How to Choose a Major

Key Points for Getting Started

1. Three out of four students change their major at least once.
2. Majors are designed for differences in student goals.
3. Majors are usually broad in scope and somewhat flexible.
4. Through intellectual development, major choices will frame world views and attitudes and influence individual behaviors.
5. Self-assessment and researching majors is vital for informed decision-making.
6. Know your particular learning style, values, and personality strengths.
7. Only 70% of college graduates find their first job related to their major.
8. The ideal major is the one that you feel passionate about.

What is a Major?

A major is a concentration of courses within a specific field or interdisciplinary theme. There are three different pathways to consider when selecting a major.

1. “Occupationally oriented majors” are for graduates wanting to obtain employment immediately following graduation such as nursing or computer science.
2. “Graduate school readiness majors” are designed for careers where advanced education is necessary such as in counseling, law, dental, or veterinary careers.
3. “Multipotential majors” offer flexibility for many career opportunities such as in liberal arts and science fields. This pathway often leads to graduate school.

How to Learn about a Major

1. Obtain descriptions on different majors from educational sources.
2. Identify the prerequisite courses for the major.
3. Review majors in college catalogs. Read the required course descriptions.
4. Plan how much time it will take to complete the major. How many units are required?
5. Explore the history and background of the major.
6. Find out the current status and future outlook of the major.
7. Know the specific admission requirements for the major.
8. Be aware of the competition for admission to the major.
9. Identify the various career paths and job opportunities connected with the major.
10. Talk to graduates that have completed the major and to professors that teach courses in the major.
11. Discover the skills that will be learned through the major.
12. Explore opportunities for gaining experience with the major such as job shadowing or volunteer work.
13. Learn about the characteristics of a successful student for the major.
14. Sample different courses to determine new interests and skills.
The Truth about Salaries and Choice of a Major

1. The highest salaries are usually obtained from majors that have substantial coursework in mathematics or rely on mathematical techniques.
2. High or low salaries are not guaranteed from choice of a major or degree.
3. Men tend to choose more majors associated with higher salaries than women.

Clues for Choosing a Major

1. Which majors are represented by your interests, skills, values, and personality preferences?
2. Which subjects do you enjoy the most?
3. In which subjects do you earn your best grades?
4. In which subjects do you earn your poorest grades?
5. Are there any patterns in your academic record that would indicate certain interests, strengths, or limitations for certain majors?
6. What other majors relate to these programs of study?
7. How much time, energy, and financial resources are you willing to invest in your future?

Common Reasons for Changing Majors

1. Discovering that your original choice is not right for you based on a better understanding of your interests, experiences, or that you are better suited to another major.
2. Concern for the availability of employment related to your lifestyle goals.
3. Concern for your financial goals.
4. Concern for the impact your choices will have on yourself, your family or significant others.

Other Beneficial Courses for Career Management

1. Career development course
2. High level careers demand coursework in liberal arts such as English, humanities, mathematics, and social sciences.
3. Business writing course
4. Grant writing course
5. Promotion/public relations course
6. Speech/business presentations course
7. Sales/selling principles course
8. Time management workshop
9. Human relations/interpersonal communications course
10. Marketing course
11. Language course
12. Business/accounting principles course
13. Stress management workshop