

Deciding Your Major — Five Considerations

1. What Are Your Interests?

Think about the kinds of things that you enjoy. What activities do you like to participate in? What do you enjoy watching on TV or reading, studying, or talking about? What hobbies do you actively pursue? Do you enjoy group activities, or do you prefer working alone? Do you enjoy outdoor activities or being indoors? Are you interested in science fiction, science fact, or neither? What courses did you enjoy most in high school? When you fantasize about a career, what do you think you would enjoy doing or being? What kinds of activities are you not interested in, and why? Imagine not being interested in a subject that you would study in depth for four years or more. The importance of considering your interests in choosing a major should not be underestimated. Would you be interested in the work required in a particular major?

2. What Are Your Abilities?

Try to take an objective look at your past performance in scholastic as well as in non-scholastic work. How do your college entrance exam scores and high school performance compare to those of other students? How have others judged your performance in the past? Have you won scholastic honors or awards for excellence in art, music, sports, or other performance areas? Do you seem to have a natural talent for helping other people, working with numbers, influencing others, solving problems, using your hands, or organizing activities? How strong are your study skills? Do you have the ability to be successful in the work required in a particular major?

3. What Are Your Values?

Think about the values and principles that are guiding your life. Are your decisions and choices influenced by certain religious, philosophical, moral, or ethical beliefs and teachings? Do you consider service to others to be an important part of your personal philosophy? Is a broad undergraduate education more important to you than a more narrowly-focused program, or is the opposite true? Do you value financial security above all else? Where do you stand politically? Would you rather save the rain forests or cut them down? Why? What are your moral values? What place does a family have in your future? Will your values match the requirements and outcomes of a potential major or career?

4. What Are Your Motivations?

Ask yourself why you might be considering a particular major. Do your strongest motivations come from your interests, your abilities, your values, or from some other factors? Are outside pressures (from family, peers, or the job market) shaping and influencing your decisions? Are you thinking about choosing a major because you believe it will be easy, because it is what somebody else said you “should” do, or because you think you could ensure a good job and earn a high salary? Would your motivation be strong enough to allow you to succeed in a major even if other factors seemed to direct you away from that major?

5. What Are the Realities?

Consider what situations in your life may have a strong and overriding influence on your choice of major. Do your interests, abilities, values, and motivations conflict with each other or are they in agreement? Sometimes students are very interested in a major but find that they do not have the abilities to handle the academic demands of the required courses. On the other hand, some students have considerable abilities in a particular area but do not have any real interest in studying that topic. And sometimes students have both interests and abilities in an area but find that the realities of the job market are such that they are not willing to risk a four year (or more) investment of time and money on a major that appears to lead to bleak employment chances.

What other realities might you face? How much extra time will it take to graduate if you have already completed a significant number of credits that cannot be applied to a major? Does Rice offer the major(s) that you are considering, or would you have to transfer to another school? Can you afford to finance a five-year degree? Consider these and other outside factors that may make a significant difference to you. Is your choice of major a realistic one?