

Choosing a Major

DISCOVERING YOUR TRUE FIT



The Search Begins

When it comes to big life decisions, choosing a major is certainly one of them. It's a process that deserves time and attention, yet you don't have to do it alone.

“WHAT SHOULD I DO?”

It's easy to look at classmates who seem certain about their majors. Pre-med fits her, you think. He was born to be a broadcaster, you sigh. When will *you* find your “perfect” match?

This isn't some collegiate dating game! Instead, it's about examining who you are, what's important to you, your interests and abilities. And, in the end, it's about deciding what major will satisfy you in a number of ways, including:

- Subject matter that you have a passion for
- Topics that challenge you
- Class projects you look forward to
- Subjects that you like to spend time with
- Ideas that inspire you
- Tasks that speak to your interests and abilities
- The kind of work you'll be proud to do

In order to find a major that meets these criteria, you may need to take a variety of classes. Talk with your advisor about smart ways to explore different subjects while still meeting your core requirements. Don't delay!

Change is Okay

As you “try on” different subjects, you may decide to change your major. That's okay. Just be sure to discuss changes with your advisor first to avoid academic disruptions. Make a change for the better!



Possible Paths with a Major in... COMMUNICATIONS

Editorial Assistant • Radio Announcer • Development Officer/Fundraiser • Translator
Public Relations Consultant • Speech Pathologist • Lobbyist • Speech Writer
Consumer Advocate • Youth Worker • Human Resources Staff • Photographer
Special Events Coordinator • Production Assistant • Proofreader • Fashion Merchandiser
Travel Agent • Training Specialist • Web Developer • Reporter • Not-for-Profit Staff

Thoughts & Feelings

There are many thoughts and emotions tied into the decision-making process. And all of them are valid. Take stock of what you're thinking and what you're feeling before going any further. For instance, do any of the items below look familiar?

FEELINGS ABOUT CHOOSING A MAJOR

- Panic and anxiety
- Excitement and enthusiasm
- Pride and anticipation
- Worry and indecision
- Being “stuck”
- Not wanting to let anyone down

Your Employee Package

Choosing a major is just one part of your career path. Potential employers will be looking at your major and your coursework, yet they'll be very interested in what you did *outside* of class, too. From leadership skills to clubs to volunteer activities, these involvements will have an impact. Your “package” is about much more than simply what you majored in.

THOUGHTS ABOUT CHOOSING A MAJOR

- Do I have the skills and the smarts?
- What identity am I taking on?
- Will I be able to handle the course load?
- Am I being swayed by anything or anyone?
- What jobs will I be qualified for?
- Am I doing this for the right reasons?



It can be easy for other people to sway you. Don't let others be your only influence, though, when they say things like, “You'll be the next lawyer in the family” or “You need a professional major, not a liberal arts one, in order to make any kind of money.” There will always be critics and people with good intentions. However, *your* voice is the one that ultimately matters. So, gather the facts, explore the thoughts and emotions involved, and make your decision. Then, *trust* it.

Possible Paths with a Major in... CHEMISTRY

Environmental Health Specialist • Patent Agent • Optometrist • Nurse • Psychiatrist • Hydrologist
Product Development Manager • Soil Technician • Crime Lab Analyst • EPA Inspector
Molecular Biologist • Toxicologist • Food Scientist • Genetic Counselor • Perfumer
Pharmaceutical Sales Rep • Occupational Safety Specialist • Cooperative Extension Agent

What's Important to You

Your values and your interests can help guide you toward selecting the major that fits you best.

IDENTIFY YOUR INTERESTS

Brainstorm what you're interested in onto a piece of paper without censoring or judging yourself. This list can include anything from hip-hop music to philosophy!

Choosing a major often starts with this simple step. These are the things you like to do, the things in life that have captured your interest. To discover other areas of interest consider...

- What co-curricular activities are you drawn to?
- If you have free time, what do you choose to do?
- What topics do you like to read about?
- When folks ask you what you're interested in, how do you answer?

Choosing a Minor

As you examine your interests, abilities and values, you may discover that you'd like to explore a subject as a minor. Talk with your advisor about requirements for majors and minors before making your decision.



EXPLORE YOUR VALUES

Having a major that matches your values is essential. And, once you're in the world of work, you'll feel much more committed to a job that you value, too.

What does valuing your work mean to you? Here are a few values-oriented questions to consider...

- What classes have felt most worthwhile to you so far?
- Why did you place that value on them?
- What are the key values you hope to have in the workplace? Making a difference? Money? Reputation? Making others' experience positive?

Possible Paths with a Major in... ART

Website Designer • Art Therapist • Gallery Operator • Marketing Consultant • Grants Specialist
Museum Curator • Graphic Artist • Arts Council Director • Editor • Cartoonist • Librarian
Video Game Creator • City Cultural Arts Promoter • Art Critic • Exhibits Designer • Archivist

Your Fit

Examining your abilities as well as the details your school requires will help you find your fit.

YOUR ABILITIES

Look at all you're able to accomplish in your academic, social, work and co-curricular life! These abilities can lend a clue as you determine which major to pursue.

So, take stock of your abilities by asking yourself a few questions...

- What are my best subjects so far?
- What talents have I used in my past jobs?
- What skills do I bring to my leisure activities?
- What abilities help me do a good job during service projects?
- What talents would I like to develop?



Check into these details and sort through things you're unsure of with your advisor. It's your right *and* your responsibility.

MAJOR DETAILS

As you're examining your abilities, interests and values, don't forget to note the fine print associated with certain majors.

