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On Making the Next Generation a More Informed Workforce

SPONSORED Education and career decisions are not one-size-fits-all, yet many students emerge from their secondary schooling without a big-picture view of their options.



Figuring out what to do with your life after you finish your secondary education is more challenging than ever. “For this generation in particular,” says Captain David S. Kemp, commander of the U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command, “there’s been so much change — a lot of the traditional things that maybe their parents or their grandparents did are no longer accessible.”

Part of the challenge is the disconnect between the many career paths available versus the way college is often presented as the only viable option.

Many paths to success

“It’s okay to have your own journey — everyone doesn’t have to go directly to college,” says Shannon Salyer, Ph.D., the national program manager of the ASVAB Career Exploration Program. “Sometimes students begin pursuing their career goals one way, and have to rethink or delay that path. I am proud that we show students all the options they have to consider.”

A four-year college degree remains a very viable option for many. But there are plenty of other paths to explore:

- Military service (with career training that often crosses into civilian careers)
- Going directly into the workforce
- Taking a gap year
- Volunteer work

“Sometimes students don't know what they don't know,” Salyer points out. “For instance, joining the military does not mean you can't also be enrolled in college.”

Questions to answer

Patrick Rottinghaus, Ph.D., just watched his son go through this process, and believes the key is information. “Part of what I advise my son to do is to go out there and get job-shadowing opportunities,” he says, “and continue to reflect on your natural interests.”

Others questions students should ask include:

- What time and money can you apply to your goals?
- Do you have an aptitude that correlates with your interests?
- Where can you get training and experience?
- Can you take time after graduation to explore possibilities?

One powerful resource that exists is the [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery \(ASVAB\)](#) Career Exploration Program (CEP).

Integrating the ASVAB CEP

“The ASVAB CEP offers options,” explains Captain Kemp. “It's sponsored by the Department of Defense at no cost to schools, and it has a two-part mission: Provide a career exploration service and provide leads to military recruiters — but participants have no obligation to military service.”

“There is a misconception in the public that the military is what students choose when they don't have other options,” Salyer adds. “But the jobs in the military are just like the jobs in the civilian world — we have robotics, medical technology and linguistics. We have many CTE careers that kids don't realize we offer. A large percentage of the training in the military results in certifications, college credits or associate degrees.”

The ASVAB Career Exploration Program offers:

- Information on career pathways
- Assessment of interests and aptitude
- Help identifying careers
- Help for teachers and counselors to have structured conversations about options

Dr. Rottinghaus endorses the ASVAB CEP, even though his son wasn't interested in a military career. “The [OCCU-Find](#) tool, where you're able to combine interests and skills, was particularly useful,” as was the Portfolio feature, where students can chart work, education, skills and interests. “My son advises upcoming high school students to really benefit from that,” says Rottinghaus. “It's a proactive feature that serves as a framework for exploring careers.”

Captain Kemp agrees with that assessment. “One of the things that the CEP does is it helps students kind of picture what their future could be.”

