

Ten Tips For Selecting a Major

If you are undecided about your major, you are in good company. “Undeclared” is one of the most popular majors for first-year students at VCU (and probably many other colleges as well). Because you can’t actually graduate with undeclared as your major, we recommend you try several strategies to make help you in selecting a program of study. Remember, it is required that you declare a major by the time you earn 60 credit hours.

Discuss your major with your academic advisor .

The advisors in the Office of Academic Advising in Hibbs 207 are specially trained to assist you in identifying and choosing a major that best suits your strengths, interests, and goals. Advisors are knowledgeable about all majors and minors offered and can help you uncover how majors relate to careers and graduate school.

Try introductory courses in your areas of interest.

Talk to your advisor about what courses would be appropriate and how these might fit into your general education requirements. Taking survey courses in areas that sound interesting to you or in subjects that you may not have had much exposure to previously are good ways to explore.

Talk to people knowledgeable about your major.

Besides your academic advisor, professors who teach courses in areas you are considering can give you terrific insights about the major. Also, talk to other students who are majoring in areas you may consider. Peers can give you a different perspective on their major and classes required—just be sure to confirm these insights with at least a couple of other students!

Join a student organization. Chances are, there is at least one student organization that is related to your area of interest. Active participation in a group with a specialized focus will allow you to interact with others who quite possibly have similar interests and abilities. You can make some determinations if you have much in common with others in the major through your involvement in the student organization.

Test the waters through experience. One of the best ways to explore a career area is to experience it first-hand. Consider getting a part-time job, internship, or volunteer position in an area of interest. Shadow someone on the job by spending a day on the job with someone who works in an area you might like to pursue.

Visit the Career Center. Meet with a career counselor to discuss how to make career choices; learn more about your career interests, skills and values; and talk about how your career affects your life and vice versa. Career counselors can help put all this information together into a meaningful plan. Call 828-1645 for more information.

Read the Undergraduate Bulletin. Arguably, the *Undergraduate Bulletin* is not the most exciting thing you’ll ever read, but it does contain a description of the major areas of study offered at VCU and the requirements for each major. Make it a point to read the course descriptions of the areas you are considering—the descriptions that sound interesting to you may be a good clue to major areas of interest. Beware of majors with courses whose catalog descriptions give you a severe headache while reading them and as well as ones that induce you to fall asleep.

Learn as much as you can about careers.

Choosing a major can be easier if you have the right information. Familiarize yourself with different occupational areas by reading about various careers. Begin with the *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)*, a publication by the U.S. Department of Labor, which gives in-depth information on 250 occupations that account for about 85% of all jobs in the U.S. economy. It includes information on salaries, job outlook, working conditions, educational required, and nature of the work. The OOH is available on-line at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/>

Take an assessment on-line. There are plenty of good assessments available on the Internet to help you define your interests and skills and relate them to careers and majors. Although it’s not recommended that you do this in lieu of talking to a career counselor or academic advisor in depth, these assessments can be a worthwhile way to begin to understand what people do who have interests and abilities similar to you. Check out the following web sites:

- <http://www.ncsu.edu/careerkey>
- <http://career.missouri.edu/holland/>
- <http://www.review.com/career>

Go with your sweet spot. In tennis, you’ll get the best swing by hitting the ball on the sweet spot of your racquet. Uncover your sweet spot by considering courses you’ve already taken. Ask yourself which ones you really enjoyed and which ones you were good at. Since many career fields don’t require a specific major, consider selecting one that capitalizes on your interests and abilities.