



## COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

### GUIDE TO CHOOSING A MAJOR

You are about to invest several years of your life studying something in great detail. Make sure it is a subject that interests you! Planning allows you to design your own future. Students often hesitate to make a decision because they are worried about making the "wrong" decision or because they just don't know how to start. Remember: no decision is final. Here are some steps to help you get started with choosing your major.

#### Step 1: Define the Decision

Start by defining the decision. You are choosing a major. This major will *not* necessarily 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. Keep in mind that the more passionate you are about your intended major, the likelier you are to enjoy your studies.

*Some questions to ask yourself:*

- What activities do I enjoy during my spare time?
- What kinds of books or websites do I most like to read?
- 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?

*Sometimes these questions are harder to answer than you might expect. The **SJU Career Development Office** has resources to help you.*

- Career Assessment tools such as The Strong Interest Inventory and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator are useful for self-discovery. They also offer FOCUS, an online assessment tool that can help you assess your interests, skills, and values. If you would like to learn more, call (610-660-3100) or email ([careerhelp@sju.edu](mailto:careerhelp@sju.edu)) Career Development to schedule an appointment with a career counselor.

#### Step 3: Make 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 SJU Course Catalog and/or the University Website can help you to identify a list of options.

*Some questions to consider as you investigate majors:*

- How many courses are required to complete this major?
- Who are the faculty in the department?
- Is it possible to double major or complete a minor in Arts & Sciences?
- 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?
- Is co-op available? If so, what type of placements are typical for students in this major?
- Does this major allow for internships or study abroad? If so, what are the requirements?
- Looking through the SJU Catalog, how many of the courses offered in this major genuinely appeal to me? Which ones are most interesting?
- What is the connection between this major and my career plans?
- What are examples of careers SJU graduates with this major pursued?

*Some strategies for investigating majors include:*

- Review the requirements for majors in the SJU Course Catalog or on the University Website
- Talk with professors in departments of interest to you. Don't be afraid to visit them in office hours! Professors *want* to talk with you about their department, even if you're not sure if you'll become a major
- Take a look at the textbooks you would be using in your classes and any available web resources
- 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 the Career Development Office
- Visit the Majors resource section on the Career Development Website

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

Time to make a choice! Take a step back and think about all the information you have gathered. Students will make their final choice in different ways. Some may know intuitively what they really want to do. Others, who need more guidance, may find tools like the "Major Analysis Sheet" a great help in making a selection. Ultimately, however, this needs to be YOUR decision. 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, parental pressure, others' opinions/needs, etc. If you are encountering obstacles or feeling "stuck," talk with a career counselor in the CDO, your faculty advisor, or a staff member in the CAS Advising Center.

#### **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 may find yourself frequently 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, your skills, experience, and your demonstrated academic success are far more important than your actual major. 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 flexibility, critical thinking skills, and a willingness to learn. If this is a concern for you, speak with your faculty advisor or look at departmental websites for further information about future careers.
- **Myth: The major I choose now will determine my lifelong career**  
Studies have shown that within ten 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.