

# How Do College Students Plan Their Future Career Direction under the Global Economic Turmoil

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## ABSTRACT

Under the situation of global economic turmoil, the future career planning has become an important issue for college students to think about urgently. At present, the global economy is affected by multiple factors, and traditional industries are facing recession, while emerging industries are booming. In this context, how to choose a university major and plan the future career path has become a key issue. By analyzing the impact of economic turmoil on the career market, this paper discusses how future college students should pay attention to emerging industries and career trends when choosing university majors. At the same time, combined with factors such as digital transformation and globalization trend, the future career direction and skill requirements are clarified, so as to provide college students with planning ideas to deal with the complex economic situation.

## 1. Introduction

The turmoil of the global economy has profoundly affected the pattern of the professional market. The change of traditional industries, the emergence of emerging technologies, the collision of globalization and localization and other multiple factors interweave, which make college students need to be more cautious in facing the choice of university majors. College examination is not only a key step to your future career, but also choosing the right major is an important basis for your future career development. In such a complex economic background, how to correctly evaluate their own interests and advantages, and how to find development opportunities in the emerging industries, has become a topic that every college student needs to seriously consider.

## 2. Recognize the career changes of the global economic turmoil

### 2.1 The Decline of Traditional Industries and the Rise of Emerging Sectors

#### (1) Changes in Manufacturing and Energy Sectors

Global economic turbulence is reshaping the development trajectory of traditional industries, with manufacturing and energy sectors bearing the brunt. Many traditional manufacturing industries, hindered by lagging technological innovation, are gradually losing competitiveness. The rise of industrial automation and smart manufacturing is replacing low-skill jobs, particularly manual labor roles, with machines and automated systems. The energy sector is experiencing profound shifts as well. Careers related to

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fossil fuels are declining, while job opportunities in clean and renewable energy fields are on the rise. With the global promotion of renewable energy policies, industries like solar, wind, and hydrogen energy are in urgent need of technical experts and project management professionals. Energy sector workers who enhance their expertise in new energy technologies can look forward to broader career prospects<sup>[1]</sup>.

## ***(2) Opportunities in Emerging Sectors: Information Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and the Green Economy***

In contrast to the gradual decline of traditional industries, the rapid rise of emerging sectors like information technology, artificial intelligence, and the green economy presents abundant career opportunities. The rapid advancement of information technology has driven growth in fields such as data science, cybersecurity, and cloud computing, leading to an increasing demand for data analysts and cybersecurity engineers. Similarly, the demand for AI professionals has surged, with roles like machine learning engineers and natural language processing researchers becoming prevalent. Traditional industries are also increasingly adopting AI technologies to enhance efficiency and competitiveness, generating cross-industry applications of AI. The rise of the green economy has fostered career development in areas like environmental consulting and sustainable development management. Companies' emphasis on environmental sustainability has created demand for professionals like environmental engineers and sustainability consultants, offering rapid career growth opportunities. According to a 2023 report by McKinsey Global Institute, approximately 85% of jobs over the next decade have yet to be fully defined, highlighting the uncertainty and opportunity inherent in career choices and development. The importance of specialized skills and interdisciplinary abilities is becoming increasingly evident. The **World Economic Forum's "2023 Future of Jobs Report"** predicts that digitalization, AI, and green economic transformation will reshape the global job landscape. University students should focus on developing data analysis, digital literacy, cross-cultural communication, and problem-solving skills—core competencies for the future workforce. Data shows a rapid growth in demand for digital economy-related talent. According to data from the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, the number of workers in China's digital economy is projected to reach 120 million by 2025, with an average annual growth rate of over 8%. This indicates that professionals with digital skills will enjoy vast career opportunities. The key to career planning lies in maintain-

ing learning agility, fostering interdisciplinary thinking, and cultivating lifelong learning abilities. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, in today's workplace, individuals need to update or rebuild their professional skills every 3-5 years on average, making lifelong learning an essential choice for career development.

