

Making Career Decisions the Ignatian Way

Decisions, decisions. The word itself causes angst for so many of us and yet there's no need to be fearful. Just as the decision-making model identified by St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, has provided an effective approach for hundreds of years, it can also benefit students and alumni who face career decisions.

St. Ignatius is credited with uncovering a style of decision-making that includes these steps:

- Identify the concern which is prompting a decision
- Recognize that whatever decision is ultimately made, it should be for the greater glory and praise of God
- Understand that if you ask, God will guide you to do what pleases Him
- Weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the choices at hand, particularly in relation to God's hopes for you
- Consider what is the most reasonable answer
- Present the tentative decision in prayer to God and seek confirmation that it would please God.

Significant Career Decisions: Four Examples

Decision	Information Needed
"What should I choose as a major?"	Information about academic curricula and career opportunities for certain majors
"When should I seek to gain practical experience?"	Information about part-time positions, summer jobs, internships, and volunteer work to help answer the question, "When should I seek to gain practical experience?"
"Should I go to graduate school, commit to a long-term service program, or seek employment after graduation?"	Information about the advantages and disadvantages of the various post-graduation options to help answer the question, "Should I go to graduate school, pursue a long-term service opportunity or find a job after graduation?"
"Should I accept this offer I have received?"	Information about weighing job offers to help answer the question, "Should I accept this job offer?"

In order to make a well-informed decision, you should assess what information is needed.

- Information about your abilities, values, interests, and limitations
- Information about careers including job duties, training requirements, salary, and job outlook
- Understanding of your own decision-making style.

The decision-making process includes spending time alone as well as in conversation with others. Elements to be considered include information you have gathered and insight provided by others. It is always worthwhile to spend time in prayer and reflection, being attentive to God's movement inside you.

A Decision That Gives Greater Glory to God

Begin by identifying the strengths and the gifts you possess. Look at your talents and how you can best utilize them for the greater glory of God. You can meet with a career counselor and engage in discussions, reflections and even exercises to help you learn to capitalize on your strengths, interests, values and desires while accepting and minimizing your weaknesses or limitations.

James Martin, S.J., author of *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* and well-known writer on Ignatian spirituality, says that understanding the source of our deepest desires can help us determine our life's purpose. Stay attentive to what you are seeking in a career, but strive to utilize your strengths in a way that provides the most glory to God, helps others, and is true to who you are.

EXAMPLE:

Matthew was an accounting major who excelled academically, but wrestled with what to do after graduation. He acknowledged that he grew professionally and spiritually from the service work he did throughout college and questioned how his values of service to others, humility, and love of God could fit into a career. He sought out the advice of others, engaged in thoughtful reflections and prayer, and read about the needs of children throughout the world. In addition, he completed an internship in the accounting field, gaining first-hand experience in his possible career. He concluded that committing to a yearlong service program abroad was the decision that was right for him at that point in his life. This student's decision to stay true to his values and utilize his strengths in a program serving children is an example of what William C. Spohn defines as a "different wisdom on vocation" in his essay, "The Chosen Path". This wisdom, he states, "counsels us to discover our personal calling by aligning our gifts and aspirations with...the deepest needs of our world."

As a rule, we in Career Services recommend that you use the following tools to gather information before making a decision: reading, talking to others, and gaining experience.

Reading

- A course catalog to learn about academic requirements and offerings
- A career article to read about work duties, work environment, required training, salary, job outlook, similar occupations, and contacts for more information
- The career resource section of a professional association's webpage
- The Internet, including the career section of particular company websites.

Talking to Others

- Talk to those who know you well and love you enough to be honest with you such as family, close friends and mentors
- Talk to career counselors, academic advisors, upperclassmen, campus ministers and faculty members
- Participate in job shadowing or informational interviewing to gain additional career information and different perspectives about a career field you are considering.

Gaining Experience

- While reading and talking to others is enough for some students, you may need to gain practical experience to help you make a career decision
- Taking a particular course to see if you like the subject matter is one way to gain experience and additional information about a specific career
- Volunteer work, part-time jobs, summer jobs, or internships can provide you with the actual experience you need for clarity on the decision.

