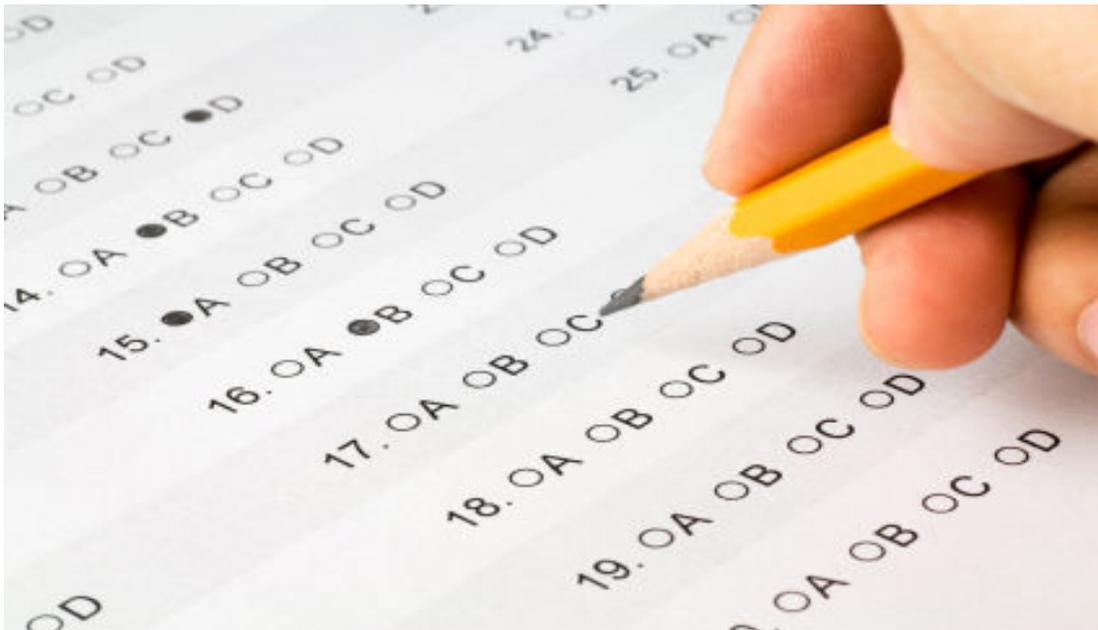


Choosing a Major Guide

Assessing Yourself, Exploring Your Options,
& Preparing for Your Career



Radford University
Career Center
(540) 831-5373
www.radford.edu/Careers



Introduction



You're in college now and everyone is asking, "What's your major?" Are you stressed because you don't have an answer? You may have even considered a few majors, but none of them seemed like "the one" for you. First off – RELAX! Exploring majors can be fun.

Some of your friends may have chosen their majors, but you should know that most students don't stick with their first major. Many students choose their majors based on faulty reasoning such as:

- "All my friends are in this major"
- "I like it on television"
- "It pays a lot of money"
- "My family said I should do this"
- "Everyone in my family is a _____"
- "It seems easy"

Be careful in choosing a major based on any of these ideas. Remember that choosing a major is your decision and will be made on your own timetable. Don't select a major to satisfy family or friends. Discover what motivates you and what you are happy doing. The insight you will gain from this search will ensure a successful and fulfilling career.

The following information will help you get started in the process of choosing a major at Radford University.

Self Assessment

You must know yourself in order to know what directions to take in life. Identify your strengths and weaknesses, clarify your values, pinpoint your interests, and explore your personality. Talk to your Career Counselor and take the assessments in Career Services to help you on your self-assessment journey. Also, complete the activities at the end of this guide.

Exploring your options

Read materials:

- Go to the college catalog or Academics website and look at degree plans and course requirements of the majors that interest you. Read course descriptions in the catalog.
- Go to the Library and read books about your field of interest.
- Go to the bookstore and browse through the assigned texts to get an idea of what the courses involve and what they require.
- Go to the Career Center and read various books about careers/majors.

Discuss your options:

- Seek Informational Interviews
- Students - Ask friends what they like/dislike about their major and what they're learning that is especially challenging.
- Alumni - Seek out alumni who have graduated in majors of interest to you (Use HireAHighlander to connect to RU alumni).
- Faculty - Ask what skills you will develop in the major, what kinds of careers graduates typically pursue, and what they like about the field.
- Advisors - Ask which courses are difficult, what students like/dislike about the department, and if any prerequisites must be completed.

