

# Surviving “THE GRILL”

## Communicating With Family About Career Issues

*By Dennis Nord with fine tuning by Micael Kemp, Don Lubach, and others at Career Services.*

Students love to visit their families. They arrive to enjoy hugging their parents and other family members, including pets. But hugs and smiles often turn to expressions of worry around the table where many Gauchos feel forced to field challenging questions about school progress and career plans. The questions from Mom and Dad are usually asked in the spirit of caring about you and wanting you to be happy and successful, but sometimes the timing is just plain poor.

As a freshman, you may have recently discovered that the major you entered with isn't working, but haven't found a good alternative major yet. Or you may suspect that your family's strong desire to see you go to med school or law school may not be in the cards anymore.

As a senior, you may not be ready to answer questions about your graduation plans in June. And sometimes the answers that you might give are just not the answers they're going to want to hear. "I'm spending a gap year (or year abroad or summer internship) in Somalia taking care of babies with diseases" isn't necessarily going to give them the reassurance they seek.

Career Services offers you a few tips to help you navigate these caring well wishers. Only you know the proper behavior in your family context, so do what works for you:

### **STRATEGY 1: Ask them for advice.**

Turn the question back to the person asking by saying something like, *"I'm working on that question right now. It would really help me to know how you chose your major/career after college/ internships, etc. Can you tell me about how you made your decision?"* This will keep them busy recounting their own path and might give you some ideas both about strategies that work as well as what not to do!

### **STRATEGY 2: Ask them for help.**

Since they are invested in your future, get their help in achieving it. For example, you could say, *"I've decided to look into careers in finance, but I'm not sure whether accounting, insurance, or banking would fit me best. I could use your help in meeting people who work in these careers. Do you know anyone I could talk to?"* Enlist their help in finding people doing something you think you might like to explore for an informational interview, internship, shadowing day, or full-time job.

If you're further along in your decision process, you can ask them for more specific assistance. *"I want work for a small company in the Bay Area doing technical writing for the computer industry. Might you know people like that?"* Use your contacts to make direct connections. Did you know that social networks trump even the Internet for job hunting success? More jobs and internships result from questions like this than from all Internet job sites combined.

### **STRATEGY 3: Ask about their careers.**

Often, well meaning adults have forgotten their own experience around finding a career. They may not realize that the average adult has five careers in his/her lifetime. Ask them to tell you more about how they found their current career, what careers or jobs they held in the past, and what they did as a first career after college.

Also, if there's a relative or friend at home who is working at a job that you think you might like as well, ask them about it in detail: *"How did you get started? How would someone new start? What would you recommend to a new person trying to enter this field? Who works most closely with creative programs (or budget, or acquisitions, or whatever)? Can you introduce me to them? What do you read that is exciting in your field? What are the problems you deal with? What's the most exciting development this year?"* People who love their work can talk about it all day and each of your questions will feel like a gift to them.

### **STRATEGY 4: Use Career Services to arm yourself with data.**

Much of our work is on our website at [career.ucsb.edu](http://career.ucsb.edu). Click on "Career Planning" and select either "[Researching a Career](#)", or "[Careers by Major](#)". Compile and print out your research, and then you can hand this to your worried well wishers and say, "I'm seriously looking into a career in Actuarial Science and I conducted this research about the career. Will you read through it and see if it seems like a good career for me?" Even if you are only remotely interested in this career, this strategy will engage the services of the most caring and diligent research team you can imagine. And it might just open the door to a great career.



Open 8:30 to 4:30, Mon. - Fri. (holiday and break hours vary)

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