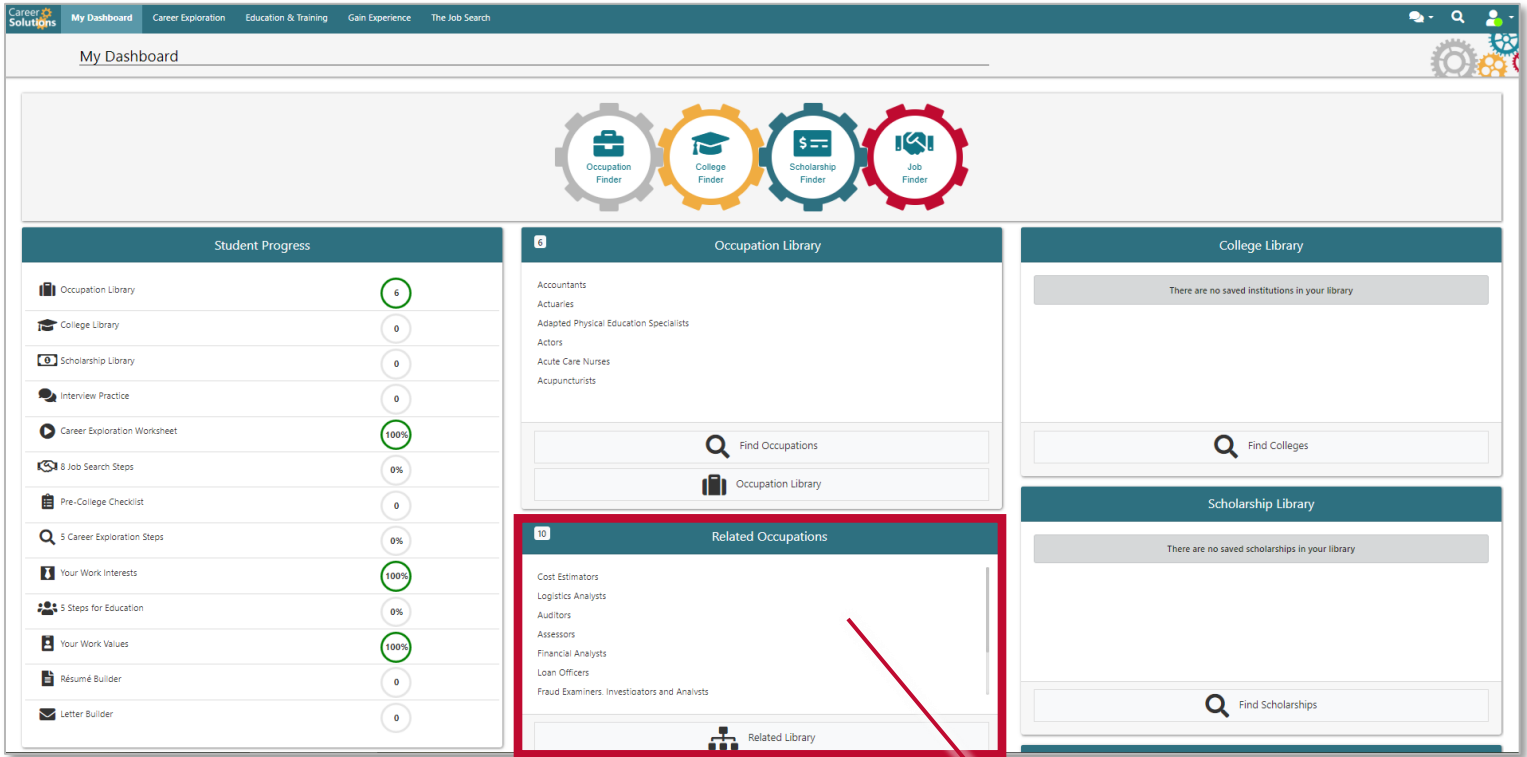


The Occupation Library box lists saved occupations

Click on links to access occupation information

Click on the link at the bottom for quick access to the Occupation Library

The Related Occupations box displays a list of occupations that are related to those saved in the Occupations Library. Detailed occupation information can be explored by clicking links within the box. There is also a link at the bottom that provides quick access to the Related Occupations page (that is part of the Occupation Library).



