

Common Misperceptions about Selecting Your Major

Sometimes students get stuck while making career decisions because of certain preconceived ideas. Some of these ideas are actually misperceptions that can hinder your progress.

Examples of common misperceptions are listed below for you to consider. Do you see yourself in any of these? If so, reflect about how you might change your thinking in these areas.

Misperception # 1: The major I choose now will determine my lifelong career.

Once you become a college graduate, many factors could influence you in your career life. You will gain new skills, network with important people, and have different needs in your personal and/or professional life. New opportunities may become available that you cannot even imagine for yourself now, including jobs that do not yet exist. In today's job market, most people find that they have at least five different career paths over their lifetime. People change, the job market changes, and thus, careers change.

Misperception # 2: There is only one major of job that is perfect for me.

As you may have noticed from completing several self-assessments, there are likely many jobs that you might find satisfying for several reasons – rarely is there ever one perfect job out there. Plus, change is the main order of business these days, no matter which career field you choose to start in. Also, we get to know ourselves more and more over time, and get to choose some of those changes as we gain more self-knowledge.

Misperception # 3: Picking a major and a picking a career are the same thing.

This is another common misperception. The terms “major” and “career” are often used as if they have the same meaning. They are connected, but choosing one does not necessarily mean you have chosen the other.

For example, students who want to become a lawyer learn that there is no undergraduate law degree. Pre-law students can actually choose from several majors and still be accepted into law school.

For another example, students who love to write may choose an English major but feel uncertain as to what types of careers they might be eligible to apply for. There are a large number of career possibilities for English majors.

Choosing a major does not limit you to only one career choice.

And choosing a career doesn't limit you to one major.



Misperception # 4: Choosing one major means giving up all others.

Students have options to combine their interests. Some students choose to double major in their two favorite majors – this will increase course requirements and delay graduation but may be a perfect choice for you. Other students choose to major in one area and minor in another area, thus focusing in two areas, not usually requiring extra time to graduate. A third option could be to major in one area as an undergraduate, then continue on to graduate school for a master’s degree in a second area. A fourth option could be to complete an individualized bachelor’s degree program that some area colleges offer. They have varying degrees of flexibility for students to design their own specialized majors.

Misperception # 5: Everyone but me seems to be certain about their major.

Actually, most students are somewhat or very undecided – you are not alone. It is uncommon to be certain about your major, and to stick with it during your college years. You will be learning about yourself and making career decisions throughout your life.

Misperception # 6: My career has to meet all of my needs: financial, personal, emotional, physical, spiritual, etc.

Your career should be able to meet some of your life needs. The rest of your needs can be satisfied with other life activities like hobbies, family, friends, and community volunteering, for instance.