Helpful Resources

- Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm)
- ONET Online (online.onetcenter.org/gen_search_page)
- Wetfeet (www.wetfeet.com)
- Major to Career Converter (content.monstertrak.monster.com/tools/careerconverter)
- Major Resource Kits (www.udel.edu/CSC/mrk.html)
- Virginia View (<http://www.vaview.vt.edu/>)



Narrowing your choices

It's a lot easier to choose a major if you have things to compare it against.

Take courses – this will get you acquainted with various subject areas and broaden your scope of knowledge. You can even ask professors if you can sit in on a class without enrolling to save you money.

A necessary component of exploring majors is to get some real world experience. Do this by getting volunteer experience, an internship, part-time or summer job in a career field that interests you.

If you are having trouble deciding between two majors, consider the possibility of taking a double major or taking one as a minor. Discuss this with your advisor.

Making your decision



Realize that there is no major that is perfect or that can meet all your needs.

Remember that this is not a final decision. Many people don't pursue a career specifically related to their major. Many people change careers throughout their lives to fit their needs.

Choosing a major rarely limits you to one career. Most majors give you the education (only one part of your personal package) that can enable you to enter a variety of careers.

Make sure you enjoy studying the subject matter, perform well in the major, and relate to other students in the major.

Once you have declared a major, don't feel like you have to stay committed to it. Keep your options open and continue exploring different majors to ensure the right fit for you.

And be sure to maintain contact with your Career Advisor throughout this process.

Skills Inventory

Rate yourself according to the following skills:

1 = Very skilled, 2 = Reasonably skilled, 3 = Not very skilled, 4 = Not skilled at all

Communication

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Persuasion/Sales | <input type="checkbox"/> Negotiation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening | <input type="checkbox"/> Group discussions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Develop rapport easily | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-verbal (expressing & responding) |

Mathematical

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical reasoning | <input type="checkbox"/> Budgeting/managing money |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Calculate/Solve math problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compile data | <input type="checkbox"/> Visualize 3 dimensional objects |

Creative

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Artistic | <input type="checkbox"/> Visualize concepts and results |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inventive | <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with metaphors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spatial perception | <input type="checkbox"/> Abstract thinking |

Interpersonal

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> At ease socially | <input type="checkbox"/> Able to take criticism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counsel and encourage | <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate and serve |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Express feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> Mediate between conflicting parties |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipate other's needs and reactions |

Investigative

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analyze data | <input type="checkbox"/> Look for meaning and solutions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research/find info | <input type="checkbox"/> Compare and evaluate info |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving | <input type="checkbox"/> Use scientific equipment |

Managerial

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Motivate others | <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate, delegate, and organize |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plan and make decisions | <input type="checkbox"/> Time management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide constructive criticism |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Set and meet goals |

Values Inventory

Rate the following values in order of importance to you.

1 = Very important, 2 = Reasonably important, 3 = Not very important, 4 = Not important at all.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking risks | <input type="checkbox"/> Working in a relaxing environment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not being in front of a crowd | <input type="checkbox"/> Expressing kindness and love |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empowering others | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling my work really counts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being close to nature | <input type="checkbox"/> Appealing work hours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traveling for work | <input type="checkbox"/> Be physically challenged |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have independence/autonomy | <input type="checkbox"/> Get recognition for your work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do precision work | <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual status/knowledge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Influence others | <input type="checkbox"/> Work under pressure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have power/authority | <input type="checkbox"/> Contribute to a cause |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help others | <input type="checkbox"/> High income |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership/supervision | <input type="checkbox"/> Public contact |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excitement; fast pace; adventure | <input type="checkbox"/> Gain prestige and status |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have family/leisure time | <input type="checkbox"/> Have variety at work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifestyle and geographic location | <input type="checkbox"/> Be creative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working as a part of a team | <input type="checkbox"/> Be competitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grow personally | <input type="checkbox"/> Have job stability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work alone | <input type="checkbox"/> Having cultural diversity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dress casually at work | <input type="checkbox"/> Possibility for advancement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stress free work environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Continued learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aesthetic work environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Variety in your activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to take time off | <input type="checkbox"/> Easy commute |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible hours | <input type="checkbox"/> Be challenged/stretching myself |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Immediate rewards for your efforts | |

From both inventories, list possible majors/careers and evaluate them based on your values and skills:

1. What are my top skills and values and do they correspond with this major/career?
2. What are my lowest ranked skills and values and how will they influence my decisions?

Personal History

To discover what you might enjoy in the future, it's helpful to look at your past.



List the jobs (paid/unpaid) you've held. What did you like/dislike about them?

How will these likes/dislikes affect your future career decisions?

Clubs/Organizations

List the Clubs/Org's you've participated in. What did you like/dislike about them?

What prompted you to join and continue participating? How will these likes/dislikes affect your future career decisions?

