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How to Choose a MAJOR and a CAREER

Many ask me key questions on career selection and decision criteria, the document below tries to highlight some key areas of focus, however the list does not in any way serve as a ideal document, after completion you may need to speak to a specific career expert in the related field to fine tune your priorities, furthermore as a policy I am unable to provide information on specific institutions be it local or international, it is also virtually impossible to provide accurate guidance without the usage of proper tools or talking to the candidates, this document serves as a starting point to help candidates, who can find answers to the key questions and then ask me the question.

Which comes first, the major or the career?

Major First:

Some people believe that you should first choose a major that interests you, since all majors lead to jobs (as long as you have relevant internship experience during college), and what you should be most concerned about is feeling like you want to go to your classes for the next four years. They're right.

Career First:

Other people think that you should first choose the career, and then find out which majors lead to it, since the career is where you'll ultimately spend more of your time. They're right, too.

Lifestyle First:

Some say you should approach school from an "education for life" perspective. Maybe you know who you want to "be" (type of person, citizen, etc.) but not what you want to "do" (career or major). Then start by choosing courses that interest you! Any of these will work to start with. Focus on the one that makes sense to you now, realizing that some majors do need to start in the first year of college in order for you to graduate in four years

Who controls your decisions?

- Are YOU going to decide, or is someone else going to decide for you?
- Other people mean well, but they aren't YOU.

When you do make a choice, you will choose based on some connection you have

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with the major or career. The more this choice is based on your personal experience and your personal preference, the more likely it is to be a good choice. The more it's based on other people's preferences (parent, spouse, or friend), the more likely it is to be a good choice for THEM, but not for you. Go to other people for ideas and impressions, then make up your own mind. Something that would not agree with the direction someone else wants for you? In the long run, you'll feel more certain about a well thought-out decision rather than one made hastily.

Which statement sounds most like you?

If you really feel lost, and don't know where to start...

You might want to go through this document and simply begin with something that catches your attention. Or, you can work your way straight through the document one section at a time.

If you don't have a clear idea of your alternatives...

Maybe you understand yourself pretty well, but just don't know what's out there to choose from, or what you can "do" with a particular major or area of interest. Start with the suggestions below,

- "Which jobs would you choose" exercise

If you're choosing between two or three majors...

This is usually pretty straightforward. If you want to, you need to be clear about the differences and the career differences with each major

University/Professional bodies (local/international) Majors

- Accounting
- Art
- Art Therapy
- Athletic Training
- Biology
- Business Management (Finance & Human Resources)
- Chemistry/Biochemistry
- Communication
- Computer Science
- Criminology
- Economics
- Education
- English (English Literature or Professional Writing)
- Environmental Science

- Exercise Science
- Health and Fitness Management
- History
- International Studies
- Marketing
- Mathematics
- Modern Languages (French & Spanish)
- Music (Several options)
- Nursing
- Organizational Communication
- Philosophy
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Public Administration
- Public Relations
- Radio-TV-Film
- Religion
- Social Work
- Sociology

You may need to select between May be and No (be absolutely sure about the decision)

Your interests and skills

Your interests & skills show you if you have a good match between what you do well and what you enjoy. You want to maximize both of these in your major and

CAREER GURU

career. If you enjoy the major/career, but have no natural talent in that area, you're not going to succeed academically. If you do well in the courses, but have no interest, you'll be bored and miserable. Same thing goes for careers and jobs. Find something that you can be good at and enjoy

Identify your PERSONALITY/WORK CHARACTERISTICS

Read each of the descriptions under the following seven themes. If one sounds like you,



put a check mark in the box. When you have read each of the descriptions, record the number of check marks under each theme in the space provided below.

INFLUENCING

- I am good at communicating, which I can put to effective use in leading others and selling.
- I enjoy persuading others to my viewpoints.
- I am impatient with work involving precision or prolonged concentration.
- I see myself as energetic, enthusiastic, and self-confident.

ORGANIZING

- I prefer structured activities and like working in a well-established chain of command.
- I like to know exactly what is expected of me.
- I feel most comfortable when I know the rules.
- I see myself as stable, well-controlled, and dependable.

HELPING

- I am sociable, responsible, people-centered, and concerned with the welfare of others.
- I express myself well and get along well with others.
- I like to be near the center of groups and prefer to solve problems by discussing them with others.
- I see myself as cheerful, well-liked, and achieving through assisting others.

CREATING

- I prefer unstructured situations where I can deal with problems through self-expression.
- I enjoy designing, creating, and producing.
- I prefer to work alone and have a great need for individualistic expression.
- I would describe myself as independent, original, unconventional, and expressive.

