Major and Career Exploration Guide

Choosing a major or a potential career path is an important, personal decision. It is a decision that requires research, reflection, and time. To start the process, it’s important to understand yourself and gain knowledge about majors and the world of work. There can be many paths to a career, so when you research majors consider the career options associated with them, but also keep in mind that your career choice may not always be defined by your major choice. The more research and reflection you do, the more confident you will be in making an educated choice.

LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF:
As you begin the major and career exploration process, it is important to first understand yourself and what is important to you in a major and career. Reflect upon what your personality type is, what your strengths and skills are, what you value, and what interests you.

CAREER ASSESSMENTS:
Career assessments can be helpful in better understanding yourself. If you are interested in taking an assessment, make an appointment with a career counselor (612-624-4090). The CSE Career Center offers three assessments at a fee.

Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI): This assessment identifies your personality preferences and offers insight into who you are, how you interact with others, and what careers may be a good fit for your personality type.

Strong Interest Inventory (SII): This assessment identifies your interests and offers insight into how your interests may fit in certain work environments and occupations. The SII provides information on what your top five interest areas are and matches how well your interests align with people in various occupations who report being satisfied in their careers.

StrengthsQuest: This assessment identifies your top five strengths. Knowing your strengths may be helpful as a tool to gain insight into who you are, what you are naturally good at, and how this relates to the career options you are considering.

EXPLORE MAJORS:
Before you choose a major, it is important to understand what major options exist and which ones interest you. As you explore majors, consider which ones excite you, what subjects you enjoy studying, and which majors would give you the type of job options you are interested in.

DEPARTMENT WEBSITES: Visit department webpages to read about course options, four-year plans, emphasis areas, research opportunities, and the faculty.

- CSE Majors and Minors: http://cse.umn.edu/r/departments-and-majors/
- U of M Majors and Minors: catalogs.umn.edu/programs

FACULTY MEMBERS AND ACADEMIC ADVISORS: Talk to department faculty and academic advisors about the specifics of major programs. Department contact information can be found on each four-year plan.

OTHER STUDENTS: Talk with students in the majors you are interested in to learn about their experiences. The CSE Student Ambassadors offer a mentor program for first-year students: cseambassadors.wordpress.com/ or you can request a Major Mentor from the Center for Academic Planning and Exploration (CAPE): cape.umn.edu/major_mentor_program.html.

Also, student organizations offer a way to meet upper division students: http://cse.umn.edu/r/student-groups/

INTRODUCTORY COURSES: Take introductory courses in the subject(s) you are interested in. Talk to your academic advisor about options and how this fits into your academic plan.

CSE CAREER CENTER RESOURCE CENTER: Check out the Resource Center in the CSE Career Center, which has a lot of helpful information including major binders and What Can I Do With a Major In handouts with detailed information about each major, related industries, companies that hire that major, salary data, and graduate school information. There are also books that will assist in helping you research different majors and career opportunities, such as “The Eco Guide to Careers that Make a Difference.”
EXPLORE CAREERS:
It’s difficult to choose a career path before you understand what people in that profession do. Use a variety of resources and talk to people in career fields of interest to you to gain an in-depth understanding of what it’s like to be in those careers.

ONLINE INFORMATION: There are several websites that offer detailed information on careers, such as job duties, education/training, projected job growth, and salary data. As you read about these careers, reflect on if you think that job would be a good fit for you. Identify what you like about it, what you don’t like, and what you have further questions about.

Career Information and Statistics from the Government:
Onet: online.onetcenter.org/
Occupational Outlook Handbook: stats.bls.gov/oco/
Iseek (specific information to Minnesota): iseeek.org/sv/index.jsp

Career Information:
careercornerstone.org/fields.htm
wetfeet.com/
myplan.com

Career Profile Videos:
http://careersouththere.com/
occupations.careers.org

ATTEND EMPLOYER EVENTS: Events such as career fairs, career panels, and company information sessions allow you to learn about careers and companies. Visit http://cse.umn.edu/r/career-center/ and goldpass.umn.edu for a listing of events.

