A Major Decision: Choosing a College Major

A few people know what they want to do with their lives, and they choose a major that is part of the plan. Others want college to be a time of exploration and fun, without goals in mind and deliberately choose a major at the last possible moment. But for most people, the road ahead is not as clear as they would like.

Choosing a major can be like taking a drive without a roadmap. Even if you make a choice, how do you know it's right? To help you decide how to approach choosing a major, which one of these "drivers" is most like you?

Driver 1: "I have a couple of ideas, but I just can't make up my mind."
Driver 2: "I thought I was sure, but now I have questions about my choice."
Driver 3: "I have no clue right now."
Driver 4: "I know exactly which major and career I want."

If you are most like Driver 1, read this:

If you have a couple of ideas, but aren't sure what's right for you, one possibility is to "double major", that is, take courses in both areas of interest to you. Another option may be to major in interdisciplinary studies or general studies as they are sometimes called. Still another is to major in one subject and "minor" in another. One important thing you can do is talk to an Academic Advisor who will assist you in designing an appropriate transfer degree plan.

Another possibility is to meet with a career counselor to discuss how various majors prepare you for the careers you are considering.

A third possibility is to talk with faculty or students who are in the majors you are considering. Taking an "intro" course in a major is a good idea if this option would fit into your degree plan. Check with your advisor about this option.

If you are most like Driver 2, read this:

This is a good time to meet with a Career Counselor. Many students begin college with a major in mind and then change their minds. Career counselors will help you process and answer the questions you have. What has changed for you? Why do you no longer want to major in what you are studying? What other ideas are you considering? Remember the decision is still yours to make, but discussing your concerns with a trained counselor is a good idea when you are stuck.

The main thing is not to panic. This is a bump on the road of college life. If needed, they can help to assess your interests, abilities, and values that assist you in identifying possible majors and careers.
If you are most like Driver 3, read this:

Although nothing happens magically, you can get a job in the career of your choice even if you have no clue about your major. Once you commit yourself to the process of discovering what you want to do, you can utilize many career planning resources available to you-working with a career counselor, reading about various careers, interviewing people. In short, not knowing which major you want is inconvenient, but not a huge problem. The more questions you ask now, the better prepared you'll be to select a major.

If you are like Driver 4, read this:

Congratulations for having a major selected and a career in mind. Watch for opportunities to gain experience, skills, and knowledge about the field you plan to enter. If you find you have a change of heart later, read this article again!

Remember, whether you know what direction you are going or not, the best part of the journey is the experience. So enjoy the ride and if you don't have a map, be sure to stop and ask for directions every once in a while. Also, be sure to declare your degree with your Academic Advisor.

*Adapted from DISCOVER Newsletter, August, 2004*