

# Researching A Major

## FOUR IMPORTANT FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A MAJOR

### 1. Enjoyment/Interest

Are you genuinely attracted to the subject matter in this field?  
Do you find the courses stimulating, challenging, and filled with new ideas?  
Is this an area where your interest might be sustained over a long period of time?

### 2. Performance

Are you likely to perform reasonably well in this field?  
Do the courses take advantage of your better abilities?  
Will you have to struggle to attain a decent grade-point average?

### 3. The People

Do you feel comfortable with the faculty and students in this department?  
Are these the kinds of people you enjoy listening to, talking with, and being around?

### 4. The Implications for Your Career

Will this major have a positive effect on your career plans?  
Are you learning skills and acquiring knowledge that will be useful in the fields you hope to enter?

## THE CAREER IMPLICATIONS OF YOUR CHOICE OF MAJOR

**Technical Fields** - (i.e. Architecture, Nursing, Engineering, Pharmacy) In these fields, your major is directly related to your future job and career opportunities. You are likely to be interested in jobs of this kind, because this is where you have decided to focus.

**Semi-Technical Fields** - (i.e. Business, Communications, Natural Sciences) In these fields, there are job and career opportunities related to your major, but you may consider other areas of work that are not major-related, such as those listed below. Also, students from other fields of study (such as Liberal Arts) may be interested in these same kinds of jobs.

**Non-Technical Fields** - (i.e. Liberal Arts, Fine Arts) Students in these fields will be likely to find jobs that do not directly relate to their majors. However, they acquire a variety of skills that will give them access to all of the non-technical fields and more.

Turn this sheet over for FIVE WAYS TO RESEARCH A MAJOR

## FIVE BEST WAYS TO RESEARCH MAJORS

You may want to conduct your research in the following order, because these five methods begin with the easiest and work through the method requiring the most involvement from you. If you like the major based on the first method (Reading), then go to the next method (Observing), etc.

1. READ MATERIALS - Here are some of the materials to help you begin your evaluation of a possible major:

- The degree plans and course requirements for every UT major are available online at: [http://www.utexas.edu/cec/lrks/degree\\_plans.html](http://www.utexas.edu/cec/lrks/degree_plans.html)
- Evaluations of classes and instructors are available online at: Course Instructor Surveys, <http://web.austin.utexas.edu/diia/cis/results> or at [pickaprof.com](http://pickaprof.com)
- In the textbook section of the University Co-op, you can browse through the assigned texts and get an idea of the nature of the content and difficulty of the reading

2. OBSERVE CLASSES - Be sure to observe classes in the major field which you are considering

- “Audit” a course by enrolling officially in a class without having to take it for credit or complete the assignments
- Observe classes on a one-time basis. Trying classes one at a time is an especially good way to sample the possibilities and cover a broad territory.

3. TALK TO STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND ADVISORS - Most people involved in a major field of study are willing to talk about it, but you must approach them directly.

- Ask students:**
1. What do you like about this major?
  2. What do you not like about it?
  3. What are you learning that is especially challenging?

- Ask faculty:**
1. What kinds of abilities will I develop in this major?
  2. What kinds of careers have graduates of this department gone into?
  3. What do you especially like about this field?

- Ask advisors:**
1. Which courses are known to be the most difficult?
  2. What do students who enroll in this department say they like about it?
  3. Are there any pre-requisites that I must have?

4. TAKING COURSES

Sampling the courses themselves is a way to gauge your first-hand reaction to the subject matter, how you will be tested, and the skills you will acquire. If you are exploring more than one major, you would be wise to take at least one or two courses in each of these major fields before you decide on your field. It is OK to take courses in many different fields or Colleges at the same time, and it helps to broaden your overall education.

5. WORKING DURING COLLEGE

Another way to test the value of your major is to get an internship, or a part-time/summer job in a career field that interests you, and then ask yourself: “Which particular major (among those whose courses you have sampled at the University) would help me the most in this career?” Sometimes the major is helpful in a direct and obvious way (learning subject matter that applies to the job, such as Engineering, Business, or Pharmacy), and sometimes the value of the major is more subtle (for example, the analytical skills of Philosophy might help you solve business problems, or the research skills of History might help you organize a project.