FIND A MENTOR: CSE offers a mentorship program that pairs you with an alum that has similar interests as you. By being matched with an experienced professional in a field that you are exploring, you will gain valuable insight into their career path, which may be helpful as you create your own career plans. If you already know a professional that could serve as your mentor, ask for help and guidance.

- CSE Mentor Program: http://cse.umn.edu/r/mentor-programs/

PROFESSIONAL & STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS: Professional organizations are a great resource for information about career fields. To find an organization related to your interests, visit weddles.com, or check out the What Can I Do With a Major In handout found in the CSE Career Center Resource Center and on our website: cse.umn.edu/career. Student organizations are sometimes associated with professional organizations and can be helpful because many of them have ties to industry (guest speakers, career panels, etc). Here are some resources to help find groups related to your interests:
- CSE student organizations: http://cse.umn.edu/r/student-groups/
- U of M student organizations: sua.umn.edu/groups/

READ JOB DESCRIPTIONS: Although you may not be ready to apply for internships or jobs, it is still helpful to conduct a job search to find out what types of positions exist for different majors. Start by going to goldpass.umn.edu/ and search for openings by interest area or by major, or see the Internship/Job Search Guide for more job search sites. As you read the Descriptions, consider if the job duties and the company seem to fit your personality, strengths, skills, values, and interests.

ACTIVE EXPLORATION: Complete an informational interview or job shadow to learn more about what it really means to be a scientist or engineer (more information on Pg. 3 & 4). Also consider doing an internship, participating in a research project, and/or joining student organizations to actively explore your major and career interests. These opportunities may help you narrow down the career options you are considering and focus your career path. For more information about these opportunities, see the Get Experience handout.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING & JOB SHADOWING:
Talking with people who are in a career of interest to you is a way for you to gather information about a certain career field and a particular position. Informational interviews are invaluable because you gain first-hand information. Often students find informational interviews helpful when making major and career decisions because they receive insight as to what it is really like to have a certain career, and then they can assess if it is a career they are interested in.

Job shadows are a great way to gain more detailed information about a certain career, job function, and company. A job shadow is typically longer than an informational interview (anywhere from a few hours to a few days) and allows you to observe a day in the life of a professional. It also gives you the opportunity to ask professionals questions as well as meet their colleagues. Doing a job shadow will provide insight about what it is really like to be in that career.
WHOM TO CONTACT FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW/JOB SHADOW:

- Start with friends and family and ask for their referrals. Even if you don’t know someone personally who is in a career you are interested in, you may be surprised who your family and friends know.
- Ask faculty. They can give you insight into industry or refer you to alumni.
- Reach out to employers. Employers host events and make their contact information available for a reason—they want to connect with students. Find employers through the Employer Directory or the Professional Networking Database on Goldpass: goldpass.umn.edu/ or contact employers you meet at events (career fairs, student organization/group meetings, etc.)
- The CSE Mentor Program (cse.umn.edu/r/cse-mentor-program/) gives you the opportunity to get to know a professional in a career field you are interested in through multiple meetings and events throughout the year.
- Find contacts through professional networking sites, such as linkedin.com. Connect with people you know and see whom they are connected to. Join groups on LinkedIn such as the U of M Alumni Association, College of Science and Engineering, University of Minnesota, and groups related to your career interests to search for contacts. Keep in mind that people on LinkedIn have chosen to be on a networking website, so it is appropriate to contact people you don’t know. Just be sure to communicate with them why you want to connect and keep all communication professional. Watch the online workshop about LinkedIn on the CSE Career Center website (cse.umn.edu/career) to learn more.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING/JOB SHADOWING ETIQUETTE:

- Contact the person you are interested in meeting with via phone, email, or LinkedIn. Be sure to state how you got their information. Ask them if they would be willing to do an informational interview or job shadow (be sure to give them a length of time).
- Dress business casual (dress shirt and dress pants) and arrive 10 minutes early to your appointment.
- Before your interview go to the website of the company they work for so that you have a basic understanding of the organization (see the Research Industries and Employers handout for research tips).
- Be prepared with questions. See examples of questions on Pg. 4.
- Bring a copy of your resume. Your resume will help them get to know you a little better, and you may have the opportunity to ask for their feedback.

