



Major Decision

Don't Panic When Choosing a College Major

BY LUKE LUKERT, SPECIAL TO USA TODAY

High school seniors spend countless hours researching which college to attend and how to pay for it. The hard decisions should be over. But another big question looms: what major to choose? This decision could have huge implications for the future. For students with a clear career path, choosing a major is easier. For incoming undergraduates with less direction, the task can seem daunting. Luckily, first-year students have both time and resources to help make an educated decision.

Students who enter college unsure of a major and future career shouldn't worry. Most are in the same situation, and few have it planned out. Every institution has options to choose from, with some larger universities offering hundreds of majors. Additionally, most

colleges provide many resources to help students make these tough decisions, including career services, college exploratory programs and academic advisers. Before meeting with advisers, look at each individual focus the school offers and choose majors that sound interesting. Then research those fields; most schools offer online resources with information about available majors.

BEFORE MEETING WITH COLLEGE ADVISERS ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- What subject would interest me for many years of study? Students will usually complete 60-plus hours of coursework related to their major, including lectures, homework, group projects and studying for exams. If you are not excited by the subject

while making the decision, it is unlikely you will be later.

- What type of career can this major lead to? While most jobs don't require a specific major, it can be a factor during the application process. If you have a specific career in mind but are unsure of what to study, contact your school's career center or visit job websites and see what the preferred major is on job postings. Also consider earning potential. College is an expensive investment. Make it worth it.
- Do I want to pursue a career that requires certain prerequisites (e.g., medicine, engineering)? While you do not have to major in science to become a doctor, you will still have to take the prerequisites, adding extra coursework on top of your major.
- What are some career aspirations? List a few careers you have always been interested in and discover what majors could lead you to that career.
- What am I passionate about? This is a question with an ever-changing answer. Ask it throughout the first two years of college and let the answers guide you to a meaningful major that will make you happy enough to wake up and go to class every morning.

Choosing a major is intimidating for anyone, but you don't have to do it alone. Academic advisers are the best resource for students struggling with the decision. "Advisers provide support, encouragement, information and guidance to help students make the most of their college experience," says Diane Miller, the head of academic advising at the University of Georgia's Franklin College. Such counselors will help students make a plan and find classes that will explore their interests. They can also connect undergraduates with major-specific professors who will be able to offer a more in-depth look into that field.

Undecided undergraduates can use the first year of classes to gauge their interest in different subjects. Often incoming students intrigued by science courses quickly learn after Chemistry I that they do not want to pursue that route. In the first year, take a variety

of classes that are both interesting but still fill core requirements. Students should keep an open mind about academic experiences and allow themselves to be flexible.

Students can also double major if multiple subjects interest them. Double majors will often be in two completely different subjects and will require a punishing work load, but this may be a great decision for undergrads who love learning. Other options are academic minors and certificates. These allow students to pursue multiple academic endeavors but do not require nearly as large a course load.

The good news for prospective students is that there is time to figure out college majors. Advisers say undergraduates should lock in a major by the time they complete their core coursework. For the average student, this will be during the final semester of their second year or the first semester of their third year. The majority of classes taken from that point forward will be major specific. Take time during the first year to explore interests and learn about the opportunities different majors can provide.

Choosing a major is an important decision, but a majority of students

change majors at least once. Students who go to college with an open mind and follow some of the above tips should be able to pick a major with relative ease. Remember, many graduates find jobs that have nothing to do with their specific major. Plus, careers are not final. In fact, the average person changes careers two to three times. Don't panic. ■

Luke Lukert studied finance and banking at the University of Georgia. He now works as a reporter for an Atlanta area radio station.

