

12.3 Choosing Your Major

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand how your major is important to your career.
2. Understand why majors are not important to a career.
3. Practice skills for selecting a good major.

Choosing a college major can have a big impact on your career choices, especially if you are following a technical or vocational program of study. After all, it's hard to become a pharmacist if you study computer networking. But students often get too anxious about choosing a major or program of studies. Certainly many two-year students have a very clear idea of what they are studying and the job they expect to land after completing their degree, and you probably feel confident enough in your choice of program of study to make the investment for tuition in that program. But there is no need to panic over your choice of major or program of studies:

- Your choice of major or program will be important only for your first job after college; most people change careers (not just jobs, but careers) five times or more in their lifetime, so there is no possible major that will cover that level of flexibility.
- Many majors and programs share foundation courses with other majors, so you can usually change your major without having wasted your time in courses that will be unrelated to your new major. Chances are that if you change your major, it will be to something similar, especially if you have completed an occupational interest survey as recommended earlier in this chapter.
- Most students change their major at least once, and many will change majors two or three times before they graduate.
- If a change in major does cause a delay in completing your degree, it may be a good investment of time to follow a career path you are truly happy with. Before making a decision, consider the factors outlined in phase C of [Chapter 10 "Taking Control of Your Health"](#), [Section 10.2 "Activity and Exercise"](#). Use your creative thinking skills to find a second right answer to any dilemmas a delay like this may cause.

While these thoughts might remove some of the stress of making the choice, there is no doubt that it is not always easy to make your choice. The following tips may make it a little easier...and perhaps fun!

- **Follow your dreams.** Your first instinct in choosing a field of study is probably based on your dreams and life experience. Make sure you base your choice on your own dreams and interests and not those of a parent, spouse, or friend.
- **Make it fun.** What do you like to do for fun? What kinds of magazines do you read? What Web sites are bookmarked on your computer? What kinds of volunteer work have you done? What do the answers to these questions tell you about the kind of career you would enjoy?
- **Build on your skills.** A good choice of a program of study is not based exclusively on your likes; it should also consider your skills. What courses did you "ace" in high school? Consider also courses that you found challenging in which you learned a lot (it's hard to keep a level of determination to tackle a tough subject if you don't enjoy

it). What do these courses tell you about what you are skilled at studying?

- **Ask around.** Find people who are following the courses of studies you are considering. Ask them what they like and dislike about their majors. If you can find recent graduates with that major, ask them about the value of their major.
- **Two is better than one.** Talk to your faculty advisor about a double major or a combined program; that is an effective way of preparing yourself for the uncertainties and options of future employment. Think about declaring a minor if your college allows it.
- **What makes you unique?** If you have a major that you'd like to pursue that is not offered at your college, find out if you can plan your own major. This option is especially attractive if you want to combine two seemingly different disciplines into a major (Dance and athletics? Sociology and film? Women's studies and economics?).
- **Be open to change.** Once you have selected a major, don't panic if it turns out to be the wrong choice; consider it a step toward finding the right program for *you*. Repeat the major selection process, but carefully consider what you learned from your original major choice. Why was it not the right major? (Did it not match your interests? Was the workload too heavy? Were the courses too tough?) What do you know now that you didn't know when you made your first selection that you should consider in making a new choice?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is no need to panic over the choice of a major or program of studies.
- Most students will change their major during their college years.
- Many people work and have successful careers in disciplines they did not major in.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. How is your choice of major important? Why do you want to be sure you do a good job selecting one?

2. What are some of the reasons you should not panic over the choice of major?