- **Major Requirements.** Do you need a certain GPA to apply for a major program? Are there pre-requisites? Is there a limit on how many students can be in a major?
- **Additional Obligations.** Some majors may require that you do a practicum, a field study or some other out-of-class task. Just know what you're getting into.
- **Degree Completion.** Talk with department chairs, faculty and your advisor about how long it will take to complete requirements for your field of study. Do students in this major typically graduate in four years? Are you on track with your classes and any credits you brought to school?

Possible Paths with a Major in... LANGUAGE

Bilingual Educator • Public Health Administrator • Publishing Specialist • Police Officer
Travel Writer • Sports Agent • Translator • Hotel Administrator • Court Interpreter
Intelligence Specialist • Customs/Immigration Officer • Archivist • Importer/Exporter
Negotiator • Library Technician • Art Dealer • International Conference Planner
Scientific Linguist • Diplomat • Museum Curator • Journalist

Taking Initiative

There are some key resources at your fingertips on a college campus, there to assist as you make decisions about your major. However, these resources mean nothing if you don't take the initiative to use them!

- **Get to Know Your Advisor.** Your advisor is there to help you navigate and make good choices. So, be proactive in establishing a relationship. Make an appointment to visit so you become more than just a name. Ask him to help you create an outline of classes and other requirements so you can graduate on time. Talk about choosing a major. And get to know your advisor as a person, too.



Developing Relationships

The longer you go without a declared major, the longer you may have to remain in school. That's why it's so important to develop relationships now. It's never too early to start!

- **Get to Know Instructors.** As you're learning about certain majors, talk with instructors and department chairs. They know the major inside out and can share nuances that you may not have considered. Make an appointment to do an informational interview, asking about classes offered within the major, internship/field study requirements, what students can do with such a major and more.
- **Get to Know Career Counselors.** The career center isn't just for seniors needing resume assistance. Anyone can use them! These professionals are full of information and resources. Career exploration is a multi-year process and it makes sense to get started now.

Possible Paths with a Major in... **BUSINESS**

Public Utilities Manager • Small Business Owner • Transportation Director • Stock Broker
Restaurant/Food Service Manager • Credit Analyst • Quality Control Auditor • Sales Manager
Trust Administrator • Training Manager • Media Planner • Insurance Agent • Payroll Officer
Labor Relations Manager • Compensation Manager • Consultant • Risk Management Services
Purchasing Agent • Entertainment Manager • Bursar • Online Educator

Using Resources

There are many available resources to help as you decide which major to pursue, and they include...

YOUR CAREER CENTER

This office has everything from self-assessment instruments to informational workshops to the *Directory of Occupational Titles*, filled with thousands of job descriptions. Plus, check out their website for additional online resources. And nothing beats talking face-to-face with one of the caring, well-trained career counselors!

THE COURSE CATALOG

Browse through all the classes and requirements available within each major. What does it take to get a major and what's required for a minor? If the course listings spark your interest, you may be on to something.

ALUMS

Contact the campus alumni office to see if they have a job-shadowing program or can help you set one up. This allows you to shadow an alum for a day or more in an effort to learn about what *really* goes into certain careers.

UPPERCLASS STUDENTS IN CERTAIN MAJORS

Ask your advisor to help connect you with an upperclass student in a major that interests you. Then, grab a cup of coffee and pick that person's brain. It could be the best 45 minutes you'll ever spend!

Campus Happenings

Our campus is a lively place, filled with the exchange of ideas on a daily basis. Take advantage of this exchange by attending:

- Free activity and job fairs
- Residence hall programs
- Career panels and workshops
- Guest lectures
- Academic programs
- And more!

Soak in as much information as you can to help in your decision-making process.

Possible Paths with a Major in...

MATH

Environmental Technician • Computer Engineer • Meteorologist • Investment Banker
Cartographer • Air Traffic Controller • Network Programmer • Research Analyst
Software Support Specialist • Technical Writer • Transportation Planner
Math Teacher • Statistician • Risk and Insurance Specialist • Estate Planner
Economist • Mortgage Researcher • Astronomer • Accountant

Discover the Ideal vs. the Real

There's an **Ideal Self** and a **Real Self** inside of you. As you evaluate your major options, put your **Real Self** in charge.

Your Ideal Self is the person you may wish to be, possibly created by family or societal expectations. Yet, it's not really you.

Your Real Self is who you are today, talents, flaws and all. It's the self interested in finding a true fit; a major that matches your interests, values and abilities. It's who you *really* are.

NO WAY!

What majors can you definitely rule out?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Once you've explored the vast array of majors, narrowing it down gives you more focus to explore the real possibilities within each.

The *process* of exploration can form you just as much as a major can. You'll be talking with professionals, exploring your interests, getting in touch with your values and examining options. You deserve to know yourself better. There's no doubt that you will once this process is complete.

YOUR TOP 3

What majors have made it to your Top 3?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Get Real

Ask trusted individuals, "Where do you see my talents?" They'll likely offer possibilities you never considered before! Plus, they can serve as a mirror, reflecting back your **Real Self** rather than your **Ideal Self**. Get real, with a little help from your friends.

Possible Paths with a Major in... POLITICAL SCIENCE

Director of Public Policy • Government Employee • Special Interest Group Director
Journalist • Lobbyist • Teacher • Campaign Staffer • Social Worker • Federal Agent
Congressional Researcher • Media Analyst • Paralegal • Historic Preservationist
Legislative Assistant • Law Enforcement Officer • Foreign Service Worker
Peace Corps Volunteer • Probation/Parole Officer