

Career Exploration Project

A valuable lesson

When NDA Career Counselor **Jackie (Zigray) Flom '85** was a senior at Notre Dame Academy, the Senior Project wasn't a requirement.

"But it certainly would have helped me out — and I probably wouldn't have changed my major three times, had I done some career exploration while still in high school," she shares.

Jackie attended the University of Toledo, and started with a major in chemical engineering before switching to accounting — and then changing again to major in marketing.

NDA implemented the Senior Project in the late 1980s, when **Sr. Mary Carol Gregory SND '58** was Principal. "We wanted to provide a benefit by helping the girls determine what they wanted to pursue as careers, and we also wanted to utilize the time during the month of May, when the seniors were ready to fly," explains Sr. Carol.

"They would shadow a professional for a week, and then come back to NDA and present their experience to one another. Many had ideas of what they wanted to do, but some of them changed their minds after the experience. The students who were really into it got a lot out of it, and they learned valuable lessons about responsibility and professionalism."

Today at NDA, the Senior Project has been renamed the "Career Exploration Project," and students may begin working on their job shadowing hours during the summer before their junior year. They now must complete their hours before the fall semester — at the beginning of senior year — which gives students more time to make informed decisions about which college to attend and major to pursue.

"With this timeline, failures or challenges can become learning opportunities for the future," shares Jackie.



Kara Cannon '18
Pediatric RN
Senior Project:
Shadowed a pediatric nurse

"I originally wanted to be a pediatrician, and went premed after graduating from NDA. I earned my bachelor's in biology and master's in nursing — and today I'm a pediatric nurse at ProMedica's Toledo Ebeid Children's Hospital.

NDA's Senior Project gives a first look at a real workplace experience, and can help students see if they actually like a career — or if they just like the idea of it."



Kylie (Foetisch) Smith '19
Early Childhood Education
Senior Project:
Shadowed at a preschool and middle school

"My experience confirmed that I loved education, but steered me more toward early childhood rather than young adult education. I appreciated getting hands-on experience in my desired career!"



Beth (Grime) Mooney '89
Business Owner

Senior Project:
Shadowed then-Toledo City Councilwoman Eleanor Kahle

"The Senior Project is a critical connection to the community — and teaches accountability and networking skills. My career plans were confirmed after my experience.

Today, I own my company — Jump Commerce Group, LLC — which helps European companies establish businesses in the U.S. I specialize in marketing and digital commerce, working primarily with industrial manufacturers."



Katelyn (Cook) Burton '02
Nurse
Senior Project:
Shadowed a nurse manager of a NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)

"I've been a nurse for 20 years! My background is primarily in NICUs, but I'm currently working as a school nurse in Fairfax, VA. The real-life experience of the Senior Project is unmatched."



Jayna Lonsway '20
Chemical Engineer

Senior Project:
Shadowed at the Dart Container Plant in Mason, MI, and the Owens-Illinois Glass Plant in Toledo

"During my Senior Project, I was introduced to engineering roles that bring innovation to life, from design and manufacturing to customer application. Seeing the R&D work at companies like O-I sparked my interest in research and ultimately led me to my current role at Dow. Ironically, some of the polyethylene resins I develop today are sold to companies like Dart, where I first discovered chemical engineering, a true full-circle experience.

The Senior Project provides students with valuable early exposure that many don't receive until college, helping them explore and confirm their interests before pursuing a degree."



Heather (Myers) Loomis '96
4th and 5th Grade Teacher

Senior Project:
Shadowed at Sunshine Children's Home

"I originally planned to pursue child psychology and help children affected by addiction, but my experience at Sunshine helped me realize my career path was elsewhere. It showed me the importance of experiencing a field before committing to it and potentially investing in classes I would not use.

Senior Project also helps students build valuable connections and represent NDA in the community through career exploration and service. I love that it gives the community a chance to see how remarkable these young women are."

Career Exploration Project

Isabella Przynosch '25
Expected Career in
Medicine

Senior Project:
Shadowed health care
professionals including
doctors, nurses, and
occupational/physical
therapists

“My Senior Project solidified
my plans by allowing me
to see what a typical day
in various healthcare fields
looks like. I shadowed for
many hours and got to watch
doctors perform surgery, PT
and OT perform exams on
patients, and also helped with
community service.”

