

Choosing a Major

Mr. Samir Al Baghdadi

Perhaps the most important thing that you will do during your college career is choosing your major. It dictates your path through school and gives you a degree that you will use to become gainfully employed in the field of your choice. It's a big decision, and one that should not be taken lightly. Unfortunately, far too often, the decision is not given the respect it requires. Many graduates have "fallen" into a major, allowing indecision to make them procrastinate until they can't wait any longer. Others have chosen a major and then changed it so many times that they end up tacking extra time onto their tenure to complete the requirements. And then there's the other fast growing group of people who graduate with a degree and never use it.

Choosing a major should be approached from several different angles. Here are some things to think about when considering which way to go:

Predicting the Future

Choosing your major is, in effect, like predicting the future. You are trying to decide what career path you want to take for the rest of your life. That can be a daunting thought, but it is the reality of the situation. Yes, there are many people who work in fields that are unrelated to their degrees, but their path has not been an easy one. Without the backing of education in their field of choice, many people find they have to start at a lower salary to gain experience.

Do what you Love

Money isn't everything. Being able to support oneself is important, but status and wealth should not be the only drivers for career selection and, by extension, major distinction. Happiness and contentment factor in far more than you may initially think. If you love arranging music or if you have an inherent feel for the flow of prose, would you be content to work as a systems administrator in the IT field? Perhaps yes, but perhaps no.

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Follow your inherent proclivities to their commercial end and you will be able to find satisfaction in your work that many, who just got a job rather than focused on a meaningful career, do not know.

How do you do that?

Think about what you like to do – what you have always liked to do. Have you always had an interest in the way things work, taking apart simple machines and putting them back together? Perhaps you should consider engineering as a career path. Were you the go between, solving disputes between friends and acting as a mediator? Perhaps a psychology career is right for you. Think about what you like to do and what you are good at. Think hard. Does the job path you are thinking of make you happy? Is it a part of your nature to embody certain characteristics of those in the field (i.e. being a natural caregiver might make you an excellent candidate for a medical career)? Can you see yourself doing it for years to come? Pick out two or three career paths that match your personality, interests, and abilities.

Research

Once you have decided on the career paths, it is time to do some research. There is no better decision than an informed decision. Many people find out after they have invested money and time into getting a degree that the job duties of their career of choice don't actually suit them at all. They are saddled with a degree they don't want to use and have to decide whether to start from the ground up in something new or suffer through work they have the educational background for, but not the desire. You can save yourself that fate by researching early on. You can:

- Research the career online and gather detailed information about the work entailed
- Find a person in your community who works in the field and interview them
- Research companies that offer positions of this type to see the range of work you might be able to engage in (ideal for multi-disciplinary careers such as Project Management)

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- Determine projected salary expectations, the potential for advancement, and job segues

Try It Out

Internships are alive and well and available in many areas. This is an optimal way to get a real world idea of what you can expect in the career you are interested in pursuing.

Internships are available through most colleges and universities and also directly through companies. If you decide to pursue this option, be sure to observe and absorb. This exposure to what could be your future career is invaluable.

Choosing a major is important –so much so, that it sets the course for your professional future. Take is seriously and do your due diligence. You'll be glad you did.