

5 TIPS FOR CHOOSING A COLLEGE MAJOR

1

Combine your talents and your interests to find a great match

In what academic areas do you excel? What class do you look forward to most during the day? These questions can help you think about your talents and interests. Take note of your favorite classes, reflecting on why they interest you, how they play to your strengths and how you can further your interest in that discipline. Talk to your counselor about

resources and tools available at your school, such as interest inventories and online questionnaires, to help you connect your strengths and interests to potential college majors and minors, even career options.

You can continue to explore the many options while in college as well. Professors and career centers are great sources of expertise when exploring areas of study and career options. Choose something in which you do well and that you enjoy. Cultivate curiosity, the capacity to think critically and communicate clearly and a willingness to adapt – all qualities that employers value. If you do what you love, you're likely to be a happier person and a more successful professional.

93% of employers agree that candidates' demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.

Association of American Colleges and Universities study

Having more than one major can make college more interesting, and help you get a job, too!

Maybe you can't make up your mind – many of the best students have trouble deciding on one major because they have many interests and abilities.

When it comes to your major, having more than one area of expertise can be a great way to differentiate yourself from others in the job market.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of students pursuing a double major jumped more than 70 percent in the last decade. A college education is an investment; you can get the most out of it by developing more than one interest.

Explore learning environments where you can be creative and learn through doing. Talk to admission counselors about double majoring or choosing a minor that complements your major – it's easier at some schools than at others.

60% of CEOs in a global study conducted by IBM cite creativity as the most important leadership quality.

2

During your first year of college, seek academic breadth by completing prerequisites for courses that interest you across a variety of subject areas. This will help you lay the groundwork for a second major or a minor. Some of the best students also take advantage of Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) or dual credit courses in high school to expand their intellectual horizons. These courses make the transition to an academically rigorous college smoother, and you might earn college credit that will allow you to double or even triple major. Whatever combination appeals to you, it's likely that you'll have a leg up on the competition by becoming expertly trained in two fields rather than one.

3

It's OK not to know

You probably have friends who believe they know exactly what they want to do and others who really aren't sure. Wherever you find yourself on this continuum, realize that it is OK not to know exactly what you want to do with the rest of your life. Many students begin their college careers not knowing exactly what they want to major in. In fact, some colleges often encourage students to be "undecided" or "multi-interested." As you begin college, you'll have plenty of opportunities to take interesting courses, and you may end up discovering a love for a particular subject that you had not considered before. Most colleges won't require you to declare a major until the end of your sophomore year, so you'll have ample time to explore before declaring your major. Even if you do know what you want to study in college, keep your options open by taking a variety of courses.

A liberal arts education is a great foundation for anything

Perhaps you aren't sure what it means to study the liberal arts and sciences. A major in core learning areas such as English, science, math, social sciences and languages prepares you to be broadly informed about the world in which we live. Employers in today's global economy seek individuals who have developed critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, strong writing and communication skills, cultural perspectives, teamwork, adaptability to new circumstances and a capacity for a vibrant continuum of learning. A liberal arts and sciences education provides a foundation for all this and more. It can not only help you get your first job, but also your first promotion. Today's global environment requires leaders who understand the economic, social, political and cultural forces affecting the way people and services flourish in different parts of the world. A major in the liberal arts is outstanding preparation for life in the world you'll be entering after college.

4 out of 5 employers agree that all students should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences.

Association of American Colleges and Universities study

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Your college major does not define or limit your career choices

Although choosing the major that is right for you is an important element of your college years, your major does not necessarily have to be determined by your career goal. You don't need to major in biology to apply to medical school or in political science to go to law school. Biochemists become hospital administrators. Artists own studios and manage theatre companies. Engineers become CEOs. Only 11% of the S&P 500 CEOs majored in business administration, showing that there are multiple avenues by which to reach the top. Thinking about business? Every career field offers opportunities in management, finance and marketing – discovering what fields interest you might provide options beyond a general business degree. Whatever your academic focus, look for opportunities to excel. If you do have a specific career goal, your professor will help you explore the many ways to accomplish that goal.

Use your high school and college years to prepare your mind for diverse intellectual interests and learn more about yourself – what excites you, what you want to learn, what your analytical skills are, what your creative strengths are. Reflect on your talents, goals and interests, and match them with potential programs of study. You don't necessarily need to set a career goal in high school, but with careful thought to your electives and extracurricular interests you can build a broad foundation for a successful college experience.

Learn more about choosing your major(s) at smu.edu/5tips.

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