Relation of Major to Career

At one time or another someone probably asked you, "What can you do with a major in English...or political science... or biology?" Most people assume that your choice of a major field is ultimately linked to your employment. While the choice of an academic major has some influence on your career, it by no means completely determines it.

Studies conducted by the UMM Career Services have shown that many UMM graduates obtain jobs that are related to their major. However, many obtain jobs that are formally unrelated. Biology graduates have successfully obtained employment as retail merchandisers. English graduates have become bank trainees. History graduates have taken positions as newspaper reporters. Mathematics graduates have successfully obtained work as employment counselors. Studies from other institutions, including the University of Minnesota's College of Liberal Arts in Minneapolis, have shown that liberal arts graduates find employment that makes use of their skills, special knowledge, values, and interests, even though the employment field may not be related to their academic major.

You may ask yourself, "How do I prepare myself for a job that is unrelated (or related) to my undergraduate major?" There are many careers that do not require a specific undergraduate major; they are learned as a result of the on-the-job training rather than prior education. What is sought among prospective employees is the development of certain skills and abilities that can be developed not only through your major but through the courses you take to supplement your major, and through, directed studies, tutorials, seminars, work-study and summer employment and volunteer experiences.

UMM studies indicate that 41% of graduates between 1980-1987 obtained employment in the 'same field' of their major; 29% took jobs 'related' to their major; 15% accepted employment in 'unrelated' fields, by choice; and, 15% took jobs 'unrelated' to their major, not by choice. A list of typical entry level jobs for liberal arts graduates can be found on the following pages.

Recent UMM graduates report that a combination of course work and out-of-class learning experiences were important preparation for their job. Fifty-nine percent of some recent graduates said courses in their major were moderately to extremely important preparation. Fifty-four percent said the same for general education course work, in addition, 59% reported that internship, teaching or research experience that they had received was important preparation for their current employment. Finally, 46% indicated that extra-curricular participation was important preparation for their current jobs.

A liberal arts education, in general, and specifically, any academic major from UMM can develop skills employers need:

1) the ability to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing;
2) the ability to comprehend problem situations from several points of view;
3) the ability to learn new material and apply that knowledge;
4) the ability to relate to and understand other people;
5) the ability to think critically and independently; among others.

Graduates indicate that they have benefited greatly from their experiences at UMM especially in their ability to relate to others, to think independently, to understand others and their values, and in seeing relationships among ideas. It is not just in entry-level positions that these skills will be of us to you. The impact of liberal arts training is frequently even greater in later stages of your career when independence, breadth and problem-solving abilities are essential for advancement.

Relation of Major to Graduate/Professional School

Annually, approximately 22% of UMM graduates use their undergraduate major as a spring-board for direct entry into graduate and professional schools. Others will obtain some work experience prior to returning to full time post-baccalaureate training while still others will work and engage in graduate/professional study at the same time. But how does the selection of an undergraduate major affect admission chances? Do you have to major in political science to be accepted into law school? Is it necessary to major in business/economics to get into a graduate business program?

In many graduate programs, only a half a dozen or so courses are required for entry. Others require certain majors and, in addition, specify in detail the other courses which must be taken. In situations where you may lack certain requirements, they may sometimes be acquired after graduation from college. While you frequently do not need a major in the field of study you want to pursue in graduate school, you should make sure you meet the minimum requirements for admission. Your advisor and the Student Counseling Service are the best sources of this information, and it is essential to contact them on this point.

Follow-up studies of UMM graduates have shown that there are a variety of graduate and professional programs that will accept a wide array of major fields. Graduate s with majors in biology, sociology, mathematics, physics, English, and political science have been accepted in medical and dental programs. Graduates with majors in psychology, philosophy, economics, English, and political science have been successful in being admitted to law school. Graduates with majors in foreign language, economics, political science and sociology have been accepted in graduate business administration programs. Majoring in a field that deeply interests
Choosing a Major

Above all, major in what interests you. A career should not be the only criterion for selecting a major. We live in a rapidly changing economy. Accountants and computer specialists are in demand today, but they may not be in 2000. Five years ago, jobs in secondary teaching were hard to find; today some areas face teacher shortages. So choosing a major solely according to what appears profitable now may be a mistake. Furthermore, today people commonly change careers because they become dissatisfied or develop new interests. The typical American makes significant job changes in his or her lifetime.

Students who have chosen a major that they like tend to get better grades and are more likely to complete college successfully, so it is important to choose with your own interests in mind. Probably the most reliable criterion is you--your strengths, aspirations, your own vision of personal growth.

Signing Up
If you have not chosen a major area of study, don't panic. It's O.K. to be undecided! If you have chosen a major, perhaps you have some doubts about your choice. Perhaps you've changed majors several times. Perhaps you've made a choice and have stuck with it. All of the above situations are normal for students during their college years.

If you are a freshman, you shouldn't worry if you don't have a major or definite career plans. Involve yourself in a variety of courses and experiences. Talk with your academic advisor, faculty in the fields that interest you, counselors in the Student Counseling Office and the Career Services, and other students in order to obtain information and assistance in establishing some direction. Don't be surprised if you find yourself moving toward a goal you would never have foreseen when you were in high school!

If you are a sophomore, you may be close to declaring a major by the end of the year. However, you still may be drawn to several fields and feel unsure of your final choice. At this point you should discuss alternatives with your academic advisor and other faculty members and gather as much information as possible. It may or may not be essential for you to decide right away; but it is important to plan early and carefully so that you take essential courses if you wish to keep your options open.

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When you have decided on a major field you should discuss this decision both with your advisor and with a faculty member in the discipline in which you wish to study. They will be able to help you decide on your potential in that field, the courses you will need and the order in which you should take them, related courses that may help you, and possible career paths. In some areas, such as education and business/economics, you will have to apply for admission to the program. In many cases you may be told that it is wise to change advisors to someone in your newly declared major. This is frequently urged by faculty as the best course of action, and it is very easy to accomplish. Simply go to academic advising and request a change; if you have a specific advisor in mind, they will try accommodate you. If you care of all the paperwork involved in the change.

If you find that you have lost some of your interest in your classes, that you lack motivation, that you rarely want to go beyond the requirements in your major classes, it may be that you should consider changing majors. This is done quite frequently by UMM students and does not present insuperable practical difficulties. However, it often requires a re-examination of goals and re-appraisal of possibilities; this may sometimes be a difficult task, Academic advisors, Student Counseling and the Career Services are good resources, but students majoring in other areas can be very helpful, too.

Personal Responsibility

Unlike high school, in college you will probably have more freedom to choose classes and extracurricular activities. This new freedom presents a challenge to demonstrate personal responsibility. Since Career development does not instantaneously or automatically occur at the end of one's senior year, it is incumbent upon you to set educational and career goals, assertively seek out information, engage in a variety if extracurricular experiences, and actively participate in career related programming throughout your college years. A variety of courses, non-credit learning experiences, clubs, advisors, counselors, and fellow students are available to you. It is your responsibility to assertively make your total education work for you.

Summary

The major--is it a major decision? As we have pointed out, the selection of the major does not necessarily determine your future employment. It may not reflect the profession you will enter. It may only provide you with some of the skills you will need to effectively function in an employment setting.

The important thing is to view your years of college as a whole. Your major and related courses are a very important part of the total experience, but they are not all of it. Your participation, throughout the college years, in extracurricular activities, internships, field trips, summer jobs all play essential roles in the education you acquire. With reflection, planning, and assertive actions, your liberal arts education will provide you with a solid foundation for your future.