Juan received his acceptance letter to Sacramento State. He stared at it with excitement as he contemplated the thought of transitioning from high school into college. Juan began to ask himself questions: What am I going to major in? What will I learn in college? Who will I meet? What will I do when I graduate? How does my choice of major relate to the world of work?

He loved the outdoors, hiking and talking with friends. He hoped that college would provide him with that same excitement. Nobody in his family ever went to college, so Juan was unsure how to “do” college. He loved high school, especially his experience in a leadership class he took and being team captain of the school’s water polo team. Juan was afraid and excited at the same time about going to college. How could that be? He remembered his first day of high school and having that same feeling of being apprehensive and excited at the same time. He had successfully made a significant change in his life before, but would this be the same? More importantly, how would his college education relate to what he would do after college? After all, Sac State did not have a major in hiking or talking with friends. He had daydreams of getting paid to hike or be in the outdoors. He knew his college experience would change him. He just was not sure how college would change him as a person or how it would prepare him for the world of work.

One day before leaving for Sac State, Juan was having lunch with his friend Sasha. Sasha was also going to Sacramento State and had some of the same doubts as Juan about what college was going to be like and what they would do when they
graduated. Sasha told Juan that she was also excited about going to college, but at the same time, nervous, since she was also the first in her family to do so.

It seemed as though the questions they were asking were shared by many of their friends. Thinking back to their high school experiences, they knew they had changed personally, they were more mature, and had developed additional knowledge, skills and friendships. Juan’s leadership class gave him more self-confidence and allowed him to practice speaking in front of people. Sasha was quiet in high school and not as involved in extracurricular activities, but she loved math and also developed a strong interest in computers. She dreamed of one day using computers in the work that she did.

Both Juan and Sasha decided to go after the answers to some of their questions. Before they left for college, they decided to talk with a few of their high school teachers and counselors who had been to college. Also, Juan visited the Career Center at Sacramento State to see if someone there could help him with his questions. Both Sasha and Juan also attended Sacramento State’s open house, where they spoke with instructors and other staff at the college about what to expect as students. In addition, Sasha called a friend’s mom, who worked as a Physical Therapist, to ask her questions about her experience in college.

After several weeks of gathering information, the two of them again met for lunch and began to share what they had learned.

Juan learned that the world of work is constantly changing. New jobs and industries are created every day. There are emerging fields that are on the cutting edge of technology, like the Green building movement, telecommunications, and space travel. In addition, Juan learned that employers do have jobs for college graduates in many
different career fields, however, he was surprised to learn that many employers are not just looking for students with specific majors, but are also looking for workers who are able to work with different types of people, who are adaptable and flexible, who have strong organizational skills and who are able to learn quickly. Employers also are seeking new college graduates who have excellent communication skills, leadership skills and have the ability to listen. This excited Juan because he was beginning to see how the skills he developed in his leadership class in high school would be helpful to him when he graduated from college. He was already beginning to brainstorm ways he could acquire those skills at Sacramento State. He also learned about the value of transferable skills, such as communication skills, organizational skills, or leadership skills. These are the skills that are acquired during your lifetime that will be applied in future activities or jobs. Sasha learned that by going to college she would acquire lots of transferable skills that she would be able to take into the world of work – like creativity, evaluation, research, planning, organizing, making decisions, leadership, abstract thinking and time management.

Sasha also learned that there are many different majors on campus. She learned about the value of general education classes. These are the classes that all students must take before graduation that can introduce students to different majors and fields, as well as, help students to develop the transferable skills that Juan mentioned. Sasha was beginning to see that the skills she would develop in college would be valuable in the world of work too. In addition to transferable skills, Sasha learned that there were two other types of skills to be learned in college or on the job; technical skills and adaptive skills. Technical skills, or work content skills, relate to a specific discipline, major, or occupation. For example, computer programming, nursing, video production,
learning how to write a marketing plan or how to assess a client’s speech and language, are all work content skills. Adaptive skills are rooted in our personality, such as our energy levels or dependability; or having the ability to get along with others or work independently. Sasha and Juan were beginning to see how they would learn skills not only in the classroom, but also through other activities they participated in at school.

Sasha and Juan were so excited because they were seeing how life experiences, including what they do in college, teach certain skills and shape their personalities. These skills can be very helpful in their daily lives and also in the work and career field’s they choose.

Juan interrupted Sasha with excitement to tell her what else he learned on his journey of discovery. He learned that the world of work is not organized like college majors. He told Sasha there are many opportunities for all majors. Some employers look for students with a specific major, like Nursing, Accounting, Chemistry, Speech Pathology and Audiology, Music, Biochemistry, to name a few. These are called applied majors. Majors like these relate more directly to what graduates do in the world of work. However, Juan further explained that Biochemistry majors might also like working with people and may prefer not to be in an office all day. For these individuals a career path in pharmaceutical sales might be a more appropriate choice. Sasha learned that in addition to technical or applied majors, Sacramento State has many liberal arts majors, including Communication Studies, Sociology, Humanities and Religious Studies, and English. Graduates from liberal arts degree programs are valuable to employers because they tend to possess a broad range of skills that employers find valuable, including writing skills, ability to work as a member of a team, organizational skills, listening skills, and the ability to work with diverse groups of people.
Sasha and Juan could now see that students acquire many types of skills while going to college. They also learned that there are many opportunities in the world of work for students, some directly related to their major, others indirectly related. Sasha was excited to see how her interest in mathematics and computers related to certain majors on campus, such as Biology, Computer Science, Business Administration, Mathematics, Chemistry, and Physics. She jumped up and down when she learned that she could combine her major with an interest that she might have. For example, she loves working with children, so she might decide to teach mathematics at the high school level, rather than work for a computer high-tech company. In both cases, she can do still use both computers and mathematics, but teaching would allow her to work with kids, whom she loves.

