

YOU WANT TO MAJOR IN WHAT!?

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As an academic advisor for undeclared majors and students in transition at UWSP, I meet with approximately 250 students each semester, helping them choose courses, and eventually a major, that fit their academic interests and abilities. For many, choosing a major is an agonizing decision. I try to assure them that this is not a life or death decision and that this decision will not lock them into a specific career path. I still remember the conversation at my family's dinner table some 30 years ago when I announced to my parents that I wanted to be a German major (after failed attempts at Nursing and Natural Resources). "What the heck will you do with that?" my father replied. I use this example often when explaining to students who are interested in majors in the liberal arts that my path from German major to Academic Advisor had more to do with my out-of-classroom experiences than my course of study. It's true that the advantage majors in professional programs have over those in the liberal arts is the built-in practical experience that usually comes with that type of degree. Generally, liberal arts majors must create these out-of-classroom experiences for themselves by joining student organizations, becoming engaged in the campus or local community as well as seeking job-shadow or internship experiences, so that they learn how to put the communication and critical thinking skills learned in their liberal arts courses to real life practice. Liberal arts majors should not feel obligated to find a career directly connected to their major. I encourage



students to study what they are passionate about. Only then will they truly develop the transferable skills employers are looking for. However, just as an academic transcript reflects four years of coursework, their resume upon graduation should reflect four years of activities that demonstrate their skills in action.

Encourage your student to talk to their academic advisor about possible courses that incorporate experiential learning in them and to visit the Student Involvement & Employment, Residential Living, International Programs, and Career Services offices, just to name a few, to get ideas on what type of extra-curricular activities they can get involved in to enhance their in-class experience. For more information on this topic, an interesting article from the Wall Street Journal on the same subject can be found at:

<http://www.collegejournal.com/careerpaths/findcareerpath/20040713-asher.html>

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."
William Butler Yeats