Hobbies and Interests

List activities you enjoy in your spare time. What do you enjoy about them?

How will these likes/dislikes affect your future career decisions?

Reading and TV

List the books/TV shows you read/watch. What do you enjoy about them?

How will these likes/dislikes affect your future career decisions?

Careers and Dreams

List careers you've considered (even as a child). What did you like/dislike about them?

How will these likes/dislikes affect your future career decisions?

Family Careers

List careers of family (include extended family too). What are your opinions of those careers?

How will these opinions affect your future career decisions?

Discovering your Personal Purpose



1. What activities do you enjoy performing? (List what is enjoyable about them and why)
2. What are you good at? (List skills, talents, and special knowledge)
3. Think of a specific situation in which you felt successful. Describe the time, place, and activity. Describe what you were doing and how you were feeling.
4. Think of a time you did something meaningful, that was satisfying to you. Describe the situation (as in 3 above) and why it had meaning.
5. List three QUALITIES you are proud of ... and describe WHY.
6. Describe your VISION of an "ideal world" if you could make it happen
7. Review the above information and circle 15 - 20 key words or ideas. Summarize the key words and select the 10 - 12 that are most important to you and record them here.
Next, create a purpose statement, on the back of this sheet, using those words.
Start with: My purpose is to:

Adapted from Dave Morrison and Andre de Zanger and presented at the Creative Problem Solving Institute (CPSI) , State University at Buffalo, NY 1985. ©1999-2002 Deborah L. Knox & Sandra S. Butzel, Butterworth-Heinemann.

Daydreams Activity

Let your daydreams take you into the future and imagine a typical workday five years from now.....



You just stepped out of the shower and are looking through your closet to decide what to wear. You select an outfit. What does it look like?

It's time for breakfast. What time do you need to leave for work? When do you expect to return home? Do you pack a lunch? Do you have a laptop, pager, or work papers to carry with you?

Now you're leaving your home. What does your home look like? What is your neighborhood like? Are you living in a big city, suburb, or in the country? Are you driving a car, walking, or taking a train or bus to work?

Now you are traveling to work. How long does it take to get there? How do you feel about the day ahead? (Prepared...excited...bored...stressed...challenged...energized?)

You've arrived at work. Create a mental picture of your work site. Where is it located?

Are you indoors or outdoors? Do you have an employer or are you self-employed? How many people work for your organization?

Now you arrive at your specific workspace. What does the area look like? Do you have a private or shared workspace? What is the first thing that you do? Who is the first person you meet? What do you say to each other? Do you work primarily by yourself or with others? If you work with others, how would they be described? Are you supervising others?

Now, imagine some general tasks that you will be performing. Don't worry so much about your job title, but imagine in general the activities you will undertake. Are you talking to people? Are you helping others? Are you working with your hands...with figures and budgets...thinking and planning...writing...drawing...creating...performing?

It's time for lunch. Do you skip lunch and keep working? Are you eating alone at your desk or do you go out for lunch with others? Where do you go and what do you talk about?

It's afternoon already. Have your activities differed throughout the day? Are you feeling productive? Have you encountered some unpredictable tasks? Do you feel challenged and rewarded? Have you attended several meetings? Have you interacted with the general public?

The workday is over. What time are you leaving work? Are you able to leave your work behind until you return tomorrow? Are you thinking about and planning tomorrow's work activities? Are you planning to get together with work colleagues for some fun?

Now, evaluate your answers to discover your preferred work values:

Style of dress: _____
Prior to work: _____
Home and Neighborhood: _____
Commute: _____
Work Site: _____
Work Space: _____
General Work Activities: _____
Lunch: _____
Afternoon: _____
End of Day: _____

Preparing for your Career

Once you have chosen a major, ask these career preparation questions to ensure a successful transition into the work world.

1. What are the qualifications for jobs in this field?
2. What degree is required or recommended for this field?
3. Are there specific courses I can take that would be particularly beneficial in this field?
4. What entry-level jobs qualify a person for this field?
5. Are there any extracurricular activities that I should be thinking about?
6. Are there internships available in this field?
7. What is the best way to prepare myself to start my career in this field?
8. Would joining a professional association be beneficial?
9. What jobs can I do now that will give me related experience?
10. What is the top job I can have in this career?
11. Are there other areas of this field that might be of interest to me? What are they?
12. What would I do in a typical day?
13. What aspects of this career would I enjoy? Dislike?
14. What is the salary range for various levels in this field?
15. Is there a current demand for people in this field? Would I have to relocate?
16. How will this field change over time? What can I do to prepare myself for these changes?
17. Where can I get a job description?
18. Who do I know that works in this field that I can talk to?