

Nontraditional Careers

MOST PEOPLE would consider themselves open-minded and free of stereotypes and prejudices. Yet when it comes to careers and occupations, one-sided preferences and beliefs can rear their ugly heads. In recent years, thanks to many pioneers, steady improvements and corrections have been made regarding these stereotypes. In truth, there are no gender predispositions to certain careers, only people with individual make-ups that are a good fit for certain jobs.



Objectives:



1. Define nontraditional career opportunities.
2. Explore nontraditional career opportunities.

Key Terms:



career clusters
comprehensive career assessment
cross-gender career
gender-neutral career
nontraditional occupation (NTO)
STEM

Considering All the Options

Each specific occupation has a set of knowledge and skills necessary for success in that field. The required skills may be mathematics, spatial relationship, creativity, or compassion. Some obvious personality traits also make for a good fit with certain careers. There are, however, no careers or occupations that require a certain gender. No one gender owns a career field. All the career fields are available to everyone. The best part about nontraditional careers is that for the person for whom a great “fit” exists, there is a much higher degree of job satisfaction. And job satisfaction is priceless.

NONTRADITIONAL CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

A **nontraditional occupation (NTO)** is an occupation in which one gender makes up less than 25 percent of the employment within that field. A person whose job position is in a nontraditional field is said to possess a **cross-gender career**. Examples of individuals in cross-gender careers are a male kindergarten teacher and a female firefighter.



FIGURE 1. A teacher guides a kindergarten art project.

When you review the skill requirements for a particular occupation, you will not see either gender “highlighted” as the better fit for the occupation. There are no gender requirements for any career. The stereotypes that exist are just that, perceived preferences.

Nontraditional careers can be found in the following areas of study:

- ◆ Agricultural education
- ◆ Business education
- ◆ Family and consumer sciences education
- ◆ Health science education
- ◆ Information technology education
- ◆ Marketing education
- ◆ Skilled and technical sciences education
- ◆ Technology and engineering education

Examples of nontraditional career opportunities for females include broad categories of jobs that are labor intensive, scientific/technical, and supervisory. For more information on nontraditional career pathways for females, see the list developed by the state of Utah at http://www.schools.utah.gov/cte/nontrad_pathways.html. Nontraditional careers and pathways may differ by individual state. Review careers on your state’s education website.

Examples of nontraditional career opportunities for males include broad categories of jobs that are in education, health, and service-related areas. For more information on nontraditional career pathways for males, see the list developed by the state of Utah at http://www.schools.utah.gov/cte/nontrad_pathways.html. Nontraditional careers and pathways may differ by individual state. Review careers on your state’s education website.

Benefits

Many benefits are associated with nontraditional careers. The foremost benefit is that of greater job satisfaction. People who select careers based on real interest and fit are more satisfied in their work than those who select careers based on accepted stereotypes. Nontraditional jobs often offer higher wages, better employee benefits, and a greater opportunity for advancement. These benefits often lead to greater economic self-sufficiency and to broader job opportunities overall.

Resources

Some especially helpful resources for persons interested in NTOs include:

- ◆ The nontraditional fact sheet from Rutgers University at <http://www.ncrc.rutgers.edu/templates/fastfacts.aspx>
- ◆ The website of the Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support (ICSPPS) at <http://www.icsps.ilstu.edu/>
- ◆ The website for women in **STEM** (the academic and professional disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) at <http://www.womeninscience.org/>
- ◆ The “Nontraditional Electronic Newsletter” from the Center for Workforce Development, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale: <http://cwg.siu.edu/index.php>
- ◆ Individual state career and technical education (CTE) sites



FIGURE 2. One of the many benefits to an NTO is the high degree of job satisfaction.

EXPLORING NONTRADITIONAL CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Before researching the specific details of a nontraditional occupation, it is very helpful first to complete a **comprehensive career assessment**—an evaluation and interpretation of one’s skills, interests, personality, and aptitudes. The results of this assessment allow you to search according to your best career fit.

