
How to Choose your College Major

At some point in your college career you will have to declare a major. This task, typically done toward the end of your sophomore year, is probably one of the most important decisions you will make during your time at college.

Trying to figure out what you want to do for the rest of your life can be a daunting task. However, don't let that bother you when choosing a major as many graduates go on to work careers that are completely different than their major.

Still, the thought of choosing a major can be a stressful one; a decision that can create second thoughts on whether or not you are going with the right one. Follow this guide for help in choosing a college major.

Tips and Advice on Choosing a College Major

Work Backwards - Choose your Career

What career or profession do you want to work in?

The first step to take actually involves working backwards, by determining which career path you intend to follow post-graduation. Consider many factors, including the projected job market, average starting salary, mid-career median salary (use websites like payscale.com), what cities/locations typically have a market for these careers, what companies typically employ these occupations, and of course, your own personal interests. Pick majors that would best complement and prepare you for that profession. Some are obvious, while others may not be. (For example: a student who is interested in a career in marketing may select a psychology degree to understand how and why people make decisions.)

Browse the Options

There are 100s of possible majors to choose from. Pick up a copy of the Book of Majors and skim through it, making a list of majors you may like for further research. A good time to do this would be during the summer before your freshman or sophomore year in college so you have the whole break to research. (Bonus Tip: Consider starting research on college majors before your senior year of high school so you can apply to colleges that are stronger in certain programs.)

After browsing, pick out a few majors you might be interested in and attend information sessions on those majors to better understand the major and what it requires. Start with a handful or so (5-6) and attend these informational sessions, then narrow it down to just a couple choices. Once you have two or three majors in mind, speak with department advisors for one-on-one guidance where you can get additional information and ask questions.

Browse the Options – Alternate method

Another way to do it is by printing out the complete list of majors offered at your university, going through and crossing out what you are not interested in. Then you can further explore the possibilities you are left with.

Speak with the Experts

- Go to the Career Center: career counselors are good at helping people find their career passion.
- Talk to Advisors: Each department has advisors who are well-equipped with detailed information about the major you are considering.

Explore Majors by Taking Classes

Take a wide variety of classes your first two years; this is your experimental phase. Take all kinds of classes to explore your interests and maybe you'll come across a subject you really enjoy that you had no idea about. Take courses that interest you and some that don't. Give your mind opportunities to be bent in directions you would not ordinarily choose. You may just find something you love. (Tip #66 in College Advice: 100+ Tips for Survival.)

Personal Interests

Consider your hobbies: whether you like to read, write, or work with numbers, there should be something out there for you. Before selecting your major, consider taking a few related classes or even doing an early internship to make sure it's actually something you want to do. (Tip #64 in College Advice: 100+ Tips for Survival.)

High Paying Degrees

Perhaps it's just a high paying degree you are looking for? Check out these careers that have the highest average salary.

Check the Requirements

Some degrees may be too burdensome for your schedule and/or lifestyle and may require too much work for your liking. Many colleges offer different degree programs to help you meet the requirements needed for your intended career. The course load is often quite different with each degree program. Carefully read through the details for each major before you commit to make sure the program aligns with your career goals.

Check out the Programs Faculty

Talk with faculty and/or check out ratings of professors online and see which departments have a stronger faculty and what your school has to offer. Of course, you could always get the opinions of fellow students who are currently enrolled in the program as well. The quality of the faculty plays a big part in making the learning fun and engaging.

Career Personality/Assessment Tests

Many college counseling centers offer the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Strong Interest Inventory (SII), both

widely used career assessment tools that may be able to shed light on your academic interests. While it may cost you a little money, it could give you some personal insight on your strengths and weaknesses.

Browse Job Listings

Another idea is to check out job postings. Not to really look for a job, but to check out the job requirements and qualifications needed of any jobs that may catch your eye.

Do Something New and Innovative

Go past the tips on this list and come up with your own way of finding your interests. One student from Queen's University recently completed a job shadowing project where he job shadowed 60 professions in 60 days in an effort to determine what career he wanted to go into. He came away with some great results and a lot of industry contacts in the process.

Other Tips

- If you don't want to continue on for a master's, make sure you pick a degree where a master's isn't needed to be competitive in the workforce.
- Don't be afraid to change majors. There's nothing worse than being stuck in a field you hate. Change majors if your interests are no longer what they used to be. (Just don't wait too long to make this change as it could cost you extra tuition dollars.)