



How to Choose a Major

The view inward

First, think about what YOU want. This is your choice, and it will initially help determine YOUR path in life. Of course, making the “major” decision can be complicated by having only a few choices in shades of gray that stand out as attractive options, or also if you have many interests and see many possibilities.

Consider that some students...

- Pick a major because they want to use it to prepare for a specific job, career, or industry
- Pick a job, career, or industry, then choose the major that will best meet their career goals
- Pick a major because they enjoy it, never intending to directly use it in a future career. Many jobs are open to students with any major, and any major can be a springboard to graduate or professional school

Tips

- Did you begin college with a major, job, or career in mind? What are your skills, abilities, strengths, interests, and values related to work (yes, including income, but think of other factors that motivate you)? Even the most “undecided” students have some ideas from parents/family, teachers, friends, etc. Has this feedback been helpful?
- Review your educational background. What have you liked about school? What subjects haven’t you liked? What do you excel in? What were your previous summer and part-time jobs? In the broadest sense, do you want to work with people (advising, persuading, or organizing), data (and related information or systems), things (equipment, tools, even other species), or ideas (imagining, writing, promoting), and why?
- Would you prefer to view work as an extension of play or hobbies, or do you see yourself pursuing a mainline “profession?” Do you have a sense—even a vision—of what you would really like to accomplish?
- How important are salary and lifestyle considerations, benefits, job stability, teamwork vs. autonomy, geographic location, time off, and related issues? Evaluate your values, strengths, and aptitudes by utilizing SIGI 3, a self-assessment (interests and skills) inventory available at www.CareerCenter.ilstu.edu.

Looking outward

You are encouraged to visit www.findyourmajor.ilstu.edu for information about finding a major and university policies that pertain to the major selection process. Learn more about what you can do with your major at www.CareerCenter.ilstu.edu or other comparable career-related sites such as CareerOverview.com and Wetfeet.com.

Take a variety of classes

As a part of your exploration, try coursework in unfamiliar areas; general education classes will provide excellent opportunities for you to experience a variety of academic options.

Learn about jobs and career fields in which you are interested, or are at least curious about

What are typical job titles and the skills required to perform them? What are the usual entry-level jobs in specific career fields? What are typical and atypical career tracks? What are the typical demands and the rewards of this type of work? The Occupational Outlook Handbook (a link on the Career Center Web site) is a reliable and comprehensive source of information.

Suggestions as you broaden your exploration

- Network with professors/advisors, professionals (including Illinois State University senior professionals), friends and relatives, plus Alumni Relations to better research careers and majors.
- Browse the University course catalog! Read up on all the course offerings, at least in the college of greatest interest to you. Check the minor or area of concentration that might be the best complement to the major(s) you are considering. Find out all the requirements (upper-level, as well as 100- and 200-level), including hours needed to graduate.
- Talk with students in the major(s) that interests you. Their perspectives may help you determine if you want to pursue that major.
- Join pre-professional organizations.
- Attend Illinois State's numerous career fairs and talk with a variety of employer recruiters from a variety of employers.
- Find out the key sets of skills required in the jobs/fields that most interest you.
- Try out different summer and part-time jobs to determine if you like the atmosphere, a specific organization, even the particular tasks that the job demands. Internships provide the same kinds of beneficial "insider knowledge."
- Make an appointment with a professional in the Career Center to discuss options.
- Utilize the wide variety of resources, academic advisors (in University College Academic Advisement and academic departments), counselors (Student Counseling Services), and assistance (University Center for Learning Assistance) available across campus.
- Narrow your focus by examining your strongest preferences and researching the job options that seem like the best fit for you.
- Make your best assessment of your dream job—is it realistically attainable with your very best efforts, applying yourself in the right major? If so, then go for it!

By involving yourself in these proactive moves, you will be better able to choose a major that is a good, fulfilling fit for you. Life isn't fully "plannable"—it requires occasional tinkering, adjusting, or, sometimes, wholesale changes. But these recommendations may offer you a path to chart a course forward.



Visit the Career Center Web site at www.CareerCenter.ilstu.edu or call (309) 438-2200.

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