Career Clusters

Review the 16 **career clusters**—groupings of occupations / career specialties used as an organizing tool for curriculum design and instruction. Occupations / career specialties are grouped into the career clusters because they require common knowledge and skills. This definition was taken from the Career Clusters website. Additional information may be found at <http://www.careerclusters.org/index.php>.



FIGURE 3. Career clusters include a range of occupations from architecture and construction to hospitality and tourism.

Search and find gender-neutral careers. A **gender-neutral career** is a career in which both males and females participate and neither gender dominates the field by more than 74 percent. Use the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)* website at http://www.bls.gov/oco/ooi_index.htm and the Bureau of Labor Statistics' reports at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-table10-2008.pdf> to verify gender statistics for specific careers.

Access to Individuals and Experiences

Once your research has started, it is a great idea to confirm that research with some reality. This means seeking out persons employed in nontraditional careers to address individual experiences and challenges. Sometimes schools will arrange for classroom speakers. Make sure to indicate your career interest to your teacher and counselor. You may also want to suggest the designing of a career fair with an NTO element.

Your counselor would be an excellent resource to assist you in developing NTO field trips, work-based learning experiences, and volunteer experiences. He or she can also help you with professional mentoring resources, such as those found on the Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics ON THE AIR! website: <http://www.womeninscience.org/resources.php>.

Finally, with the assistance of your counselor, develop plans for a program of study that leads to a career that matches your skills and interests. Plan and record your career interests and coursework in your student ICP or Senior Project folder.



FIGURE 4. Work-based learning is an excellent way to confirm your interest in an NTO.

Summary:



Each specific occupation has a set of knowledge and skills necessary for success in that field. The required skills may be mathematics, spatial relationship, creativity, or compassion. Some obvious personality traits also make for a good fit with certain careers. No careers or occupations are gender specific.

A nontraditional occupation (NTO) is an occupation in which one gender makes up less than 25 percent of the employment within that field. When an individual has a job in a nontraditional field, the person is said to possess a cross-gender career. Examples of individuals in cross-gender careers are a male dental hygienist and a female operating engineer. Many benefits are associated with nontraditional careers, including greater job satisfaction.

Before researching the details of a nontraditional occupation, it is very helpful first to complete a comprehensive career assessment. This allows you to search according to your best fit. Next, review the 16 career clusters. You may then want to search and find gender-neutral careers. Once your research has started, it is a great idea to confirm that research with some reality. This means using work-based learning and volunteer experiences as ways to “try careers on for size.”

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. List and describe three benefits of nontraditional occupations.
2. Name some careers typically associated with men.
3. Name some careers typically associated with women.
4. Define the term *gender-neutral career*.
5. List some STEM careers.
6. How can you locate the NTOs within a certain career cluster?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



With the assistance of your counselor, develop a work-based experience using an NTO mentor. Conduct an interview, and learn which resources this person found helpful while pursuing his or her career.

Web Links:



ASU CareerWISE

<http://careerwise.asu.edu/>

Career and College Planning Resources

<http://www.khake.com/page51.html>

Career Click

<http://www.workforceinfo.state.il.us/>

Career Guide to Industries

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/>

CareerOneStop

<http://www.acinet.org/acinet/>

How Does Gender Play a Role in the Earnings Gap?

<http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2003/03/art2full.pdf>

National Sample Definitions—Career Clusters

<http://www.careerclusters.org/definitions.php>

New Resources for Women in STEM Careers

<http://www.icps.ilstu.edu/services/pd/docs/FY11-Connections-STEM-show.pdf>

Nontraditional Careers

<http://uhcc.hawaii.edu/nontrad/statistics.php>

http://www.dvr.w-cook.k12.il.us/index_files/Page985.htm

<http://www.isseek.org/careers/nontraditional.html>

Nontraditional Careers Program

http://www.schools.utah.gov/cte/nontrad_pathways.html

Nontraditional Electronic Newsletter

<http://cwg.siu.edu/index.php>

O*NET® OnLine

<http://online.onetcenter.org/>

Sixteen DVDs and Three Posters Highlight Women in Nontraditional Careers

<http://www.nontraditionalcareers.com/>

Women in the Labor Force

<http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook2008.htm>