EXAMPLE:

Laura was a junior majoring in psychology with the goal of becoming a psychologist when she began to question her chosen career path. After periodically working with a career counselor for two semesters, she undertook a semester-long internship with a school psychologist. It was this experience that provided her with the data needed to help make a decision about her post-graduation plans. She had previously read about the role of a school psychologist and talked to her professors about this area of psychology; however, it was not until she was able to work closely alongside a school psychologist that she clearly discovered her abilities, values, and interests fit well with this particular career.

Try to define your decision-making style. Some students readily acknowledge that they procrastinate, while others say they are impulsive when making decisions. If you are struggling to define your style of making decisions, it might be helpful to consider how you made the decision to attend The University of Scranton. It can provide insight into how you make decisions, especially important ones that have implications for your career.

Students chose The University of Scranton because:

- “It has a solid academic reputation”
- “It is far enough yet close enough to home”
- “It is the perfect size school for me”.

Ultimately, most students will summarize their decision by saying:

- “It just felt right”
- “This is where I belong”
- “I was meant to be here”.

In addition to the factual information, they paid attention to how they were moved interiorly. That made room for God to work. They sensed peace and consolation at the conclusion of the college application and decision process because they paid attention to both external and internal data.

Discernment

Engaging your mind to think about and list the pros and cons of any decision is vital. As you do this you will feel yourself moved in a certain direction and it is possible to discern which movements are in your best interest.

The term discernment, according to St. Ignatius, refers to the process of recognizing and working through feelings of consolation or desolation associated with a particular situation. Consolation is described as

feelings of peace and certainty- marked by an increase of faith, hope, and love. Desolation, on the other hand, is associated with feelings of restlessness and doubt - or a decrease in faith, hope, and love.

Having specific questions about career plans is part of discernment, while broader questions of “Who do you want to be?” and “Who has God created you to be?” are at the core of your career decisions. We recommend you seek out the support and guidance of spiritual directors here on campus in the Office of University Ministry to better understand how your relationship with God influences the discernment process.

EXAMPLE:

Julia was an education major who enjoyed her education classes and field placements but still longed for something more. She was sure there was something else she should be doing with her career plans, such as graduate school. In addition to her uncertainty about a career in teaching, her desolation included nagging thoughts, sleepless nights, and a lack of the type of hopeful excitement for the future that she saw in her classmates. It wasn't until she decided to pursue a graduate degree in speech pathology that she felt feelings of consolation. Despite the need to complete prerequisite coursework in the sciences before she could apply to graduate school, she thought this decision made the most sense and brought about feelings of peace and certainty.

Invite God into the Process

In the book, *What's Your Decision? How to Make Choices with Confidence and Clarity: An Ignatian Approach to Decision Making*, J. Michael Sparough, SJ, Jim Manney, and Tim Hipskind, SJ, state, “When we invite God into the decision making process, we find the freedom to make the best choice.” It is important to understand this freedom in the context of a relationship with God.

EXAMPLE:

I recall working with Nicholas, an alumnus who followed his dream and secured a well-paying, prestigious job in New York City. He quickly discovered he was not finding meaning in his work. He followed the suggestions outlined here and discovered that his values had changed. Nicholas came to realize that his desires were less about prestige and achievement and more oriented toward making a difference in the lives of others. His reflections, prayers, and openness to God's promptings clarified his deepest desires. With this new insight, we explored career opportunities in a different geographical area, and he secured employment as a high school teacher, a career that he now knows more authentically reflects the person he is.

It is important for you to know that no decision comes with absolute certainty. However, if you have gathered the information needed and assessed your motives, your feelings, and your trust in God, there is a strong probability that you will make a good decision.

Seek Confirmation

Many students return to talk about the results of their decisions. Through reflecting on their decisions, some realized they need to make adjustments or changes. This is a perfectly normal part of the career decision making process.

As career counselors, we encourage students and alumni to use the strategies outlined here when making any important decision, and we welcome the opportunity to assist you throughout the process. Remember that career development is a life-long process - one that begins at The University of Scranton.