

## **Your Roadmap to Deciding on a Major**

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Congratulations. As a high school graduate moving on to college, you are in a special group of students who are on track for a successful future. For most incoming freshmen the question of “What is your major?” comes up frequently in conversations with family, friends, teachers and just about anyone else who learns that you are on your way to college. The largest group of freshmen entering most universities are deciding on their major, so...you have lots of company. It is perfectly normal for you to be baffled, confused, and unclear on your major or the career path you should follow. However, don't let unsettling feelings immobilize you. Deciding on a major includes identifying options, evaluating your skills and attributes, applying resources, and prioritizing your interests. In following this course, you can create your personal roadmap to deciding on a major.

Keep in mind that selecting a major is critical eventually, but not imperative your freshman year. On most college campuses, you will need to declare a major once you complete your sophomore year or just at the start of your junior year. Now that you realize you have a few semesters for exploration and introspection, get serious about gathering information, which will help you move toward deciding on a major. Remember, in all that you are doing, you are working for yourself. Your parents, family and friends can't quite apply the passion and commitment that you will have for developing your personal roadmap toward building your future. Your personal roadmap can be developed by exploring career resources, taking advantage of university student support services, utilizing interest inventories, and creating a network of people who can provide you with useful information.

Career resource books, magazines, and websites are plentiful. A helpful book Major in Success by Patrick Combs is a good place to start. In this book, Mr. Combs recommends that you: “(1) Go to college. (2) Discover what kind of work you enjoy. (3) Do things that get the ball rolling. (4) Master the habits that make you unstoppable.” In a nutshell, take organized, well-thought out action to put yourself in a position to make the best decision about your major. Other resources that you will find helpful are How to Choose a College Major, by Linda Landis Andrews (VGM Careers Horizon) and The College Board Guide to 150 Popular College Majors, by Rennee Gernand (College Entrance Examination Board).

University websites usually have a specific section or list links that will help you as you are deciding on a major. *What Can I Do With a Major in?* is a website that helps you connect majors with careers. Information is available on common career areas, typical employers, and strategies designed to maximize your career opportunities. Also, it has links to websites that provide information about majors and related careers. While this is not a comprehensive list, you will find information on a variety of majors from Anthropology to Theater. Take a few minutes and check out <http://www.umd.umich.edu/careerservices>, click on *Major Decisions* then select *What Can I Do With a Major in?* Another helpful website on *Choosing a Major* is <http://choosingamajor.hypermart.net>

Traditional assessments, such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, the Career Occupational Preference Survey (COPS) and the Strong Interest Inventory allow counselors to give you feedback on your areas of interests, your values, perceived skills, and attributes. These assessment inventories are important tools in guiding your realization of self-image and self-discovery. A reliable option for anyone who is deciding on a major, assessment inventories are especially beneficial in providing you with meaningful information on your interests, values, and personality type as related to the types of work and career fields that you might enjoy. You should also take advantage of on-line interest inventories such as FOCUS and SIGI PLUS which are convenient and useful. Once you are on-campus, check with your career services office for further details about on-line assessments. While not as thorough as the traditional assessments, which require interpretation by a counselor, online tools can be a good starting point for some and a useful guiding system for others.

Networking is an excellent way to acquire information from people who are doing what you believe you might like to pursue as a career. Alumni of the university you will be attending, professors, local employers, friends and others can all prove to be very valuable in helping you reflect and identify your interests and major based on being able to weigh their advice and experiences. Often the most valuable and the most inspiring advice comes from listening to the personal experiences of others. Communicating with your network of people can provide realistic information about career options, employment conditions, and job responsibilities. The result will be your gaining insight on various ways to utilize majors that you are interested in and movement toward your prioritizing or fine-tuning your career interests.

Become familiar with your college campus and visit student support services offices to find out how they can assist you. It varies from campus to campus, but typically all campuses have a career services office. Your career services office has counselors who can talk with you specifically about your interests and make recommendations on actions that you can take to assist you in deciding a major. Other services offered by career services offices that can assist you in deciding on a major are: a career planning class which incorporates strategies to help you select a major, career fairs, student events, web sites that offer personal assessment tools, links to great sites about career exploration, employer links, and a calendar of programs and events. Once on campus you will easily identify other student support services offices that you should visit, such as student activities and academic counseling. All of these offices can be very beneficial in helping you to decide on a major.

As you are building and following your road map, ask plenty of questions and maintain a record of your experiences. Your record does not need to be highly sophisticated, rather something that allows you to keep track of what you have learned so that you can apply the information you have collected. Whether you jot notes in your planner, create a grid, or keep a journal, the information you acquire will serve you well in deciding a major and in unearthing interests and knowledge about yourself that you may not have previously been in tune to. Equally as important, you will learn through your roadmap, the direction that you should go.

Good luck and enjoy the journey.

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