

# Choice of Major

MIT Global Education & Career Development Ctr. ♦ 12-170 ♦ (617) 253-4733 ♦ <http://careers.mit.edu>

## How Does Choice of Major Relate to Your Career?

The most important career step for undergraduate students is to learn to do excellent work within a field of study. That means becoming knowledgeable about the field, and obtaining the skills necessary to work in that discipline. Learning how to become proficient in a field to the degree that one can produce excellent work within it is a powerful and useful skill.

*“Do what you love and you’ll never work a day in your life.”*

For many students, it is easier to do excellent work in an academic subject that truly interests them. This makes intuitive sense – if you enjoy learning about something – reading about it, thinking about it, studying, perhaps doing research in it, then it’s easier to apply yourself and work hard in that subject.

*What if you don’t know what you love?*

Start with where you are. What subjects do you enjoy? Ask yourself the questions on the back of this sheet to help you think about a major that is a good match for you.

*How about the job market? Shouldn’t I pay attention to where the jobs are?*

The economy is important, but it is also very changeable and hard to predict. Many jobs that exist today will be performed in very different ways five years from now or may even be obsolete by then. New types of jobs are emerging every year. The emphasis in career planning at the undergraduate level is on the development of general transferable skills (writing, speaking, computer, problem-solving, teamwork) that employers want and that graduates will need in order to adjust to rapidly changing careers. (<http://www.psu.edu/dus/md/mdmisper.htm> )

*Remember the following important points:*

- ✓ Choosing a major does not limit you to only one career choice.
- ✓ Choosing a career does not limit you to only one major.
- ✓ Graduate work does not have to be in the same area as an undergraduate degree.
- ✓ It is okay to change your mind.

*Some MIT web resources to assist you in choosing your major*

- UAAP Choice of Major website: <http://mit.edu/firstyear/2011/choiceofmajor/index.html>
- Schedule of Departmental Open Houses for students wanting to learn more about the departments: <http://mit.edu/firstyear/2011/choiceofmajor/events.html>
- Careers Office Major Guides: “What can I do with a degree in ...”  
<http://web.mit.edu/career/www/infostats/byschool.html>
- Undergraduate Departmental Administrators - great people to talk with about their departments: [http://web.mit.edu/acadinfo/deptcontacts/undergrad\\_administrators.html](http://web.mit.edu/acadinfo/deptcontacts/undergrad_administrators.html)
- Institute Career Assistance Network - browse this networking database to find out what alumni/ae from different departments are doing for work: <http://alum.mit.edu/cs/>

# Choice of Major (Cont.)

**Choice of Major Decision Making Table**

<b>Some Considerations:</b>	<b>Department A</b>	<b>Department B</b>	<b>Department C</b>
<b>Appeal of area of study</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Will you enjoy this Major for its own intrinsic value?</li> </ul>			
<b>Level of challenge</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do you think you can perform well in this field?</li> <li>▪ Is your motivation strong enough to enable you to succeed in this Major?</li> <li>▪ Are you choosing this Major because it is easy? Because it is hard?</li> </ul>			
<b>Department characteristics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How big is the department?</li> <li>▪ How do you relate to other students in this Major?</li> <li>▪ Are the faculty accessible? Do you seek them out for informal discussions and other interactions?</li> <li>▪ Are there activities in the department that bring students together? Are there activities that bring students and faculty together?</li> </ul>			
<b>Courses within your Major</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Will this Major help you acquire prerequisites needed for graduate studies you may be considering?</li> <li>▪ How many credits does this Major require to complete a degree? Do you wish to focus largely on one department, or do you want flexibility to study in other departments as well?</li> </ul>			
<b>UROPs /internship programs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are there opportunities for you to get experience in your Major that will help prepare you for your potential career?</li> </ul>			
<b>Skills</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What kinds of skills will you be developing in this Major?</li> </ul>			
<b>Family, peers, outside influences</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How are outside pressures from family, peers and the job market influencing your decision?</li> </ul>			
<b>What else do you need to know to make a better decision?</b>			

Weigh the above factors to indicate which are most important to you.