Presented by Elana Lyn Gross CCAS ‘11, journalist and author of What Next?: Your Five-Year Plan for Life after College
This presentation is adapted from my new book, which is published by the Simon & Schuster imprint Adams Media. While written to help college seniors and recent graduates navigate life and work after college, the advice is helpful at any age.
What is a Five-Year Plan?

- A five-year plan is a road map for how the next five years of your life could play out. It motivates you to think about what you want and how you’ll get it.
- Your five-year plan is customized to you. The goal is to reflect on what you want, not what other people want for you or what will sound the most impressive.
- Your five-year plan isn’t set in stone. It can change as your life changes. It is better to have a plan and change it than to not have a plan at all.
The Purpose of a Five-Year Plan

- You can’t achieve your goals if you don’t know what they are and why they are important to you.
- The purpose of a five-year plan is to clarify what you want, why you want it, and how you’ll make it happen.
- There are five steps to creating an actionable five-year plan for your career.
Step 1: Reflect

- Reflect on where your life is at right now, what you’re happy about, what you want to change, and your personal values.

- This will help you understand what you want, discover your strengths and weaknesses so you know a career path that would be good for you, and set realistic goals.

- Self-reflection will help you tune out the noise of other people’s expectations – like your friends, roommates, professors, or parents – so you hone in on what will make you feel happy and fulfilled.
Step 1: Reflection Questions

- Where do my talents and interests align?
- What did I enjoy doing when I was younger?
- What has been my biggest professional accomplishment?
- What are my professional strengths and weaknesses?
- What types of projects and assignments make me feel energized and excited?
Step 2: Brainstorm

- The next step is to brainstorm. When you plan ahead, you can move forward with set goals. You don’t have to plan every moment of your life, but having a general idea of what you want will help you stay focused and motivated.

- This is the time to dream big. Start by writing down anything and everything that you believe will make you happy in the future.

- Don’t limit yourself by thinking your career goals are too lofty. Working toward difficult goals is why you’re creating a five-year plan.
Step 2: Reflection Questions

- What career would I choose if money weren’t a factor?
- Would I prefer to work at a startup, a corporate job, or on my own business? Why?
- What would I want my ideal workday to entail?
- What specific career goals do I want to accomplish in the next five years?
- Fast-forward to five years in the future. Where do I hope to be in my career?
Now that you’ve reflected and brainstormed, it’s time to choose five goals for your career and to make them more concrete so you know exactly what you want to achieve.

One of the popular goal-setting tools is to use the acronym SMART which stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

The SMART exercise turns broad or vague goals into ones that are clearly defined and measurable.

For example, if one of your goals is to get a job in marketing, you could make a specific goal to apply to two jobs a week.
**Step 3: Set Your SMART Goals**

- **Specific**: Make your goals specific to be clear about what you want. Ask yourself: Who is involved in this goal? What do I want to accomplish? When do I want to complete it? Where will I complete this goal? Why do I want it?

- **Measurable**: Every goal should be measurable, meaning that you know how to quantify if you’ve successfully achieved your goal.

- **Achievable**: SMART goals make you feel challenged, but they are still doable. Set lofty goals as your long-term goals and create smaller ones leading up to them that are SMART.

- **Relevant**: You are more likely to accomplish your goals if they are meaningful to you. Ask yourself: Why do I want to achieve this goal? How will I feel when I achieve it? How will accomplishing it be beneficial to me?

- **Time-Bound**: Decide when you want to start working on your goal and when you want to finish it. Setting a time frame will help you stay accountable because you have a specific date in mind.
Now it’s time to organize your SMART goals into categories: short-term (those that can be accomplished in less than a year to two years), medium-term (two to three years), and long-term (three to five years).

Your short-term goals should get you closer to your medium-term goals and your medium-term goals should get you closer to your long-term goals.
Step 5: Plan it Out

- Now go through each goal you made in Step 4 and decide if it should be finished in Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, Year 4, or Year 5.
- Once you have an organized five-year plan, keep it on a pin board, in your journal, on your desk, or somewhere else you’ll see it often so you stay accountable and can celebrate everything you achieved.
To-Do: Take Small Steps to Achieve Big Goals

▪ The key to reaching the big goals you’ve set is to plan out the smaller things you need to do to get there and to check in with yourself.