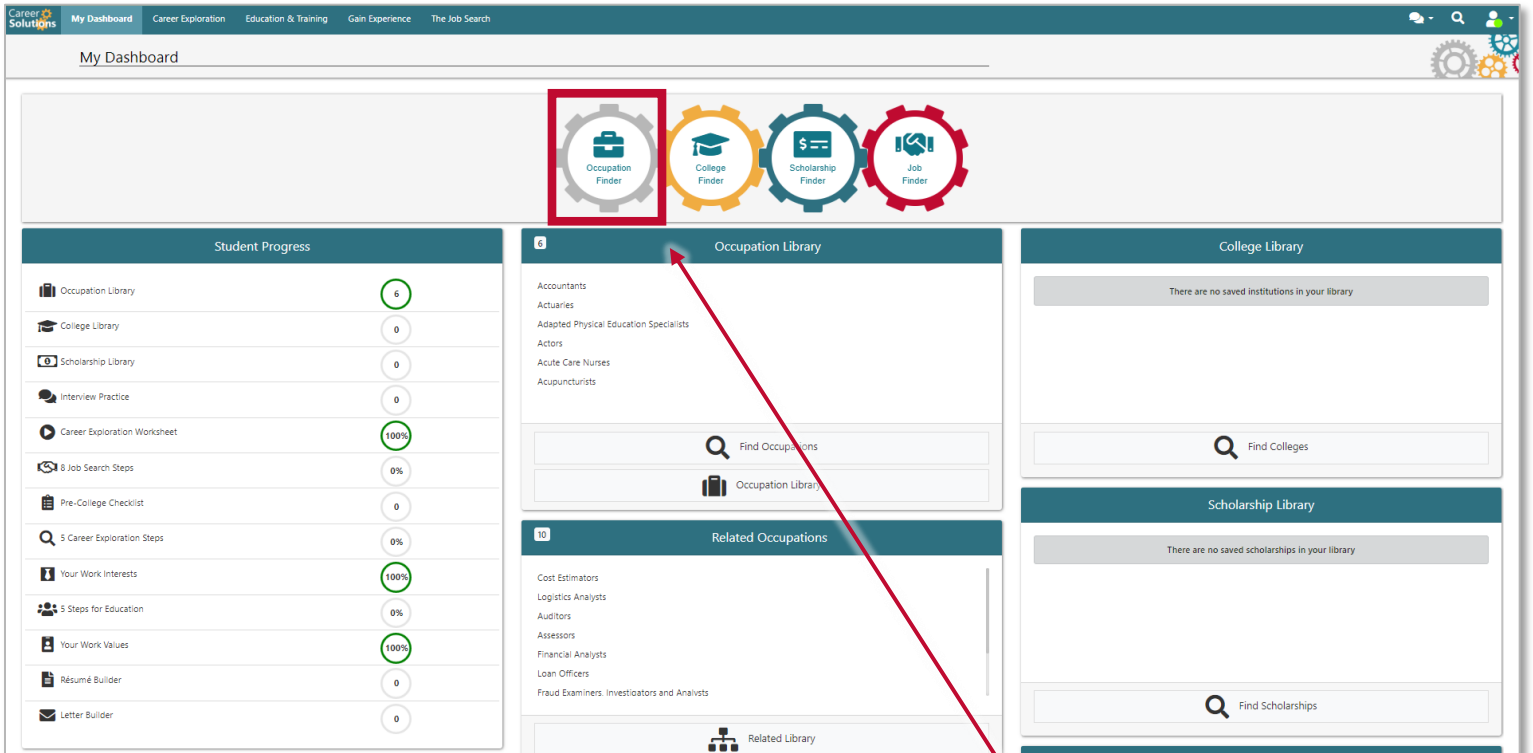
The Related Occupations box displays occupations that are related to those saved in the Occupations Library

Click on links to access occupation information

Click the bottom link for quick access to the Related Occupations page



The last area of the My Dashboard feature that can be most useful to students at this stage of career exploration is the Occupation Finder. A link to this tool is provided at the top of the page. Students can use this tool when they are ready to explore additional careers and add new occupations to their library.



Click on Occupation Finder to explore and add occupations to the library

Connecting with Students

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will be given the opportunity to...

- Review the components of an informed career decision.
- Evaluate the personal and external factors that can affect their employment success.
- Consolidate and apply their personal and external factors to the selection of careers.
- List top career choices and compare these occupations to determine a primary career path.
- Determine next steps in developing a career plan.

Classroom Discussions and Presentations

Introduction

This is the point in the career exploration process where everything comes together. Students can gather what they have discovered about their personal and external factors and begin applying this knowledge to the selection of a career. This involves a few steps, with the first focusing on consolidating and organizing information. From here, students will need to evaluate this information and determine the best use of the information in supporting their career decisions. Once a method or approach has been identified, students can use this as a lens in which to evaluate careers. The ultimate goal is to help focus their efforts and provide direction to their career search so they can more easily identify career targets with the greatest potential for employment success.

Talking Points

Below are some helpful comments to share with students.