Juan learned that many companies offer professional positions for college graduates from any major. This was exciting for Juan and Sasha also, since it created some additional options for them regardless of the major they chose. Sasha mentioned to Juan that she learned that some students go on to graduate school or professional schools in medicine or dentistry, for example. They were both surprised to learn that their bachelor degree programs did not necessarily have to be in the same academic area as a graduate program were considering.

Sasha and Juan were amazed to learn how interconnected their college experience was to the world of work. They began to understand that their college experience would help to shape their personality; provide them with transferable, work content, and adaptive skills; and help them develop the self-confidence and attitude to make a positive impact on others.
Suddenly, Sasha stopped talking and became quiet. Juan was unsure what she was thinking. He soon learned that Sasha remembered that a career counselor she spoke to encouraged students to actively create experiences that help shape who they will become. Juan was confused. He thought by just going to classes, he would develop all the skills and experience he would need. Sasha went on to tell Juan about the importance of seeking additional experiences while you are in school that can help develop the skills necessary to be successful in your chosen field or occupation. She learned that everyone, including students, have natural talents and gifts. In addition, students can develop experiences and opportunities in college that will shape who they are as a person and shape what they will be able to offer employers after they graduate. Juan was wondering if this meant that he could look for experiences at school that he would enjoy that would at the same time, provide him opportunities to learn new skills and knowledge. Sasha confirmed that college provided opportunities to further develop his leadership skills.

Juan and Sasha danced with delight in knowing that the experiences they gained in college related directly to shaping who they were as people, provided them with knowledge and skills that employers seek, and gave them the self-confidence and ambition to successfully pursue their educational and career goals. They also learned the importance of connecting with the world of work while they are in school. Sasha and Juan learned that even as freshman there are campus resources, like the Career Center, where they can learn how to talk with professionals in the world of work, in order to learn more about what they do. Juan was excited to learn about job shadowing, where he could observe someone on the job, so as to learn their “typical” work day. Juan learned as well about the value of internships and part-time jobs while in college.
Internships can provide experiences related to specific majors or to fields or industries. The skills and work habits they would learn in an internship or part-time job would also help Sasha and Juan to develop as people. Through an internship or part-time job they would begin to more clearly see the connection between their college major(s) and what takes place in the world of work. Sasha began to see how interrelated their college experience was with opportunities in life and who they were as people.

In addition to part-time jobs and internships, Sasha and Juan also learned that there are many opportunities on-campus for students to learn leadership skills. Sasha is interested in applying for a student job to help with the campus orientation program. Juan is going to join a student club related to environmental causes. They both would like to attend a leadership conference sponsored by Student Activities. Juan told Sasha that the environmental club he is planning to join is planning to invite a panel of six alumni who are working in the environmental field to speak with students. There are so many opportunities for students to gain experience and learn about the world of work while they are students. Sasha leaned how valuable the Career Center and the Academic Advising Center can be to help students relate their major to the world of work and prepare them to be successful in school and after.

As Sasha and Juan were finishing lunch they had a new found excitement and confidence about college. They could see how going to college would not only provide them with degrees, but more importantly, help shape them as individuals. The skills and knowledge they learned in school would go with them as they transitioned into the world of work. Juan learned the importance of internships, informational interviewing, job shadowing, and part-time jobs, and how they can provide the knowledge and skills sought by employers. Most importantly, Juan and Sasha learned how exciting it will be
going to college. They learned how their college education relates to work and their potential career paths. Juan and Sasha got back on their bikes and road home knowing that college was going to offer them exciting opportunities to grow, learn and develop as people. They also found comfort in knowing they will now be beacons for other members of their families who will follow after them.

Reflect on the following questions concerning Juan’s and Sasha’s journey to learn how their college education relates to work and career:

1. Which questions that Juan and Sasha were asking about college have you wondered about in your own life?
2. What strategies did Juan and Sasha use to gather information and learn about how college relates to work and career?
3. What part of Juan’s and Sasha’s story did you find most interesting and why?
4. What do you think it is like for Juan and Sasha being the first ones in their family to go to college? What would you recommend to first-generation college students to help them be successful in school and in work?
5. What are the three types of skills that Sasha and Juan discussed?
6. Brainstorm several ways you might gain leadership skills while in college.
7. What are the reasons employers like liberal arts majors?
8. How do applied majors relate to the world of work?