Pathfinder Quest: I'm New

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Time Frame 210 minutes

Essential Question(s)

- How can understanding my interests and strengths help me choose a career path that fits me?

Summary

This freshman resource helps students reflect on their feelings about transitioning to college while building confidence through peer connection and self-discovery. By identifying their personal interests and strengths, students begin to see how these traits align with potential career paths. Through interactive activities and exploration of postsecondary degree options, they gain a clearer understanding of how their passions can translate into future opportunities.

Learning Goals

1. Students will reflect on their feelings about transitioning to college and build confidence by connecting with peers.
2. Students will identify personal interests and strengths and connect them to potential career paths.
3. Students will explore and critique postsecondary degree options that align with their career interests.

Attachments

- Activity Slides—I'm New.pptx
- Magnetic Statements—I'm New.docx
- Magnetic Statements—I'm New.pdf
- Note Catcher—I'm New.docx
- Note Catcher—I'm New.pdf
- PSI Degree Sheets—I'm New.docx
- PSI Degree Sheets—I'm New.pdf

Materials

- Activity Slides (attached)
- PSI Degree Sheet handout (attached; facilitator copy)
- Note Catcher handout (attached; one per student)
- Magnetic Statements handout (attached; one set)
- Pen/Pencil
- Poster paper
- Markers

15 minutes

Preparation Note

Magnetic Statements

- For the Explore, print one set of the **Magnetic Statements** handout and tape them to the top of each poster paper. Then, secure the posters around the room in strategic areas so that large groups can congregate around them comfortably. Also, have markers at each poster.

Updating Slide Information

- Use the **PSI Degree Sheet** to find your school's URL. Be sure to add it to slide 10 for students to access for the Extend activity.
- Add the next session's meeting information to slide 14.

10 minutes

Engage

Use the **Activity Slides** to facilitate this session. Transition through **slides 2-4** to review the session title, essential question, and learning objectives.

Move to **slide 5** and take time to talk with students about the results from last session's First Semester Check-In. Be sure to review the results beforehand to have answers ready. Take time to answer questions and ask if they have any new ones.

Facilitator's Note: First Semester Check-In

The survey results used for this activity are a continuation from the previous resource in this series: "Pathfinder Quest: Welcome to the Trail." If you have not completed that session, consider facilitating this part of the presentation as a more informal Q&A session, instead giving students a space to voice concerns or questions they may have.

15 minutes

Explore

Move to **slide 6** and explain the Magnetic Statements activity. Invite students to circulate around the classroom and carefully read each of the Magnetic Statements displayed on the walls. These statements are organized according to the Holland/RIASEC Code, representing different personality and career interest types (i.e. Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional).

Encourage students to take their time as they move from one statement to the next, reflecting on how each one resonates with their personal interests, values, and feelings about work. Remind them that they may take notes on their handout or mentally rank the statements if helpful.

Once all students have reviewed the options, ask them to stand beside the statement that they feel best represents their own preferences or aspirations related to work and a career.

After students have grouped themselves, move to **slide 7** and prompt them to engage in a small-group discussion with others who chose the same statement. In their groups, they should talk about:

- What aspects of the statement did they connect with most?
- Which traits or skills associated with that statement do they find appealing?
- How might those traits show up in real-world careers or activities they enjoy?

Encourage students to listen actively and find commonalities or differences in how they interpreted the statement. This step is designed to help them begin making personal connections between their interests and potential career paths.

15 minutes

Explain

Move to **slide 8**. Now that students have grouped themselves based on the Magnetic Statement that best reflects their interests, ask students to brainstorm a list of careers that align with the traits and skills described in their statement. Encourage them to think broadly, considering traditional roles, emerging fields, and even creative or unconventional paths that fit the statement. Instruct them to write their ideas directly on the poster paper using the provided markers.

Start the K20 2-minute timer on the slide. After two minutes, move to **slide 9** and signal for groups to rotate clockwise to the next Magnetic Statement. At each new station, students should complete the following activities:

- Read the existing career ideas already listed.
- Add new career suggestions that haven't been mentioned yet.
- Consider how the traits in that statement might connect to different industries or roles.

