Ten Myths of Choosing a Major

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1. I need to declare now: I am already behind, and declaring something is better than being undeclared.

No one at Loyola expects 18-year-old students to know what major or career they want to pursue. Many students don’t; a large percent of the freshman class in the College of Arts and Sciences was undecided on the first day of school this fall, and many students won’t identify a program of student until the following year.

Uncertainty is the only certain thing in life. We need to allow ourselves times when we just don’t know, and we need to realize that not knowing is not a bad thing. Think of your undecided status as an “exploratory” status, with all the positive aspects of being open to options as you encounter them.

Also, it is probable that you aren’t behind if you don’t know what you want to pursue until later in your college career. With some exceptions, majors at Loyola are highly flexible and don’t require that a student enter freshman year knowing exactly what she wants to do.

We encourage you to choose your major based on careful investigation and consideration of what academic program would best fit you. Don’t look for the perfect major, though (it doesn’t exist), and don’t wait until you are 100% sure of that area (you’ll never bet that certain). When you have reasonably researched an option and are about 75% sure you would like to pursue that option, that is a good time to declare.

2. When the time is right, I’ll just know what I want to do.

If you expect that the right major will just fall out of the sky and into your hands, you are mistaken. Choosing a major and a career path that are a good match for you requires your active participation. You must identify your interests, strengths, skills, and values, work on identifying options that may fit your personal characteristics, research those options, and then decide.

Decisions by default are decisions that are made simply because you aren’t actively involved in the decision making process. In this context, you might
default to a particular career that someone else has chosen for you (without your input) or to a major that does not require any prior planning or action on your part (such as completion of course prerequisites). Don’t limit your options by opting out of your own major and career selection process.

3. **As long as I choose a career that earns a lot of money, I will be happy.**

Research on millionaires indicates that money does not have a direct correlation to happiness. Our best advice in planning for happiness is to carefully assess your personal values as well as your interests, skills, and preferences. We hope your personal fulfillment and satisfaction in the future is the direct result of who you are and what you are doing with your life rather than how much money you make.

4. **Unless I major in accounting, info systems, or computer science or become a doctor or lawyer, I’ll be homeless within 10 years.**

If you are concerned about making a living with just any major, note that the top qualities employers are looking for in prospective employees are about skills, not content. What you want to do in college id develop marketable skills like written and oral communication, problem solving, the ability to work in groups, interpersonal communication, and sensitivity to other cultures. Loyola’s core curriculum is designed in part to foster those skills in students, and the skill-building process continues in any major.

It’s true that you probably won’t get a job as an accountant without an accounting background, and you probably won’t be a computer programmer without programming classes under your belt, but this certainly doesn’t imply there aren’t other ways (and indeed thousands of other ways) to earn a living and make a life.

5. **Majoring in English (or history or sociology or Spanish ...) is a waste of money because you can’t really do anything with it.**

Research tells us that five years after graduation, only 40% of college graduates are working in career areas directly related to their undergraduate major. Chances are, it doesn’t really matter what you choose as your major. The question “What can I do with a major in ...?” isn’t really a helpful question. A better one is “What skills will my undergraduate education help me to develop?"

6. **Doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief. Eeny, meeny, miney, mo.**

When we being to think about career choices, we tend to identify those careers that are highly visible in out worlds. This tendency is natural; we are
more familiar with those careers, although sometimes what we “know” (the portrayal of a job on prime time, for example) isn’t a realistic picture.

It is a mistake, though, to limit ourselves only to the 10 or 15 career fields with which we are most familiar, because undoubtedly there are many other career options that are a better fit for us. There really are thousands of career choices, and as technology advances, the world and our cultural divides shrink, and society responds to those changes, more career fields are created.

7. I don’t have a choice. I’m premed so I have to major in biology.

As a prehealth advisor said recently, “In terms of getting into medical school, what a student majors in doesn’t matter. What does matter is completion of the necessary premed courses, exemplary academic records, good performance on the MCAT, strong recommendation letters, and practical experience.

If you have determined that a career as a medical doctor would be a good fit for you, you should major in an area that you really enjoy. If you choose an area you really like, you will be motivated, you will work hard, and you will likely succeed.

8. This is probably the biggest decision of my life.

Choosing a major may very well be one of the biggest decisions you’ve made thus far, but it is only the beginning. Our world changes rapidly, and we change with it. It is highly likely that your professional life will involve career changes and that you will experience significant personal changes.

Also, you will encounter life decisions that are larger than your major decision. Certainly decisions about where to live, about establishing lifelong relationships with partners, and about raising children are a few examples.

This decisions is a big decision, but it won’t be the biggest one and moreover, it may not matter much in the long run.

9. Once I decide on a major everything will just fall into place for the next 40 years.

As we mentioned before, the only certain thing in life is uncertainty. The path between college graduation and retirement is not a straight line. It will bend, curve, detour, and possibly go in circles in response to changes in the world and in our personal lives. Think about it: do you want to be locked into something for the next 40 years not knowing how your chosen field will change, how your life will change, and how you will feel about those changes?
Earlier we mentioned being open to options as you encounter them during your major/career selection process. Likewise, welcome situations that force you to reconsider and reassess those initial decisions, and celebrate when you outgrow those earlier choices or when you grow away from them to new, more exciting opportunities.

10. *I have to make this decision all by myself.*

You are not completely on your own in this decision making process. Many people and many resources are available to assist you in identifying and investigating options and in working through this process.

However, the final choice is yours. Community and acceptance are very important to us as human beings, but you don’t want family members, friends, advisors, or anyone else for that matter determining what happens with your life.