



## CENTER FOR CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Choosing a Major

## 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. IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUR CAREER

How will your choice of major contribute to shaping your professional identity? How are you developing 21<sup>st</sup> century career-readiness skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, problem solving, etc.) and acquiring knowledge that will be useful in the fields you hope to enter? How will you construct a well-managed professional life?

## Five Best Ways to Explore Majors

These five methods begin with the easiest and work up to the most involved. If you like the major based on the first method (Reading), then go on to the next method (Observing), and so on.

### 1. READ MATERIALS

Here are some of the materials available to help you begin your evaluation of a possible major:

- The University catalog describes in detail the requirements and course offerings for each major.
- In the textbook section of the SU Bookstore, you can browse through the assigned texts for a course 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:

- What do you like about this major?
- What do you not like about it?
- What are you learning that is especially challenging?

**Ask faculty:**

- What kinds of abilities will I develop in this major?
- What kinds of careers have graduates of this department gone into?
- What do you especially like about this field?

**Ask advisors:**

- Which courses are known to be the most difficult?
- What do students who enroll in this department say they like about it?
- 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. 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).