



## GUIDE TO CHOOSING A MAJOR

You are about to invest several years of your life studying something in great detail. Make sure it is something in which you are interested! Planning puts you in charge and allows you to design your own future. Some people are reluctant to make decisions being fearful of making the "wrong" decision while others just don't know where to start. Remember: no decision is irrevocable. The following model can provide you a system for getting started with choosing your major.

### Step 1: Define the Decision to be Made

The decision-making process begins with defining the decision that needs to be made or the problem that needs to be solved. In this situation, you need to choose your major. Remember that the major you choose will not dictate your career choice – major choice and career choice are two separate decisions.

### Step 2: Know Yourself

Identify your most important **interests** (what you enjoy), **skills** (what you do well), and **values** (what motivates you). Discover the "real you" and what you want to achieve.

*Some questions to ask yourself:*

- What activities do I enjoy during my spare time?
- What classes have I most enjoyed?
- What activities do I do well? What have I done in the past that makes me especially proud?
- In what type of classes do I perform best (e.g., lectures, seminars, labs, discussion)?
- What clubs and organizations have I been involved in? What did I like/dislike about these experiences?
- What were my favorite (and least favorite) jobs? Which skills did I particularly enjoy using/ developing?

*Resources Available through the Career Services Office:*

- Career Assessments including The Strong Interest Inventory and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. If you would like to learn more about these assessments, call Career Services to schedule an appointment with a career counselor.

### Step 3: Identify and Investigate a list of Possible Majors

Develop a list of majors that you would like to explore. Consider how your strengths, interests, and goals compare with possible majors – you will naturally gravitate towards some majors and eliminate others. The Ursinus Course Catalog and/or the College Website can help you to identify a list of options. Your first-year advisor can also be instrumental in helping you to identify options based on your interests and talents.

*Some questions to consider as you investigate majors:*

- How many credits are required to complete this major?
- What prerequisites are required to complete this major?
- Who are the faculty in the department?
- Is it possible to minor in this area as well as major?
- What specifically interests me about this major?
- Why would I expect to do well in this course of study?
- What are four skills I will need to possess or develop to be successful in the study of this major?
- Does this major require any laboratory time, internships, or study abroad? If so, what are the requirements?
- Is there a minimum grade required for each course in this major? If so, what?
- Looking through the College Catalog, how many of the courses offered in this major genuinely appeal to me? Which ones are most interesting?
- What are other majors that might be similar to this one?
- What is the connection between this major and my career plans?
- What are examples of careers Ursinus graduates with this major pursued?

*Some strategies for investigating majors include:*

- Review the requirements for majors in the Ursinus College Catalog or on the College Website
- Talk with professors in departments of interest to you
- Take a look at the textbooks you would be using in your classes
- Visit classes/audit classes
- Take an introductory course in a field of study that is interesting to you
- Talk with students in the major or alumni who graduated with the major
- Meet with a counselor in Career Services
- Visit the **What can I do with a major in....** resource on the Career Services Website

#### **Step 4: Evaluate and Decide**

Time to make a choice! Develop a system to compile, review, and evaluate the information you gathered about specific majors. See the “Major Analysis Sheet” for one possible method to help with the selection process. Choose the alternative that has the greatest probability of producing satisfying results. Be aware of and address any obstacles that may hinder your decision making ability. This may include anxiety, perceived expectations, your own thoughts, financial concerns, others’ opinions/needs, etc.

#### **Step 5: Take Action and Re-Evaluate**

Follow through on your decision. Meet with your advisor/professors to develop an academic plan. Remember that decision-making is an ongoing process. Once you have declared a major you will find yourself continually evaluating whether or not you made the best choice. As you take more classes and gain experiences you will determine if you made the best choice for you.

### **SOME MYTHS ABOUT CHOOSING A MAJOR**

- **Myth: Choosing a major and a career are basically the same thing**  
Choosing a major and deciding on a career are two separate decisions. In most cases, far more important than your major is your ability to demonstrate experience and skill in a career area. Complement your major coursework with internships, coursework in a particular area of interest, volunteer work, independent research, study abroad, etc. These experiences will help to fine tune your career interests and help you prepare for the first step following graduation.
- **Myth: Somewhere there is a test or an expert that can tell me what to do for the rest of my life**  
Career interest inventories and personality inventories can help you to clarify your skills, interest, values, and preferences for work and indicate some career areas to consider, but that’s all. The answers are inside of you – don’t be fooled into thinking that a “test” knows what is best for you better than you do.
- **Myth: People with liberal arts majors don’t get jobs – you better specialize if you want a job**  
Increasingly, people with liberal arts majors are finding jobs in business, government, and industry. Recruiters find that the breadth of the liberal arts major provides a student with a flexibility and willingness to learn.
- **Myth: The major I choose now will determine my lifelong career**  
Studies have shown that within 10 years after graduation most people are working in careers that are not directly connected to their undergraduate majors. People change and careers change. New types of jobs emerge every year and most of us have no idea what those jobs will be and what education/training will be required. Because of this, the emphasis should be on developing transferable skills (e.g., writing, communication, technical, problem-solving, interpersonal) that employers want and that graduates will need in order to adjust to rapidly changing careers.