

[Home](#) > [Blogs](#) > [Driving Force](#) > Career Exploration Resources For Grad Students And Postdocs

Driving Force

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Career exploration resources for grad students and postdocs

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There are many excellent web-based resources for graduate students and postdocs who want to explore their nonacademic career options – a pursuit that's particularly important now given the glut of Ph.Ds and dearth of faculty positions available. Here are four resources that I've found especially helpful.

1. **Branching Points:** Branching Points is run by Liza Shoenfeld, a second year graduate student at the University of Washington. Liza has put

together an impressive resource with articles about informational interviews, Q&As with Ph.Ds who have made the leap to various nonacademic careers, career profiles, and other insightful posts.

2. **My IDP:** My IDP (Individual Development Plan) is an interactive tool from ScienceCareers that walks you through the process of making a career plan. I mentioned it in my earlier post ([Career Planning for Scientists](#)), but it's such a strong resource that I think it merits further discussion. Often students are a bit baffled by how to even determine their career options when they first start considering a life outside of academic science. My IDP has quizzes that allow you to assess your skills and interests. It then uses this information to determine which categories of science careers would likely be good fits for you. For example, my results suggested that careers in science policy and science writing would be better fits for me than industry research jobs or starting my own business. One of the strongest aspects of my IDP is that each of these career categories is linked to several articles and resources about specific careers in that area. Once you've taken the quizzes, the next step is to identify your Plan A and Plan B careers and to make SMART (specific, manageable, action-oriented, realistic, and time-bound) goals towards exploring these careers and advancing the skills you need to be competitive when you're ready to apply for jobs. My IDP will even send you emails to remind you of your goals so you can stay on track.

3. **Versatile Ph.D.:** Versatile Ph.D. is an online message board and support group for PhDs who are exploring nonacademic careers. It was originally developed to help humanities and social science grad students learn about new career path possibilities, network, and gain support for making the transition out of academia. It now has a separate STEM board (although many topics on the humanities board are relevant for all potential career changers). It is free to join Versatile PhD and to participate on the message boards. There is also a premium content area that you may have access to depending on whether your institution is a subscriber.

4. **What are all the Ph.Ds?** This is a brand new blog that launched just this month. I hope it catches on. The idea behind What are all the Ph.Ds is that it is often difficult to know what the options are for specific career positions even if you know broadly what type of science career interests you. This blog highlights the possibilities by showing actual PhDs who are doing all sorts of things and by letting them explain their career trajectories. In fact, if you have a nonacademic science career, please consider submitting a profile!

Do you know of other resources that you'd like to recommend for students and postdocs considering non-academic careers? If so, please leave a comment below.

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Categories

- ▶ Science Policy (317)
- ▶ K-12 Education (138)
- ▶ Undergraduate Education (112)
- ▶ International Co-operation (86)
- ▶ Human Rights (30)
- ▶ Public Engagement (153)
- ▶ Evolution (66)
- ▶ Climate Change (91)
- ▶ Energy (65)
- ▶ Medicine (163)
- ▶ Workforce Development (125)
- ▶ Career Development (138)
- ▶ Diversity (77)
- ▶ Communicating Science (192)
- ▣ Biology (168)
- ▣ Chemistry (34)
- ▣ Earth Sciences (34)
- ▣ Engineering (50)
- ▣ Physics (43)
- ▣ Social Sciences (26)