## **2.2 The Impact of Digital Transformation on Career Development**

### ***(1) The Popularization of Remote Work and Flexible Work Arrangements***

Amid global economic turbulence, digital transformation has progressively deepened its impact on career development. The widespread adoption of remote work and flexible work arrangements has significantly influenced employment models and career choices. Increasingly, companies are implementing remote work policies globally, broadening their talent pools and creating more cross-regional job opportunities. The proliferation of digital tools has greatly enhanced collaboration efficiency, enabling the smooth operation of remote work. As a result, companies now prioritize candidates' self-management capabilities and digital communication skills during recruitment. This shift in work modes has made roles such as writing, programming, and design—tasks that can be performed online—particularly advantageous in a remote work framework. Additionally, flexible work arrangements have freed career development from geographical constraints, fostering greater possibilities for cross-industry and cross-functional growth. According to the **51st Statistical Report on China's Internet Development** released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of December 2022, China had 540 million online office users, accounting for 50.6% of all internet users. This trend not only expands companies' talent selection but also creates more cross-regional job opportunities. For example, in February 2022, Trip.com announced a hybrid work policy for its nearly 30,000 employees, allowing them to work remotely from home on Wednesdays and Fridays. This "3+2" hybrid work model made Trip.com the first major company in China to implement such an approach. This transition in work modes has significantly benefitted online-capable roles like writing, programming, and design. Flexible work arrangements have also opened up more possibilities for cross-industry and cross-functional career growth.

### ***(2) The Growing Importance of Digital Skills***

Digital transformation has greatly amplified the importance of digital skills. An increasing number of jobs now require candidates to possess a certain level of digital pro-

iciency, even in traditional industries where digital literacy has become a fundamental skill. Abilities such as data analysis and information processing have become essential for career advancement. Mastery of these skills can significantly enhance an individual's competitiveness in the job market. Job seekers should gradually build their digital skillset by learning data analysis, basic programming, and cloud technology applications, laying a solid foundation for career growth. In roles such as financial management and marketing, professionals who can effectively use data tools for precise analysis and decision-making are particularly competitive. Moreover, advancements in automation technology have introduced new demands for process optimization and efficiency improvement, driving the upgrade of skills like data analysis and information processing. This underscores the increasing relevance of digital skills in future career development. For instance, the **2023 China Cloud Office Industry Research Report** by iiMedia Research projects that China's cloud office market will reach ¥33.01 billion in 2023, maintaining steady growth. This indicates a sustained increase in the demand for digital skills among businesses. Job seekers should continue to enhance their digital capabilities, using tools like data analysis, foundational programming, and cloud applications to bolster their career prospects. In fields such as financial management and marketing, those who can skillfully leverage data tools for precise decision-making stand out. The progression and widespread adoption of automation technologies have also created new requirements for process optimization and efficiency, further advancing the need for upgraded digital skills. As a result, digital competencies will remain a cornerstone of future career development<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **2.3 Balancing Globalization and Localization**

#### ***(1) Intensified Competition in the Global Job Market***

Global economic turbulence has heightened competition in the global job market, highlighting the importance of balancing globalization and localization in career development. In the context of globalization, markets in different countries and regions are increasingly interconnected, leading companies to place greater emphasis on cross-cultural communication and multilingual skills. The openness of the global job market gives candidates with international perspectives and multicultural fluency a significant edge. These individuals are highly competitive in multinational corporations and international organizations. Talent adept at adapting to diverse cultural environments can better navigate challenges in cross-border projects and excel in multicultural team collaboration. According

to Mercer's **2024 Global Talent Trends Report**, which surveyed over 12,200 respondents, many organizations are focused on enhancing talent competitiveness in a globalized environment. Candidates with international perspectives and multicultural understanding are especially valued in multinational companies and international organizations. Participation in international projects and cross-cultural exchange activities can strengthen individual competitiveness and lay a solid foundation for future career advancement. Thus, developing an international perspective and improving language proficiency are crucial. Engaging in global projects and cross-cultural exchanges is an effective way to enhance personal competitiveness and prepare for future career growth<sup>[3]</sup>.

#### ***(2) Advantages of Localized Career Opportunities***

At the same time, the advantages of localized career opportunities remain significant. While globalization expands career choices, localized expertise is irreplaceable in certain fields. Many industries and roles require a deep understanding of local market needs, laws, regulations, and cultural practices. Professionals familiar with local markets are better equipped to adapt to market changes and respond quickly. Localized career opportunities are particularly critical in fields such as law, healthcare, and government. Professionals in these sectors must possess localized knowledge and resource integration capabilities to drive business effectively. In the context of combining globalization and localization, the focus of future career development will be on cultivating hybrid talent with both an international perspective and local adaptability. This will enable individuals to contribute more significantly to the globalization process. For example, 36Kr Global reported that Glints, a recruitment platform specializing in Southeast Asia, has developed regional hiring solutions tailored to corporate strategies and team-building requirements. This approach demonstrates that localized expertise and resource integration are essential for advancing related business initiatives.

