Choosing a Major

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Here to help you get ahead.

Four Important Factors to Consider When Choosing a Major

1. Enjoyment/Interest
Are you genuinely attracted to the subject matter in this field? Do you find the courses stimulating, challenging, and filled with new ideas? Is this an area where your interest might be sustained over a long period of time?

2. Performance
Are you likely to perform reasonably well in this field? Do the courses take advantage of your better abilities? Will you have to struggle to attain a decent grade-point average? What were your best subjects in high school? What extracurricular activities have you excelled in during high school and college?

3. The People
Do you feel comfortable with the faculty and students in this department? Are these the kinds of people you enjoy listening to, talking with, and being around?

4. The Implications for Your Career
Will this major have a positive effect on your career plans? Are you learning skills and acquiring knowledge that will be useful in the fields you hope to enter? What careers might interest you based on major?

Five Best Ways to Explore Majors

You may want to conduct your research in the following order, because these five methods begin with the easiest and work through the method requiring the most involvement from you. If you like the major based on the first method (Reading), then go to the next method (Observing), etc.

1. Read Materials
Here are some of the materials to help you begin your evaluation of a possible major:
- The University catalog describes in detail the major requirements and course offerings for each field.
- In the textbook section of Bookstore, you can browse through the assigned texts and get an idea of the nature of the content and difficulty of the reading

2. Observe Classes
Be sure to observe classes in the major field which you are considering
- Observe classes on a one-time basis. Trying classes one at a time is an especially good way to sample the possibilities and cover a broad territory.
- "Audit" a course by enrolling officially in a class without having to take it for credit or complete the assignments.

3. Talk to Students, Faculty, and Advisors
Most people involved in a major field of study are willing to talk about it, but you must approach them directly.

Ask students:
1. What do you like about this major?
2. What do you not like about it?
3. What are you learning that is especially challenging?

Ask faculty:
1. What kinds of abilities will I develop in this major?
2. What kinds of careers have graduates of this department gone into?
3. What do you especially like about this field?

Ask advisors:
1. Which courses are known to be the most difficult?
2. What do students who enroll in this department say they like about it?
3. Are there any pre-requisites that I must have?

4. Taking Courses
Sampling the courses themselves is a way to gauge your first-hand reaction to the subject matter, how you will be tested, and the skills you will acquire. If you are exploring more than one major, you would be wise to take at least one or two courses in each of these major fields before you decide on your field. It is OK to take courses in many different fields at the same time, and it helps to broaden your overall education.

5. Working during College
Another way to test the value of your major is to get an internship, or a part-time/summer job in a career field that interests you, and then ask yourself: "Which particular major (among those whose courses you have sampled at the University) would help me the most in this career?" Sometimes the major is helpful in a direct and obvious way (learning subject matter that applies to the

job, such as accounting or education), and sometimes the value of the major is more subtle (for example, the analytical skills of philosophy might help you solve business problems, or the research skills of history might help you organize a project).

Career Exploration Checklist: How Does Major Relate to Career?

Other than accounting or education, no major at Southwestern equates directly to a particular career. This gives you freedom to study anything that interests you, but it also gives you the responsibility to figure out what to do after college. Good career exploration and decision-making can occur hand-in-hand with your academic planning and involves two basic areas:

Explore yourself + Explore occupations = Make better career decisions

Explore yourself: Reflect on and assess your interests, personality, skills, values and accomplishments

Career Services offers a number of assessment tools to help you articulate who you are. Call 512.863.1346 to set up an appointment to get started using them:

- ❑ Strong Interest Inventory (online)
- ❑ TypeFocus Careers or Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (personality assessments) (online)
- ❑ SkillScan (online)
- ❑ Career Values Card Sort (e.g. helping society, security, status, working alone or in groups, spending time with family, being outdoors, etc.)
- ❑ Reflection activities

Other steps include:

- ❑ Create a list of accomplishments/strengths as well as weaknesses
- ❑ Brainstorm skills you possess (Liberal Arts Transferable Skills checklist is one tool) and write examples of how you've used these skills
- ❑ Identify classes you've really enjoyed
- ❑ Identify what you like to do when you're not in school, what extracurricular activities you have been involved in

Answer logistical questions:

- ❑ Will I need an income right away after graduation? (i.e. will I be homeless and foodless if I don't have a paying job?)
- ❑ Will I have student load debt to repay?
- ❑ Will I need to live with my family? (i.e. will I need to work where my family lives?)
- ❑ Do I have other commitments I need to consider? (e.g. significant other's career/educational plans)
- ❑ Are there particular geographical areas I want to be in/be away from?

Explore occupations

Read

- ❑ Career Services' Resource Center (more than 500 print publications with information about different occupations)
- ❑ US Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/oco/) – For thousands of job titles, learn what preparation is needed, whether the field is growing, shrinking or stable, earnings potential, tasks and responsibilities, etc.
- ❑ Career Services' Major Possibilities guides – For each SU major, see what jobs recent grads have gone on to, get weblinks, lists of professional organizations, etc.
- ❑ Google – Try researching fields that interest you in your favorite search engine; just type in keyword such as "healthcare jobs"

Talk to real people

- ❑ Ask your family members, friends' family members, older friends already working and anyone you meet what they do and how they got there
- ❑ Use contacts from Career Services (e.g. SU alumni and parents, other employers)
- ❑ Conduct "informational interviews (i.e. "interview" your contact about their occupation) – see Career Services' Informational Interviewing handout
- ❑ Attend Career Services events (e.g. Careers in…, Career Connections BBQ, Experience Externships)
- ❑ Attend job fairs just to learn more about different companies

Test the waters

- ❑ Job shadow – Arrange to follow around someone whose profession interests you. School breaks are good times to do so. Sophomores can take part in SU Pirate Apprentice Days, an exclusive job shadowing event during Winter Break.
- ❑ Volunteer – It's easier to convince someone to let you get experience at no cost to them than to demand pay.
- ❑ Intern – Some organizations offer structured internship programs. For others, you can contact them and pitch the idea. Some companies hire for full-time jobs from their intern pools.
- ❑ Work – You may just have to take the plunge and try out a career field, any one of your interest areas, to see if you really like it. If not, you can always change.