

I still marvel that the word “career” comes from the 16th Century French word, *carriere*, which means “road.” Most career development experts acknowledge that a career is much like a pathway that results from the progression of one’s work-life through promotions, decisions and experiences. If you look at the saying, “It’s about the journey, not the destination,” it very well could be talking about the career path that any global worker has traveled. For it can be a slow, confusing, rambling journey, with few indicators and little success, even when you’ve done everything all the career websites and their advisors have listed for you to do.

However, with the abundance of online data resources available on in-demand skills and certifications, multiple listings of the in-demand, high-wage occupations found in Los Angeles and nationally, and 10-year employment projections for these positions, matching your skills and interests to one of the 65 Certificates offered at Los Angeles Valley College has never been easier. I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to guide students in this process, whether you are a first year student choosing a major or are a lifelong career-changer wanting information on the gig economy.

Attending nearby Notre Dame High School, the closest I came to career exploration was dreaming of being a disc jockey for KROQ or else a sportswriter, as I loved listening to music or reading Jim Murray in the Los Angeles Times. That’s where taking a Commercial Music class or a Journalism class like we offer at Los Angeles Valley College could have helped me explore and possibly cultivate those interests.

By the time I got to Pierce College in the mid-90s, I could see that computer technology and the Web were growing rapidly. So, I thought that a computer scientist or programmer would be a viable career, and one that was well-compensated! However, I was struggling through Calculus I and I didn’t really understand what was happening in my computer programming class, either. That’s when I discovered that I could transfer to UCLA as a Political Science major with only 3 more lower-division classes.

This was not exactly an informed decision, but it was the path of least resistance. I wasn’t necessarily excited to be studying political theory and comparative governments, but I was relieved to have just chosen a major and move on.

Once at UCLA, I spent quite a bit of time in the Career Center poring over the “Internships” binder. I knew that internships were an ideal way to gain real work experience and see if this was an area that I connected with. I remember doing one as a copywriter for an art gallery, writing press releases for upcoming exhibitions and summer art academies. Another summer, I interned as an assistant at a media company that sold blocks of advertising time for radio stations in Los Angeles. These were helpful in showing me what I didn’t want to do, but I still felt lost.

As it came closer to graduating from UCLA, most of my Political Science peers were preparing to apply for law school. But, I knew deep down, that I wasn’t interested in being a lawyer, no matter what the earnings outlook was. I knew I had to keep searching for “my career.”

So, I moved up the management-training ladder at Costco where I had worked for several years and returned to Pierce College to take classes in GIS (geographic information systems). I had really loved geography throughout college, and it was interesting studying relational databases and plotting the

information on a map. In fact, I even worked for the US Census Bureau in 2000 as a Cartographic Aide, editing and cleaning up TIGER files that would eventually become the data for online mapping programs we rely on so much today, such as MapQuest or Google Maps.

I was excited about the new possibilities, and again felt like I was on the early wave of some transformative technological advances. So, I went to Cal State Los Angeles and took a course on remote sensing, understanding the different satellites that were taking constant images of Earth and learning how to manipulate these images. I even tried another internship with a firm in Pasadena studying the environmental impacts of urban sprawl on Los Angeles watersheds. But, once again, I had come to the conclusion that I didn't have the right background needed to fully harness this technology, nor could I relate it to any of my own interests. I wasn't a research biologist studying the migration patterns of the Southern pine beetle, nor a business analyst studying population demographics to consult a client on where to open up a franchise. I felt as if I had tried everything up to this point.

So, six months after obtaining my first corporate job as an administrative assistant, I quit and traveled to Europe for a year. This had been a lifelong dream, and I knew that if I didn't take this opportunity now, I would risk facing lifelong regret. Having saved money from an early age for something substantial, this was the thrilling adventure that I had always envisioned it would be. Ultimately, I ended up in Barcelona, Spain, taking odd jobs to support myself for seven months. But the most consistent work I got was in teaching English. I learned that it is quite a difficult language to explain to non-native speakers because of its inconsistencies, rules and exceptions. Yet, it allowed me to improve my Spanish and extend my stay to its fullest.

Once I returned to Los Angeles, I was again faced with the stress of not knowing in which career direction to turn. Having been raised by two educators, I told myself I would never be a teacher, but be careful of the promises you commit yourself to!

Based on the strength of my most recent work experience as an international English teacher, I was hired as an Adult Education teacher with Los Angeles Unified School District, teaching language arts and reading comprehension. I had the great privilege of working with students from all over the world, whose cultural and linguistic diversity reflected that of the city of Los Angeles itself.