- By now, you have gathered a lot of information related to personal factors and external factors that can play a role in achieving employment success.
- Each piece of information is relevant and critical to making an informed career decision. So, it is important to take time to review and evaluate everything.
- Bringing it all together to create one big picture can provide some clarity that will be needed to determine how you will use this information to select a career.
- Organizing this information and determining a method for using this information can help simplify your career search and focus your efforts on identifying careers with the greatest potential.
- Skipping this organizational step can result in focusing on only one component or another, like income or work environment, which can neglect other critical pieces that can affect your future success.
- It is best to take the time now to develop a global strategy that incorporates as much information as possible to help ensure you make the best decision possible.

Discussion Questions

As a class or in small groups, have students reflect on the following questions. Help students talk about and work through their positive and negative feelings regarding career exploration.

- What has been the most helpful thing that you have learned about yourself or the career exploration process that could have the greatest impact on your career decision? Why?
- What information do you think will be the least useful in making a career decision? Why?
- What might help you organize everything that you have learned and develop a more complete picture of your personal and external factors?
- What strategies might you use to incorporate both personal and external factors in career decisions?
- Do you believe that you will be able to find a career that accommodates most of your personal factors, while also taking into account external factors?

Exploring the System

After discussing what students have learned about the career exploration process and helping them work through their positive and negative perspectives, they can be introduced to the My Dashboard feature in Career Solutions.

The “How to Use this Tool” section above provides a summary of useful information to share with students.

It is recommended that teachers and instructors...

- Encourage students to sign into the site to ensure they can access and save data.
- Help students locate the My Dashboard feature.
- Review the basic features of this tool, including how to navigate the information blocks.
- Assist students in identifying information that is most useful to explore on this page.
- Discuss how this tool can be used to explore information saved from previous activities.

Classroom Activity

Making Informed Career Decisions

This is the moment we have all been waiting for – decision time! Students can now bring everything together and engage in the process of making informed career decisions. While seemingly simple, this can be a relatively complex task. After all, students have amassed a collection of various types of information and seeing the relationship between these pieces can be challenging. Therefore, they will need assistance in evaluating what they have learned and using this information to develop effective career search strategies. Activities that provide the opportunity for students to gather and review their career factors, as well as guide them through the use of these factors, can help them understand the value of the career exploration process. The enhanced sense of direction and purpose that emerges from this process is a valuable outcome that can promote career choices with the greatest potential for employment success.

To locate the My Dashboard feature, review the “How to Use this Tool” section above.

It is recommended that teachers and instructors...

- Celebrate the opportunity to use insights from previous activities in making informed career decisions.
- Discuss the importance of incorporating personal and external factors into career exploration.
- Review the My Dashboard feature in Career Solutions.
- Identify the purpose of this feature as a place where saved information can be easily accessed.
- Provide an opportunity for students to explore this tool in the classroom or at home.
- Encourage students to complete the Making Informed Career Decisions sheet (see below).
- Assist students in understanding the benefits and limitations of using focused career exploration strategies in selecting potential careers.

Exploring the Results

In completing this activity, students will have had the opportunity to develop: (1) a list of specific personal factors, sorted from most important to least important, (2) a definition of high-value careers, along with insight into the personal significance of the labor market as an external factor, and (3) a list of at least five top career choices that take into account both their personal and external factors. The ability to complete these tasks is no minor achievement. Students have progressed through a long journey of self-discovery and exploration of various factors that have led them to this point. Taking a moment to recognize this achievement with students can provide validation of their efforts and recognize the career exploration skills they have acquired.

At the same time, students will need to be cautioned that the outcome of this activity does not have to be final. Rather, the list they have generated is a suggestion of potential career choices. The career exploration process can and should continue. Apprenticeship opportunities, volunteer experiences, and work-based learning can be embraced as additional discovery opportunities. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to experiment with different search strategies that could reveal other career opportunities. Rather than see this activity as an endpoint, it can be perceived as a starting point to more enriched career exploration.

Overall, students have accomplished much and they stand at the edge of enormous potential and opportunity. Celebration and excitement are often part of the story. Empowering them with tools that will support their journey can help them realize their potential and achieve fulfillment in their future career choice.

Making Informed Career Decisions

Instructions: Use the My Dashboard feature in Career Solutions to explore information that you have saved from previous activities. Use this information to answer the questions below.

1. Complete the table below. (**Note:** This table was completed in an earlier activity. It can be recreated or you can simply insert your responses from the previous activity.)

Work Interests Assessment	Work Values Assessment	Why I Work
List your top <u>two</u> work interests and provide a brief definition of each.	List your top <u>two</u> work values and provide a brief definition of each.	Briefly describe your future lifestyle and list the annual income you will need to support your lifestyle.