Lauren Deutschman '20
Speech Therapist

Senior Project:
Shadowed at Rehabilitation
Hospital of Northwest Ohio

“During my experience, I
saw the team of physical,
occupational and speech
therapists work together
to comprehensively and
collaboratively treat patients.
This opportunity allowed
me to find a career I’m truly
passionate about — speech
therapy — that I didn’t
even know was an option
beforehand!”

Caitlyn (Miller) Olmedo '15
Paraeducator

Senior Project:
Shadowed a veterinary
practice and in engineering

“As a senior, I shadowed
my family veterinarian
and an engineering group,
interviewing several
engineers to explore my
career options. I ultimately
changed my major after
realizing engineering was
not the right fit, though I still
hope to work with animals.
NDA’s Senior Project allows
students to experience real
world careers based on their
interests rather than just
hearing about them, making
it a valuable opportunity.”

Jessica (Batanian)
Grisier '09
Communication and
Outreach Coordinator
with Lucas Soil & Water
Conservation District

Senior Project:
Shadowed at the Toledo Zoo

“I shadowed the Zoo’s
education department, caring
for animal ambassadors and
assisting zookeepers. The
experience strengthened my
interest in the environment,
wildlife, and conservation,
and showed how meaningful
hands-on learning can be for
a student’s future.”

Carisa (Livecchi) Ebert '08
Criminogenic
Psychopathology

Senior Project:
Shadowed in physical
therapy

“I hated every minute
of my Senior Project —
nothing kept my interest!
I thought I wanted to
become an orthopedic
doctor, but quickly learned
my real passion was
elsewhere. My graduate
degree is in criminogenic
psychopathology, and today
I’m a government contractor
working in a very niche
field.”

Emily Domalski '08
Digital Illustrator

Senior Project:
Shadowed at a veterinary
clinic

“My experience sent me
down a very different path.
I enjoyed time with the
animals, especially in the
kitten room, but I don’t
think I would have handled
performing surgeries or
putting animals down
very well. The real-world
experience of the Senior
Project is invaluable to young
students. For me, I needed
that hands-on opportunity
to really think about my
future.”

Amanda Mincheff '06
AI, Product Analyst
Consumer Advocate

Senior Project:
Shadowed Toledo Police
officers and detectives

“I completed my project
with the TPD. I got to review
homicide cases, including
very prominent cases in
Toledo at the time. I also
went on calls, including a
short high-speed chase and
on-foot pursuit. I planned to
be a forensic psychologist,
and ultimately ended up
in a different field — but I
believe all field experience is
relevant.”

Tanya Tan '02
Integrated Marketing Leader

Senior Project:
Shadowed at the Philippine
Consulate in Chicago

“My experience confirmed
that I wanted to stay in
communications, but the
government would probably
not be the route. I really
benefited from the real-life
experience of leaving home,
staying with friends of our
family to complete my
project. I took a communal
train every day, I even had
to pack a lunch! I learned so
much.”

NDA IB CAS Project

Creativity
Action
Service

NDA students who are pursuing the
International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma
Programme complete a CAS Project instead
of the typical career exploration project.

The CAS Project is one of three essential
elements that every student must complete
to earn her IB Diploma.

“Perhaps a student is deeply
moved by a particular social
justice concern,” explains IB
Coordinator Angie Joseph.
“She is encouraged to research
that topic and consider how
she might positively bring
awareness to it, or actively
attempt to address it.”

The CAS Project at NDA involves a service-
learning experience centered around a social
justice issue or a community need. It includes
a collaborative series of activities with one or
more of the CAS components — Creativity,
Action, and Service — and emphasizes
leading a team toward a goal that meets an
authentic need.

IB students are encouraged to reflect on
what brings them joy, or sets a fire in their
soul, when deciding on their CAS Project.



Although it may seem like a contradiction,
students are encouraged to think small.
“Meaning, what small thing can they do to
address the concern they are drawn to,”
says Ms. Joseph. “I remind them to think
small, think local, think reasonable and
doable — not grandiose.”

The CAS Project is an
important counterbalance
to the academic rigor
of the IB Diploma
Programme. It is meant to
be both challenging and
enjoyable — made up of
experiences that are
profound and lifechanging.



Eagle
Networks

The NDA Career
Counseling Office
is always seeking
local professionals in
northwest Ohio for NDA
girls to shadow. You can
help us find networks
among our alumnae,
and within our NDA
community, to assist
our students. If you are
interested in helping a
student with her Career
Exploration Project,
please reach out to
Jackie Flom at
jflom@nda.org.