Choosing a major and career path

There is no formulaic or “right way” to choose the major or career path that is best for you. Careers can sometimes unfold in various and, many times, unplanned ways. As you engage in this journey, remember that it is your unique journey and that your active participation in decision-making and reflecting on the process will be key to your success. Check out the following practical tips you embark on your journey.

When choosing your major...

*Explore your values and interests.* You will perform better when you study a subject matter that is interesting to you and that connects broadly to your values system. Reflect on topics you enjoyed in high school and consider how your guiding principles might somehow connect to a subject or discipline.

*Understand the requirements.* Some majors require specific prerequisites and adhere to a very strict timeline. Be sure to check out the requirements for your major(s) of interest.

*Clarify the career connection.* Although your major does not always predetermine your career path, it is helpful to consider how the subject matter, skills, and experiences you encounter within the classroom might connect with activities you will be involved in as you enter the world of work.

*Talk to people in the know.* Develop relationships with faculty in the department you are interested in and ask them questions you might have around majors of interest. Be sure to have meaningful conversations with your academic advisors, career advisors, as well as alumni, parents and friends so that you aren’t making these decisions in a silo.

Gain Experience!

Experiences can provide you with great insight into the world of work and can help you clarify your interests in particular career fields while also providing a space for you to develop and enhance your skills. Experience is highly valued by employers as it shows them what your interests might be and the many ways you might be able to contribute to their respective organizations. Gaining experience isn’t always limited to the internship. Check out the following opportunities you can consider as you brainstorm ways to gain experience throughout your journey:

- Volunteer in your Community - https://engage.richmond.edu/
- Work on Campus - https://studentjobs.richmond.edu/
- Student Organizations - https://involved.richmond.edu/
- Study Abroad and International Experience - https://international.richmond.edu/
- Spider Shadowing - https://careerservices.richmond.edu/students/programs-services/shadowing.html
- Internships - https://careerservices.richmond.edu/students/jobs-and-internships/index.html
- Health Preceptorships - https://careerservices.richmond.edu/students/explore/industries/science-health.html
Make Connections and Develop Your Ecosystem!

Big companies and organizations have help making big decisions, why shouldn’t you! Growing your ecosystem of connections will provide you with an opportunity to connect with a variety of people and perspectives as you make decisions related to your major and career path. Everyone in your ecosystem of connections might have a different purpose. Here are a few suggestions for individuals you might want to exist within your ecosystem:

- Faculty members can help you engage with your academic interests in more depth and may connect you with professional organizations related to your major or area of interest.
- Career Advisor(s) are helpful as you reflect on your values, interests, and skills and are considering next steps in your journey. Career advisors might talk through your options and point you to particular programs and resources that you would benefit from.
- Alumni are helpful as you develop have interests in particular industries. They might be able to offer advice based on their path as well as insider insight into trends within their industries.
- Other professionals that you might come in contact with through mutual relationships can also be helpful to talk to and learn about particular industries. These individuals might include neighbors, family friends, or old bosses.

Understand How to Effectively Articulate Your Skills

The following competency areas indicate that you are career ready and help you transition into the world of work. Consider how your academic and professional experiences are helping you to develop or enhancing your skills in these areas.

- **Critical Thinking/Problem Solving**: Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems. The individual is able to obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data in this process, and may demonstrate originality and inventiveness.
- **Oral/Written Communications**: Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms to persons inside and outside of the organization. The individual has public speaking skills; is able to express ideas to others; and can write/edit memos, letters, and complex technical reports clearly and effectively.
- **Teamwork/Collaboration**: Build collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints. The individual is able to work within a team structure, and can negotiate and manage conflict.
- **Digital Technology**: Leverage existing digital technologies ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals. The individual demonstrates effective adaptability to new and emerging technologies.
- **Leadership**: Leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. The individual is able to assess and manage his/her emotions and those of others; use empathetic skills to guide and motivate; and organize, prioritize, and delegate work.
- **Professionalism/Work Ethic**: Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time workload management, and understand the impact of non-verbal communication on professional
work image. The individual demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior, acts responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind, and is able to learn from his/her mistakes.

- **Career Management:** Identify and articulate one's skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences relevant to the position desired and career goals, and identify areas necessary for professional growth. The individual is able to navigate and explore job options, understands and can take the steps necessary to pursue opportunities, and understands how to self-advocate for opportunities in the workplace.

- **Global/Intercultural Fluency:** Value, respect, and learn from diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions. The individual demonstrates, openness, inclusiveness, sensitivity, and the ability to interact respectfully with all people and understand individuals' differences.

Source: [http://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/](http://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/)

**Getting Started**

Because getting started is sometimes the hardest part of this journey, we have compiled a short list of activities that will help you as you begin this journey. As always, we are always here to help!

**Ways to Get Started**

- ✔ Meet with a Career Advisor
- ✔ Take the FOCUS 2 Career Assessment
- ✔ Review a list of major options
- ✔ Meet with your Academic Advisor
- ✔ Join a student organization
- ✔ Conduct an informational interview/Attend a Career Chat
- ✔ Participate in Spider Shadowing
- ✔ Study abroad
- ✔ Create a resume
- ✔ Take a new or different class
- ✔ Check out the Deconstructing Series
- ✔ Attend a Spider Road Trip
- ✔ Read the Spider Careers blog
- ✔ Attend a Career Expo
- ✔ Participate in Community Service
- ✔ Get a job on campus
- ✔ Research internships and opportunities on SpiderConnect
- ✔ Enroll in a Career Exploration or Life and Careers Wellness Course

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