### **3. Focusing on Future Career Trends**

#### **3.1 Career Prospects in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) Fields**

The demand for talent in STEM fields is steadily increasing in the future job market, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence and data science. The rapid advancement of AI technologies has led to widespread applications of machine learning and deep learning, penetrating industries ranging from finance and healthcare to manufacturing. The growing demand for intelligent systems

and automation has created numerous high-skill positions, such as machine learning engineers and data analysts, who play a pivotal role in enabling companies to make data-driven decisions.

Data scientists, regarded as one of the most promising careers today, are in high demand not only in tech companies but also increasingly in traditional industries such as agriculture and education. Furthermore, as global cybersecurity threats continue to rise, cybersecurity has become a critical issue in the digital age. Businesses are actively seeking professionals who can safeguard data privacy and defend against cyberattacks, leading to a surge in demand for cybersecurity experts. When selecting university majors, students should prioritize STEM-related disciplines, particularly those offering cutting-edge technical skills. This focus can provide graduates with a competitive edge in the future global job market, allowing them to enter high-tech industries and secure stable career paths in a rapidly evolving economic environment.

### **3.2 Career Opportunities in Health and Life Sciences**

The health and life sciences sector also demonstrates robust career opportunities, particularly against the backdrop of an aging global population and the rising demand in the healthcare and biotechnology industries. These industries not only provide essential services to society but also exhibit relative stability during times of economic turbulence. Pursuing health science-related disciplines, such as medicine, nursing, and biotechnology, offers a wide range of career possibilities. For example, as mental health issues become more prevalent, there is a rapidly growing demand for professionals such as counselors and clinical psychologists. These roles contribute to supporting vulnerable groups and advancing research to improve mental health treatment techniques. At the same time, the rapid development of biotechnology presents new possibilities for addressing global challenges, such as infectious disease prevention and cancer drug development. By choosing specialties in these fields, students can actively contribute to global health initiatives, drive progress through innovation and research, and gain opportunities to join the rapidly expanding life sciences industry<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **3.3 Career Opportunities in the Green Economy and Sustainable Development**

Career opportunities in the green economy and sustainable development have become a critical focus in the era of globalization. With the escalating challenges of global climate change, environmental protection and

sustainability are now top priorities for governments and businesses worldwide. Choosing majors related to the green economy, such as renewable energy engineering and environmental science, can offer expansive career prospects. The renewable energy industry is rapidly rising, with the promotion of clean energy technologies like wind and solar power driving an increasing demand for skilled professionals in these fields. Additionally, the concept of a circular economy is gaining global traction, fostering innovation and implementation of environmentally friendly technologies. Governments are strengthening measures to control carbon emissions, and businesses are actively investing in green technologies to reduce their environmental impact. When considering career paths, it is essential to focus on areas closely linked to environmental protection and sustainable development. Professionals with expertise in environmental awareness and sustainability skills will not only be indispensable within their industries but also play a vital role in shaping a greener future on a global scale<sup>[5]</sup>.

By paying attention to trending careers in STEM, health and life sciences, and the green economy, individuals can better navigate the uncertainties of the global economy. The vast development potential and stable job prospects in these sectors provide clear guidance for future career planning. When making decisions about academic and career paths, it is crucial to consider societal and economic trends alongside personal interests and abilities to find a direction that aligns with both individual aspirations and societal needs.

## **4. Conclusion**

In the face of global economic turbulence and uncertainty, university students need to focus their career planning on future trends and opportunities. The transformation of traditional industries, the rise of emerging technologies, and the interplay of globalization and localization provide new perspectives and challenges for career choices. Whether in STEM, health and life sciences, or the green economy and sustainable development, the future job market is increasingly open to highly skilled, interdisciplinary talent with a global outlook. When selecting a major, students should align their interests and strengths with industries that offer long-term growth potential. Enhancing digital capabilities, cross-cultural communication skills, and sustainability awareness will be crucial to standing out in the competitive global market. By understanding market dynamics and future career trends, university students can better navigate their career paths in a complex economic environment and lay a solid foundation for future success.

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