Eventually, I began working with at-risk high school students in a credit recovery program that offered an alternative pathway for young people to earn their high school diploma. I was lucky enough to have excellent mentors, support and guidance in working with a very challenging, yet vulnerable, population. However, due to my limited understanding of the environmental and socio-emotional trauma my students faced regularly, I had unrealistic expectations that sometimes led to personal frustration. My students were very capable of doing academic work, but sometimes they just needed breakfast or an empathetic adult in their lives to motivate them.

These realizations led me back to California State University, Los Angeles, to enroll in a Masters degree program for Counseling. The timing was fortuitous as I was able to put into practice the principles and objectives I was learning on an almost daily basis right back into my classroom. It was exhausting, but I thoroughly enjoyed every part of my experience being a full-time teacher in the day, a full-time

graduate student at night, and a full-time father and husband all the time. It was at this point in my life—at the age of 36!—that I finally felt I was on some sort of career track. Indeed, it brought me a great feeling of relief and hope.

However, the journey to my current position was just beginning.

I remember while attending Pierce College my first time, I took Personal Development 4, a 1-unit counseling class taught by Margarita Raigoza. It allowed for self-exploration and self-evaluation with an application towards career development. It was the first time that I had taken any quantitative assessments in order to discover my interests or personality type, and having it applied to future work.

I am not sure if it was the COPS or John Holland's Self-Directed Search, but I remember after completing the assessment that one of the suggested occupations matching my responses was being a bus driver for children with special needs. This made sense to me because I liked the Outdoors and providing Human Services. At that moment, I can recall being open to this possible career and that it could make me feel fulfilled.

I realized much later in life that the more profound thing that had occurred during this class was I had become very intrigued by Ms. Raigoza's occupation, but had not given it real consideration. She got to work with college students as a counselor helping them apply to universities, and also as an instructor providing them with life and career advice. She had a great job and her students appreciated her—a work value that today I can recognize as something I definitely require. Ironically, at that time, I remember telling myself, "I cannot do her job. I am not smart enough. There is no way I could do everything I would need to do in order to be a community college counselor." And, with that toxic self-talk, I closed the door on my "dream job" for nearly 20 years.

I thought that with my experience working with high school students, coupled with my MS in Counseling, I was going to land a position as a high school counselor. That didn't happen, but instead, I was promoted within my unit, and was soon overseeing a small independent high school on the campus of Reseda High School. With the help of 2 teachers, and 4 assistants—most of whom were CSUN students who eventually wanted to be teachers themselves—we helped students graduate with their high school diploma through the Adult School, or else earn their high school equivalency credential, such as passing the HiSET.

As I was doing this meaningful work, I had also been applying to various community colleges in the hopes of getting a full time position. Again, I had hoped that with my experience and degree, it would be enough to get me an interview on a college campus, but it didn't. So, now that I had identified that being a community college counselor was my dream job, I did what I had known to do in the past: find an internship in your field of interest.

Luckily, Project MATCH is a highly regarded LACCD program, and is the only internship program in California that allows people who are interested in becoming faculty, librarians or counselors in a community college, to have a six-month training experience.

After a competitive application process, I was selected and matched with Mr. Kyle Skinner, an EOPS Counselor at Los Angeles Trade Technical College, the same department where I eventually landed my first community college counseling position!

From June 2015 until June 2017, I was an adjunct counselor at Pasadena City College. I also had the opportunity to teach such Counseling classes as Personal Growth & Development, and Career Exploration. In addition, I had the privilege of being a CTE Counselor in their Economic and Workforce Development Division working closely with Engineering, Electronics and Automotive Technology students and their faculty, while also securing speakers for our “Women in Tech” event. In addition, I was recently trained on the Top 10 employability skills curriculum, called the 21st Century Skills by the New World of Work which is a Doing What Matters initiative of the California Community College Chancellor’s Office.

I have always enjoyed working and have derived much satisfaction from every job I’ve ever held, from customer service to catering, from banking to teaching, and now counseling. It has been a long personal journey to get me to my “dream job,” and now that I’m here, I’d like to help you find yours.

Along the way, I received two instrumental pieces of advice I’d like to share with you. The first was: “Follow your heart, and the money will follow.” Simple message, but hard to commit to.

The other was from the only poster I remember hanging up in my bedroom growing up. You too may recognize it as the last line from poet Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken”: *Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.*

Most students I know don’t care how long it takes them to reach their goal, just so long as they get there. Please make an appointment to come see me so that I can help you along your *carriere*!

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