

WORKSHOP

Preparing Seniors for Life after College

by Erica Young Reitz



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OBJECTIVE

Create a space for college seniors to think about the transition ahead. This time should help seniors:

- set realistic expectations for life right after college
- start to process some of their emotions and questions regarding the transition
- feel encouraged with perspective, help, and biblical hope for the transition
- gain practical tools for navigating the changes, challenges, and choices ahead

TIME FRAME

Two hours, or whatever length you determine is best for your context

CONTEXT

Decide when this workshop will work best for your context. Is there a way to include it in your current ministry rhythms and planning (rather than as “another event”)? Is there a place and time that your seniors are used to showing up (i.e. at Bible study, at fellowship group, at church on Sunday)? How can you make this workshop/event/program as accessible as possible to seniors who are probably overwhelmed with the demands of upper-level courses, job searches, leadership responsibilities, and other pressures?

LEARNING MODULES

Workshops do not need to include all modules. Select the modules that best fit your time-frame, context, and objectives.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Note: This list covers all modules.

- Soularium cards
- continuum of preparedness (created in advance)
- Post-It notes
- sharpies
- pens/pencils
- cards/clipboard to capture contact info
- food (Whether you serve snacks/desserts or a meal, how can you make this event special with the food and beverage you offer? How can you honor your seniors?)
- paper goods, napkins, dinnerware

MODULE ONE: Soularium Cards Exercise

(~15 minutes)

Before students arrive, place Soularium cards (picture side up) on a table. As they arrive, invite participants to select the card the best represents how they are feeling about graduation. Break into groups of 2-3 students and ask them to share why they picked that card. They can also share one thing they are hoping to learn from the workshop. Once all students have shared in small groups, you can ask the whole group if anyone wants to share what they discussed in their small group (either what they shared or what someone else shared).

Conclusion: The transition is multi-faceted and it's normal to have mixed emotions. Also, every person transitions differently; it's okay for you to have different emotions and experiences than your peers.

MODULE TWO: Continuum of Preparedness

(~15 minutes)

Create a continuum of preparedness where students can place themselves on one of five points on the continuum as they consider how prepared they are to graduate. You can create this using butcher paper and images/numbers or by using large posters and placing them on easels at five points around the room. The continuum should progress from “Not Prepared” (1) to “Fully Prepared” (5) in this order:

1. Wait, I’m graduating?!
2. I won’t think about it today, I’ll think about it tomorrow. Hey, at least it’s crossed my mind.
3. I’m on the fence; I’m sort of ready, sort of not.
4. I’m trekking towards the transition; I’m pretty sure I’ll be prepared when I get there.
5. Real world here I come! Bring it on, I’m totally ready!

Ask students: “How prepared are you to graduate from college?” Invite them to place themselves on the continuum (or next to the poster) that best represents their answer. Before they disperse for the activity, tell them that once they place themselves on the continuum they should turn to two other people (or the group around them) and discuss why they placed themselves where they did. **Ask:** How are you feeling about this upcoming year? Why or why don’t you feel prepared to graduate?

If possible, you/your team should facilitate these small-group discussions. Often students feel prepared when they have a job and do not feel as prepared when they’re still waiting for that offer. It can be helpful for you/a team member to push the conversation deeper with comments/questions like, “I noticed all of you talked about the job, but I’m wondering how you’re feeling about leaving your friends? Dealing with finances and/or loan payments? Finding a church after college?”

Ask students to return to their seats. Invite large-group discussion by asking if anyone wants to share with the whole group why they placed themselves where they did or if anything noteworthy came up in their group discussion.

Conclusion: The point of this exercise is to help students gauge their own preparedness, but also to show that this transition is multi-faceted; there are many reasons (beyond the job) why students may or may not feel prepared (or actually be prepared!).

MODULE THREE: Panel discussion with recent alumni

(~45 minutes)

Our seniors love hearing the struggle and success stories of former students! It normalizes their own transition, helps set realistic expectations and encourages them that there is life after college. The key to having a great panel discussion is found in selecting great panelists, preparing them, and facilitating well.

Send questions to your panelists in advance. Remind them that not every person needs to answer every question. You may also caution them from “giving advice” on the panel. We’ve found that panelists sometimes need to be coached to share their experience rather than spout advice.

Here are some possible questions you could ask. (We also invite students to submit questions when they register.):

- Describe your transition experience from college to the next phase, especially the first year out.
- What were some of your greatest struggles and successes? What issues did you face?
- Who/what was most helpful in overcoming challenges or issues (discussed above)?
Or, if you experienced successes, who/what contributed to that?
- Describe your faith experience or spiritual life in the first year out.
- Did you feel prepared for the transition? Why or why not?
- Was your transition experience common to experiences of your friends who graduated the same year? Why or why not?
- What’s one thing you wish someone would have said to your senior year self?

Conclusion: After you close the panel discussion, ask the students to turn to one other person and answer this question: “What stood out to you from the panel? What idea, insight, or story sticks with you?” This can help students process what they’re hearing and learning.

MODULE FOUR: Biblical Content/Talk

(~30 minutes)

There are many ways to offer solid content and biblical hope to your seniors. Here are some ideas:

- **Daniel 1:** Take a look at Daniel's life and faithfulness in Babylon, drawing parallels to living as a faithful Christian in the "real world." We frame this talk in terms of changes, challenges, and choices.
- **Genesis 12:** Take a look at Abraham's call from God to "Go to unknown land." Whether your seniors are heading to a new city, going back home, or staying in the area of their alma mater, they will all enter a time with many "unknowns." Draw parallels between Abraham's story of trust (and doubt) and God's faithfulness to him.
- **Hebrews 6:19:** Take a look at biblical hope and what it means that we have an "anchor for our soul" in a shifting, dynamic time. In a baccalaureate address to a group of Stanford graduates, Jim Wallis, CEO of Sojourners, stated, "The big struggle of our times...is the fundamental choice between cynicism and hope.... Hope is not a feeling; it is a decision." Help students consider their heart attitudes as they approach graduation. Are they choosing hope?

Conclusion: Students need to know that their story (their concerns, fears, hopes, and dreams) has a place in the grand biblical story. When we draw out Scriptures and connect them to students' situations, we offer perspective, truth, and hope for the journey ahead!

Important! Make sure you get the contact information for your graduating seniors, and invite them to participate in the CCO Alumni Network.



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