Repeat this process until each group has visited all six Magnetic Statements and contributed to each poster. Restart the timer as needed. Once the final poster has been completed, students should return to their original statement and review the newly added careers. After a couple of minutes, students should return to their seats.

20 minutes

Extend

Pass out the **Note Catcher** handout to every student, then display **slide 10**. Help students navigate to their PSI's official website to explore academic offerings in greater depth. Explain that their first task is to locate and review the degree sheets or program pages for majors they are currently interested in. These typically outline required courses, elective options, and potential career paths associated with each major.

After reviewing, students will select up to two majors that appeal to them and record their choices on their Note Catcher handout. Next, they will identify the academic advisor(s) assigned to those departments or programs, noting their contact information and office location if available. Allow students time to work.

Transition to **slide 11** and have students get into small groups. Explain that now students will collaborate to brainstorm a list of thoughtful, open-ended questions they could ask an academic advisor.

After 4-5 minutes, move to **slide 12** and have students come together for a whole-group discussion. Facilitate a discussion that focuses on the value of building strong relationships with academic advisors early in the college experience. Emphasize how advisors can support students in navigating academic requirements, exploring career options, and making the most of their college journey. Explain how important the students' values are in picking a degree path.

5 minutes

Evaluate

Move to **slide 13** and have students write an Exit Ticket about their experience today using their Note Catcher. Students should reflect on the connections between their personal strengths, interests, and the academic paths available to them. Remind students they should use insights from the Magnetic Statements activity and their review of degree sheets from their PSI.

Have each student create a list of three careers or degree paths they could realistically see themselves pursuing on their handout. Students should jot down a brief note next to each item, explaining why it resonates with them, whether it's a match with their skills, a long-standing interest, or a new discovery sparked by today's exploration.

Lastly, move to **slide 14** and explain that the next session will ask the students to explore careers based on an interest survey and potential earnings in different states. Be sure to include the date, time, and location of the next session.

Research Rationale

First Generation College Students (FGCS) lack the social capital of their middle-to-upper-class peers and thus struggle in their college and career readiness experiences (Almeida, D. et al., 2019). Social capital is defined as the relationships you develop in your personal and professional life that provide support and guidance. Research indicates that FGCSs struggle to build social capital due to a lack of experience and knowledge stemming from their familial, social, and economic background. Structured programs on post-secondary institution campuses that are readily available and convenient help bridge the gap between FGCSs and their peers (Dernberger, 2025).

Social Capital

At the post-secondary level, social capital refers to the relationships and interactions that students build with peers, faculty, and professionals. These connections provide valuable resources and support, such as information about career opportunities and access to academic and extracurricular activities. Thompson et al. (2023) explain that students had better academic and career opportunities after using their campus Career Services than those who did not. However, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to possess valuable information about college success, leading to less access to campus resources than their higher socioeconomic peers (Dernberger, 2025; Almeida et al., 2019). Studies suggest that developing social capital between students and faculty is essential for students' development, positively impacting academic achievement and retention. (Almeida et al., 2019). Students often have difficulty with the career decision-making process, and campus resources, such as Career Services departments, help ease this process by considering the student’s personality, interests, and background.

Resources

- Almeida, D., Byrne, A., Smith, R., & Ruiz, S. (2019). How relevant is grit? The importance of social capital in first-generation college students' academic success. *Journal of College Student Retention, 23*(3), 539-559. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025119854688
- Dernberger, B. N. (2025). Inequality in the college-to-acreer transition: Building career-relevant cultural and social capital on campus. *Sociology Compass, 19*(3). https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.70041
- Holland, J.L. (1997). Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments (3rd Ed.). Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Bell ringers and exit tickets. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/125
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Magnetic statements. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/166
- K20 Center. (2021, September 21). 2-Minute Timer. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcEEAnwOt2c
- Thompson, D., Dent, H., & Fine, M. (2023). Factors related to a college student's career optimism and their perception of career services. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *77*(3), 395–409. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12408