

POSTSECONDARY ACADEMIC

CAREER CONVERSATION STARTERS



For use by enrollment management staff, academic advisors, and academic support personnel in higher education

Building students’ metacognition skills and developing students’ understanding of how academics relate to their future career life is an important responsibility for academic support staff in higher education. By providing quality programs in which students explore academic options, assess their own learning and cognitive styles and have opportunities to gain an understanding of how their academic choices related to success in their chosen field, academic staff are a crucial link to students’ postsecondary success and work-life success.

In 2014, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) published the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Every Student. In 2016, the Colorado Department of Education partnered with ASCA to develop Career Conversation starters. These starters are conversational prompts that essentially align to each of the college- and career-readiness standards. Academic staff can use conversation starters for multiple purposes: (1) challenging students to consider how they are preparing for their future career through investment of effort in coursework, (2) assessment of students’ academic preparation or commitment to a particular degree or program and (3) promoting academic growth and development of higher education students through workshops and small-group formats by using the prompts to promote discussion and critical thinking.

Tips for using these conversation starters:

- Remember that these are prompts to start a conversation and not the entire script or the whole scope of a conversation.
- Tailor the questions in whatever way you see fit for the students with whom you’re working.
- When interviewing, you may replace underlined words such as this career with the actual title of the career as in “When you realized that you were interested in welding what did you do to get more information or learn about welding?”

Mindset/Behavior	Postsecondary Questions	Ideal Response
MINDSETS		
Sense of belonging in the school environment (M 3.)	In what ways are you connected to your university/college/training program community? For example, have you attended activities on campus, belong to any clubs, get support from faculty and staff, have a peer group you enjoy?	The student is involved in campus activities, gets support from faculty and staff when needed and has friends on campus.
Understanding that postsecondary education and lifelong learning are necessary for long-term career success (M 4.)	How do you see your postsecondary education contributing to your work success? Once you are in the career you desire, how will you stay abreast of new information to keep you current in your work?	Student describes the connection between his/her academic learning and career of choice. Look for responses to include continued education beyond college (e.g., reading articles, belonging to professional organizations, attending workshops, taking additional college courses).
BEHAVIOR: LEARNING STRATEGIES		
Apply self-motivation and self-direction to learning (B-LS 4.)	Think about a time when you were not learning what you wanted to learn in a class. What did you do?	Ideal response includes taking ownership of learning by researching topics on their own and asking questions.

Mindset/Behavior	Postsecondary Questions	Ideal Response
Set high standards of quality (B-LS 6.)	If someone were to randomly pull pieces of your work from various classes, how might they describe the effort you display overall in your academics and the pride you take in your work?	Ideal response includes a description of quality of work and strategies used to achieve this quality. If quality is lower than desired, the student is able to articulate strategies to improve.
Actively engage in challenging coursework (B-LS 8.)	Imagine you just enrolled in a course, and on the first day you realize based on the syllabus and the instructor's description that this course is going to be very difficult. How would you prepare yourself? What steps would you take? How do you approach courses like this?	Response includes specific strategies to flourish and persist when challenged in classes.
BEHAVIOR: SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS		
Demonstrate self-discipline and self-control (B-SMS 2.)	Tell me about a time you had to work on a project or with a person that was frustrating for you. How did you handle it?	Student articulates strategies for managing frustration and effective communication skills.
Demonstrate advocacy skills and ability to assert self when necessary (B-SS 8.)	Imagine your professor gave you a grade on an assignment you don't feel is accurate. You reviewed the syllabus and the criteria for the assignment, and you are sure you were not graded correctly. What would you do?	Student articulates a tentative approach that includes humility, poise and tact. The student would demonstrate his/her evidence for concern to the instructor while also keeping an open mind as to why the grade might be deserved.

The Career Conversations provide a guide for working with middle and high school students, parents and community members to address the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Every Student. The Career Conversations questions are based on ecosystems theory, counseling theory and an extensive review of counseling and career counseling literature. The questions can be used to work with individuals and groups of students, parents and community members. The Career Conversations were developed by ASCA for the Colorado Department of Education.



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