ANALYZING

- I prefer solving abstract problems and understanding the physical world rather than acting upon it.
- I enjoy complicated problems and intellectual challenges.
- I do not like working around many people.

- I like to be original and creative, especially in scientific areas.

PRODUCING

- I am practical, active, and like working outside and creating things with my hands.
- I prefer to deal with things rather than ideas or people.
- I value seeing the direct results of my work and dislike vagueness and ambiguity.
- I see myself as productive and purposeful.

ADVENTURING

- I am adventurous, active, and competitive.
- I have good physical skills and enjoy taking risks in my activities.
- I enjoy challenging myself and have a strong sense of discipline and commitment.
- I see myself as determined, energetic, and excitement seeking.

TOTALS:

Influencing _____ Organizing _____
Helping _____ Creating _____
Analyzing _____ Producing _____
Adventuring _____

Based on the Campbell Interest and Skill Survey (CISS), Dr. David Campbell & Pearson Assessments

A FEW EXAMPLES OF FIELDS FOR THE CHARACTERISTICS:

You can choose more than one characteristic; these can usually be combined:

Think about careers and majors that blend these aspects of your self

INFLUENCING

- Management (general)
- Management (marketing concentrate)
- Health/Fitness Management
- International Studies
- Organizational Communication (training & development)
- Political Science
- Public Relations
- Speech/Communication Arts

ORGANIZING

- Accounting
- Management (general)
- Computer Science (programming)
- Organizational Communication (communication analysis)
- Public Administration
- Sociology (urban planning)

HELPING

- Business (human resources)
- Criminology (probation, case work) Education
- Occupational Therapy
- Psychology (counseling)
- Religion (youth ministry)
- Social Work
- Sociology (case work)
- Sports Medicine/Athletic Training

You can learn a lot about yourself by writing about (and then reflecting on):

- How you played (for example, did you play in the sandbox to be with friends, to be alone, to use your imagination, to think, to build things...?)
 - How you've made sense out of your interactions with others during your early life and now
 - What you have been good at (your skills)
 - What you have dreamed of doing
- People in various careers often report that, in hindsight, their earlier behaviors and preferences were filled with important clues regarding the careers they ultimately chose.
- In this exercise you think and reflect on the kinds of activities you have enjoyed & valued and the things you have been "good at" during the early part of your life.

Which jobs would you choose?

Circle your top work values:

- Service
 - Active in community
 - Help others
 - Help society & the world
- Creativity
 - Aesthetic appreciation
 - Artistic creativity
 - Creative expression
 - Develop & express new ideas
- Prestige
 - Recognition
 - Status
 - Respect
- Security
 - Stability/Predictability
 - Low pressure
 - Job assurance
 - Live in a familiar location
- Intellectual Challenge
 - Address challenging problems



You may also send your queries via E-mail Please write and send your comments about this column to the email address given here.

Please keep your questions below 100 words

educationtimes@wijeya.lk

Pursue/obtain knowledge
Acknowledged "expert"
Research & development

■ Adventure
Excitement & risk taking
Travel, or exotic locations
Drama

■ Relationships
Organization affiliation
Work friendships
Family

Work with others (teamwork)
Public contact

■ Meaning & Purpose
Spirituality
Personal fulfillment
Work relates to ideals

■ Independence
Time freedom
Autonomy
Work alone

■ Productivity
Competence & Proficiency
Fast-paced work
Efficient work habits

■ Leadership
Influence people & opinions
Supervise others
Power, Authority & Control
Make decisions

■ Financial Reward
High earnings
Commission-based work
Material possessions

■ Variety
Changing work responsibilities
Diversity of tasks
New projects

■ Physical Activity
Outdoor work
Physical challenge
Physical fitness

■ Advancement
Promotions
Work under pressure
Competition

Write your current major or area of interest here:

It might be important to clarify your values before making a major decision, again this may need to be done with a group of experts

Major/Career choice final questions

As you "finish up", answer these questions about your decision process and your choices. Your answers can lead you to a vision or dream for your major and career direction.

■ Have you narrowed your list of possible majors to one or two majors? What are they?

■ What do your past experiences have to do with your current direction?

■ What are your main interests and skills?

■ What values are most important to you?

■ What careers or fields do you see yourself working in after graduation?

Other Self exploration and tools

The following can be used by you to further build competitiveness

■ Campbell Interest and Skill Survey or any survey offered by the relevant institutes
Attending Workshops and exhibitions

■ Web sites

■ Professional organizations relevant to your career

■ Alumni contacts related to your chosen major or career

Document published based on research conducted on the web, universities and personal networks.

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