▪ Once a month, review and celebrate what you have accomplished in the past month and remind yourself of what you will accomplish in the next month.
5 Tips for Job Searching During the Pandemic

- Identify Your Ideal Career Path
- Broaden Your Job Search
- Optimize Your Job Applications
- Use Your Network
- Make Yourself Even More Marketable
This is a good time to reflect on past internships, jobs, extracurricular activities, and classes to plan for your future.

Take out a piece of paper and write three columns: start, stop, and continue. In start, write down the things you wish you had done in your past jobs or internships that would have made things better. In stop, list the things that made those jobs and projects difficult so you know what to avoid. Under continue, jot down the things you’ve done before that you want to do in the future.

Take out another piece of paper and make a list of your top 10 strengths and think about the industries and roles that match up. When you are making your list, write down the hard skills and soft skills like interpersonal communication, organization, and leadership.

Even if you haven’t held relevant summer jobs or internships you have more experience than you think. Consider what you learned from extracurricular activities like being on the executive board of your sorority, fraternity, or other clubs on campus.
Broaden Your Job Search

- Your ideal companies might not have openings that match your skills and experience level. A lot of people don’t get their ideal jobs right out of college, even when they graduate into a stronger economy. Be open-minded about your job search and apply to jobs that might not be at your dream company (or even in your ideal industry) but that will give you the transferrable skills you’ll need in the future.

- Think of ways you can pivot and apply your strengths and skills to high-demand industries like health care, shipping and delivery, online education, grocery stores and restaurants, and digital communication companies like Slack or Zoom.

- Expand your search further by looking for paid internships, temp jobs, and part-time jobs. It could lead to a full-time role when you impress the team!

- Think of your first job as a stepping stone that gets you closer to your ideal job. You’ll gain new skills, build your network, and learn more about what you like and dislike in a role and company. And, most importantly, you’ll earn a paycheck!
Optimize Your Job Applications

- Prioritize jobs that have been posted most recently because that's a sign that the company has current role that needs to be filled.

- Be confident when you're reading job postings. You can still get the job even if you don't have all of the qualifications. Use your resume and cover letter to show you have transferrable skills employers need.

- Spend more time on each resume and cover letter so your job application gets seen. When you apply to a job online, your application often goes into an Applicant Tracking System (ATS)—software that reviews your resume to determine how well you'd fit the requirements of the job posting. The key to getting past the ATS is written right in the job posting—keywords such as the job title, responsibilities, and skills.

- The best thing you can do to decrease your nerves and impress the hiring manager is to prepare for your job interview. Practice the most common job interview questions by writing down bullet point answers for each and research the company by reviewing the website, checking recent news, reading the company’s blog posts and press releases, and looking at its social media accounts.

- Now that many people are working remotely, job interviews are being done by phone and video instead of IRL. You’ll stand out from the competition if you learn the ins-and-outs of phone and video job interviews.
Use Your Network

- Reach out to counselors at the career center, professors, past coworkers, and friends and family.
- Use Handshake and Career Connect to get in touch with alumni. (Kate will share more info.)
- Ask for email intros to hiring managers if someone works at one of the companies you are applying to or knows someone who does. Those email intros can get your application to the top of the pile.
Make Yourself Even More Marketable

- Take classes and certification programs to learn skills that are relevant to your industry.
- You know how people say to dress for the job you want, not the job you have? Use this time to work toward the job you want.
- Start a project like a blog, newsletter, or writing a business plan for a company.
- Help people and get noticed by sharing your skills on social media, your own website, and other platforms.
- A passion project can make you stand out during your job search or it could even become your full-time job.
“What Next?: Your Five-Year Plan for Life after College” teaches you how to create a five-year plan and has actionable career, finance, wellness, and relationship advice to help you accomplish your goals.

Reviewers have called it “the book every twentysomething needs,” “the go-to guide for life after college,” and “basically the Google Maps for post-grad life.”

You can buy ”What Next?: Your Five-Year Plan for Life after College” wherever books are sold!
Questions and Thank You!