2. Review each of these factors and sort them from most important to least important – 1 being most important and 5 being least important. For the Why I Work section, you can simply list, “My Lifestyle Goals” and rate this anywhere from 1-5 in the list below. (**Note:** This table was completed in an earlier activity. It can be recreated or you can simply insert your responses from the previous activity.)

1

2

3

4

5

3. What are high-value careers? What types of labor market information can you look at to help you identify high-value careers?

4. For you, how important is it that your future career is a high-value career? Would you consider a career with low job availability or low wage? Why or why not?

After answering question 1-4, you should now have an idea of your top personal factors and a sense of how important high-value careers are to you. There are many ways to use this information and no one way is better than another. Below is one approach that you might find helpful.

Based on your answer to question 4, determine whether a high-value career is essential and choose one of the decision-making pathways below. Answer the questions for your chosen pathway.

High-Value Career is Essential



High-Value Career is Not Essential



Questions for “High-Value Career is Essential”

Choosing this pathway means that your career choices will initially be screened to determine whether they are high-value. Those that do not meet the criteria for a high-value career will be eliminated from your search. Careers can then be evaluated based on their fit with your personal factors to make a career decision.

1. Examine the saved careers in your Occupation Library. Choose three careers that are high-value careers with several annual openings and median wage above \$35,000.

2. Use the Compare Occupations tool in Career Solutions to compare these occupations.
 - Write the occupation titles in the top row of the table below.
 - List your personal factors, in order of importance, in the first column.
 - Review each occupation in Career Solutions and mark an X in the table for each factor match that you find. For this activity, it is best to focus on the following categories in Career Solutions – (1) Interests, (2) Values, and (3) Wage (wage is related to lifestyle goals).
 - Add the number of X’s for each occupation and write the total in the last row.
 - The occupation(s) with the most X’s can be considered a better personal fit.
 - If a tie is found, the occupation with more X’s at the top of the list is a better personal fit.

Personal Factor	Occupation 1	Occupation 2	Occupation 3
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
Personal Factor Match Total			

3. Which of the three occupations did you find to be the better fit? Would you consider pursuing this occupation? Why or why not?

Questions for “High-Value Career is Not Essential”

Choosing this pathway means that your career choices will initially be screened to determine whether they are a good fit with your personal factors. Those that do not align with your personal factors will be eliminated from your search. Careers can then be evaluated with regard to the labor market to make a career decision.

1. Examine the saved careers in your Occupation Library. Choose three careers that you believe have the greatest potential to match your personal interests, values, and goals.

Use the Compare Occupations tool in Career Solutions to compare these occupations.

- Write the occupation titles in the top row of the table below.
- List your personal factors, in order of importance, in the first column.
- Review each occupation in Career Solutions and mark an X in the table for each factor match that you find. For this activity, it is best to focus on the following categories in Career Solutions – (1) Interests, (2) Values, and (3) Wage (wage is related to lifestyle goals).
- Add the number of X’s for each occupation and write the total in the last row.
- The occupation(s) with the most X’s can be considered a better personal fit.
- If a tie is found, the occupation with more X’s at the top of the list is a better personal fit.

Personal Factor	Occupation 1	Occupation 2	Occupation 3
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
Personal Factor Match Total			

2. Examine annual openings and median wage for these occupations. Which of these, if any, meet the criteria for a high-value career?
3. Based on your review of personal fit and labor market data, which of these occupations would you consider pursuing? Why?

For All Decision-Making Pathways

1. Repeat the steps in your chosen decision-making pathway a few more times and work on generating a list of three potential careers. Arrange this list with your top career choice listed first.

Occupation Title	Why is this a good career choice for you?

2. Did you think this activity resulted in the best possible career choices for you? Why or why not?

3. What additional factors might you want to consider before making a career decision?

Next Steps

At the end of the lesson, take a moment to review and assess the learning objectives. Engage students in a brief discussion of the learning opportunities that were made available in the classroom.

In this lesson, students were provided the opportunity to...

- Review the components of an informed career decision.
- Evaluate the personal and external factors that can affect their employment success.
- Consolidate and apply their personal and external factors to the selection of careers.
- List top career choices and compare these occupations to determine a primary career path.

After providing a brief overview, encourage students to...

- Continue their reflection on personal and external factors that can affect employment success.
- Think about factors most relevant to them and the types of occupations that fit their needs.
- Determine how they might use this information in selecting a career.
- Prepare for future lessons that will focus on developing an effective career plan.

Components of an Effective Career Plan

 <p>Education and Training</p>	 <p>Financial Resources</p>	 <p>Support Services</p>	 <p>Work Experience</p>
 <p>Job Search Strategies</p>	 <p>Motivation and Drive</p>		