

# Before Choosing Your Direction...

College students often ask, "What's the 'right' major or career for me?" hoping that someone — a parent, a counselor, or a professor — can provide quick answers and make their decisions for them. However, the responsibility for making a decision about your future cannot be passed to others.

Even if others *could* make our initial career decisions for us, they would be doing us a disservice in the long term. Because today's workplace is constantly changing, the types of jobs and the knowledge/skills needed for them are changing too. We can expect to be changing jobs and making career transitions more frequently than previous generations. This leads to one conclusion — we had better become proficient at making our own career decisions and managing our career transitions.

But before going through the career decision-making process, it helps to know some of the "realities" first:

- There is no "test" that can pinpoint what you should be. There are some instruments that can help you assess your interests, abilities, personality type, or values and determine how that information "matches" with people in various careers. The information from these inventories can be useful, but none of them will give you THE ANSWER to what is the right career for you.
- You have a large number of interests and abilities. Most jobs will not enable you to pursue *all* of them at one time. The challenge is to determine a career direction that combines as many of your abilities and interests as possible.
- Contrary to popular belief, there is *no single career* which is right for you. Each of us has abilities that can be applied in a fairly large number of career fields. Although having a career goal is important, you should not feel unsuccessful if at some time you realize that you are unhappy with the choice you made and decide to change careers. Most people change jobs and/or careers several times throughout their working lives.
- Most of us have had very little exposure to the broad range of career options that are available. We tend to know (or think we know!) about some of the more obvious career choices. There are many jobs which people do not consider simply because they do not even know they exist. There are also many jobs with which we think we are familiar, but about which our information is incomplete or inaccurate.
- As you begin your career exploration, it will be natural to investigate the "hot career fields" where employers are clamoring for college graduates. Keep in mind that the news on these fields may be, to some extent, hype by the various media. Be sure to research thoroughly these possible careers. Also remember that most individuals develop their career focus mainly because they believe it is most relevant to their interests, values, capabilities, and life goals. In

other words, most career choices are primarily “internally driven” as opposed to “externally driven.” By striving to do your very best and developing a Career Action Plan early, you will succeed in your chosen career, whether it is a “hot” field or a field that is less in demand.

- No specific major guarantees success over another. While it is true that certain majors such as nursing, computer science, and accounting prepare students for fairly specific career fields, a far greater number of majors do not have a direct correlation with given career areas. Instead, they provide learning opportunities and experiences and help you develop the personal package that can enable you to become anything you want to be.
- The relationship of college majors to future careers varies. A few years after graduation, approximately one-half of all graduates will find themselves in jobs that have only a vague relationship to the major they studied in college. Even in technical or professional majors where specific skills are taught, there are many different kinds of jobs from which to choose.
- Choice of a major is only one factor in determining your future job prospects and career path. College grads are hired based upon their complete package: academic achievements...choice of electives...campus and community involvements...work experiences...skills...personal characteristics...and knowledge of and demonstrated interest in a career field. These often tell employers more about what you have to offer than does your major and play a large part in determining an employer’s interest in you. Once an individual has been on the job a while, the undergraduate major becomes a non-factor because so many other performance factors can be evaluated.
- There will probably be some “trial and error” involved in your search for a major or career. However, you can increase the options available to you by being willing to grow and learn new things. Be positive, be open to new ideas and experiences, and be ready to learn a lot about yourself in the process.

Individuals continually grow and change throughout life. There’s a good chance that you will be faced with making a series of career choices as you discover new things about yourself and the world of work. As you face each decision, knowing *how* to take charge of your destiny will help you make decisions more effectively and will increase your career satisfaction and success.