Congratulations! You Have Graduated from College, Now What?
Most of the 1.5 Million College Grads This Year Have Not yet Decided on Next Steps

By Marcia Robinson

The cap and gown is slowly making it's way to the back of the closet, the out of town guests have returned home and the haze of the last semester plus the euphoria of the graduation ceremony could now be slowly wearing off. Having spent the last eight years in college career center operations, I know that many college grads, despite what you hear, do not have next steps confirmed at graduation. As you consider your options, and there are many, here are some possibilities that have borne positive results for new grads with whom I have worked over the years.

Travel with a Purpose. If you spent breaks and vacations in college, living la vida loca at exotic tropical locations like Acapulco, Jamaica or South Beach - you might want to consider this the time for travel with a purpose. Each year the number of students who choose to spend their breaks in service to local or global communities, increases. Nonprofits like Break Away, specializes in helping college students identify alternative ways to spend their breaks during school. If you have not yet had this opportunity, now could be the time. Organizations like Habitat for Humanity and The US Peace Corps are always open to new college grads who are willing to explore citizen service. Check with the Study Abroad office or Career Center at your alma mater to gather information about overseas opportunities.

Start a Business. If you have flirted with the idea of starting a business, now may be the time to do so. Some people cannot pursue business ownership right after college, because of the urgency of school loans or pressures from parents to move out of the house and explore independence. If this is not the situation for you, do the feasibility studies and exploratory work needed to create a great foundation. Subscribe to newsletters from Entrepreneur.com and spend time working on a business plan. Seek advice from the Small Business Development Center nearest you.

Earn Licensing or certification such as CPA or Real Estate License. This summer, while your brain is still willing, is a great time to do some additional work and earn a specialized certification or license in a specific area. Have a Communications degree and like the Real Estate industry? Work on earning your Real Estate License. Finished your Accounting degree and planning on taking the CPA Exam or have a degree in Finance or Risk Management? Want to earn a specialized technical certification? Of course for many grads, more study is not an attractive option, but this is really a good time to prepare and/or earn certifications.

Take Career Assessments to learn more about who you are. College graduates have always successfully pursued opportunities in careers that they may not have previously considered to be related to their majors. Keep in mind that other factors such as interests, values and personality play a major role in the kind of career you choose to pursue, regardless of major. For example, what do Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, Film Director Steven Spielberg and Football Coach Joe Paterno have in common? All three were English majors in college. Do
some personal introspection through career assessments. Contact the career center at your alma mater and ask for advice on which ones could help you make a decision on your next steps.

**Expand your network** - This summer may be a good time to expand your professional network by joining some of the more career related online networking sites. Some examples include LinkedIn and Spoke. Additionally, if you haven't already done so, connect with your Alumni Association and join a professional association that is related to your major or preferred career. If, for example, you were a Marketing major, consider the American Marketing Association. You will definitely gain insight in trends and opportunities within the industry that you might not have considered.

This time post graduation should be a time of joy and also of serious self reflection. You have achieved a major milestone in your life and proven that you can set and achieve goals. That in itself should give you the courage you need to explore and take your next steps with confidence.