EXAMPLE OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW REQUEST (EMAIL):

Dear Mr. Johnson,

My name is Joe Student and I’m a first year student in the College of Science and Engineering at the University of Minnesota. I am considering pursuing a major in Chemical Engineering and want to learn more about career opportunities associated with this major. My aunt, Maggie May, gave me your name and contact information and recommended I contact you. I was wondering if you would be available for an informational interview so I could ask you some questions about your career path and the pharmaceutical industry. Please let me know if I can have a hour of your time, I am happy to meet you wherever is convenient for you. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Joe Student

EXAMPLE OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW REQUEST (LINKEDIN):

Dear Mr. Johnson,

My name is Joe Student and I’m a first year student in the College of Science and Engineering at the University of Minnesota. I found you through LinkedIn on the “U of M Alumni Association” group and was wondering if I could connect with you. I am considering pursuing a major in Chemical Engineering and would be really interested in hearing about how you chose your major, your career path, and your experience working in the food industry. Would you consider doing an informational interview with me? I really hope we can connect, and I appreciate your time. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Joe Student
EXAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW/JOB SHADOW QUESTIONS:
Before your interview, consider what information you currently don’t have that would be helpful as you make a decision about your major and career path. Below are examples of questions that may be helpful to ask.

- How did you choose this occupation?
- What are some of the career paths for someone in your field?
- What skills or qualities are important for this position?
- What are the rewards and challenges of this career?
- What is your educational background, and what experience did you have prior to this position?
- What are your main responsibilities as part of your current job? Do you work mostly alone or on a team?
- Can you describe one current project you are working on?
- What is the organizational culture of this company?
- What are entry level job titles and functions related to this field?
- If you were a college student again, what would you do differently to prepare you for this job?
- What types of activities or experiences (i.e. organizations, internships, etc.) would enhance career potential with this major?
- Is there someone you would suggest I speak with to gain more information about this career?

AFTER THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW/JOBS SHADOW:

- Send a thank you note that states what was helpful from the meeting.
- Contact the people they refer you to and keep in touch with them.
- Reflect on what you’ve learned: How do you view this career differently now? What is your overall impression of the occupation and work environment? What did you like most about the career? What did you like least about the career? Can you see yourself in this occupation? Think about your personality, values, strengths, and skills.

EXAMPLE OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW THANK YOU NOTE:

Dear Mr. Johnson,
Thank you for meeting with me last week to discuss your career path. It was very helpful to hear about how you got your first job and insights into the growth of the pharmaceutical industry. Our conversation made me even more interested in chemical engineering! I took your advice about gaining leadership experience. I have joined AICE and plan on being an active member. I hope to have more conversations with you in the future. Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,
Joe Student

REFLECT AND MAKE A DECISION:

- Consider meeting with a career counselor, it may be helpful as you contemplate your options. To make an appointment with a career counselor, call 612-624-4090 or stop by the office in 105 Lind Hall.
- Analyze the information you have discovered.
  - Consider what you know about yourself: Your personality, strengths, skills, strengths, values, and interests. Think about how each option fits you.
  - Weigh the costs and benefits of each choice: What do you like/not like about each option? How does each option make you feel?
  - Consider which options are realistic for you and fit your life circumstances.
- Get creative! You don’t have to pick one thing to study. Consider combinations of majors, minors, and courses.
- Think about what skills you need for the type of career you want. Many employers are looking for a certain skill set, not a certain major.
- Keep in mind that a lot of people change careers throughout their lifetime. Choosing a major or choosing the first type of job you would like to have after graduation does not eliminate all the other careers you are interested in.
- Make an informed decision that fits who you are and what you are seeking from a major and career.