



# **Choosing a Major**

## **Steps to a Fulfilling Future**

**UNK**<sup>®</sup>

ACADEMIC ADVISING &  
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

# Choosing a Major

## Steps to Finding a Major that Fits You!

One of the greatest stressors for some college students is choosing a major. Deciding on your major (and possibly a minor) is a life decision, and one that will definitely impact your plans and opportunities beyond college.



Use this packet, along with our online Career Assessment, **Focus-2**, to guide you as you take steps toward choosing a college major – and ultimately a career -- that is best for you. Access the assessment site: [bit.ly/UNKFocus2](http://bit.ly/UNKFocus2). Click where it says “New Users” and create an account (access code = **lopers**). You will then be prompted to create your own username and password. Be sure to commit these to memory (or write



them down), as the site does not keep them on file. In addition to recording information in this packet, be sure to look for the button on the **Focus-2** homepage that says “Tying it all Together.” This application gives you the option of creating a **Career Portfolio** as you work through the

various steps.


**S** **STEP 1: Assess Your Interests.** Think about the activities, courses, and topics that interest or inspire you. What are your likes and dislikes – about school, hobbies, work, leisure time, and volunteering? Take the **Focus-2 Work Interest Assessment** to help you identify your primary interests.

When you complete the **Work Interest Assessment**, you will receive a **Work Interest Profile Summary**. This Profile will indicate your **top 3 work interests** from the following six categories:

- ♦ **Social**
- ♦ **Artistic**
- ♦ **Investigative**
- ♦ **Enterprising**
- ♦ **Realistic**
- ♦ **Conventional**


List your <b>top three</b> categories here: →→	1.	2.	3.
<b>a.</b> Read through the descriptions for each of the categories. Which words / phrases best describe you?			
<b>b.</b> List other traits and interests you have, i.e., items that may not be listed above.			
<b>c.</b> What are some occupations that match these interests?			

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 Save careers that interest you in your **Career Portfolio**

**STEP 2: Examine Your Skills and Abilities.** One of the most important steps in choosing a major (and a future career) is acquiring a realistic view of your strengths and weaknesses, skills and abilities. It's important to take an honest look at the subjects / skills you are best at, as well as those you struggle with. Take the **Skills Assessment** (a sub-test within the "Self Assessment" section), as well as the **Academic Strengths** assessment found in the "Career Readiness" section, to help you identify your abilities. After completing both, list your **top 5 skills** below. Review the Occupations featured on **Focus-2 Skills Profile Summary** (this may be a long list) that match your skills, then list several that sound especially interesting (middle column below). Finally, list the majors at UNK that can help you prepare for those occupations.



My Strongest Skills	Occupations that Match these Skills	UNK Majors that Match
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

 Save Occupations and Majors in your **Career Portfolio**

**STEP 3: Identify Your Work Values.** Do you like working . . . with words or with numbers? . . . inside or outside? . . . with a team or independently? It's important to consider your work values as you make decisions about your future. For example, teachers may place a greater value on impacting the lives of their students than they do on financial rewards. Some other values may include helping society, having variety in the work day, being intellectually challenged, achieving high social status, reaching financial security, and others. Take the **Focus-2 Values Assessment**, then write down a list of values that will be important in your future career. For additional help, review **Workplace Values (Resource 1)** at the end of this packet.

Values that will be Important in My Career	Occupations that Match These Values	UNK Majors that Match
1.		
2.		
3.		

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4.		
5.		
<p> Highlight similarities between the <b>Occupations</b> and <b>Majors</b> lists appearing in <b>Step 2</b> and <b>Step 3</b>.</p> <p> Add to your Career Portfolio.</p>		

**STEP 4: Complete the Personality Assessment.** This sub-test, found within the “Self Assessment” section, will help you expand your understanding of your traits and preferences.

Read through the results of your **Personality Assessment**, then respond to the questions below.

<p><b>1. How would you describe your personality?</b> (Examples may include <i>creative, social, reserved, orderly, practical, generous, independent... and many more!</i>)</p>	
<p><b>2. How will these traits affect your choice of majors?</b></p>	
<p><b>3. Which of these traits will you want to use in your career?</b></p>	

**STEP 5: Complete the Leisure Interest Assessment.** Some people don’t stop to think how their leisure interests and activities can connect to a major and a career choice. However, school *and* work should be enjoyable; you want to be involved in pursuits about which you are passionate, activities you find interesting and exciting, so don’t overlook this important connection when making these significant decisions. **Focus-2** categorizes leisure interests into six categories:

- ♦ **Social**
- ♦ **Artistic**
- ♦ **Organizing**
- ♦ **Educational**
- ♦ **Practical**
- ♦ **Leading**

According to <b>Focus-2</b> , your <b>top three</b> leisure interests are:	1.	2.	3.
a. Read through the descriptions for each of the categories. Which terms describe you?			
b. List some careers that might be good matches for each of these interests.			

At first glance, your leisure interest profile may seem contradictory; for example, how can someone simultaneously be **Artistic** (open, spontaneous and independent) and **Organizing** (practical, conforming, and detail-oriented)? Look for overlapping traits and attributes that may help provide balance in your life.

**S** **STEP 6: Research Occupations and Careers.** Now that you have completed most of the assessments and have learned a lot about yourself, it's time to start 'connecting the dots' and finding out how the information can guide you toward a rewarding future.

This step involves conducting research and recording the information you find about several potential career fields. Write your summary notes below (if necessary, use the extra sheet at the end of this packet) to create an overview of each career that interests you. **Focus-2** makes it easy to research careers, as you can click on the job title and be immediately linked to a resource that gives a complete description of the career. Feel free to research jobs that you've considered, but didn't show up on any of the lists.

Potential Careers				
Career Title	Job Duties	Skills Needed	Education & Training	Outlook & Salary
1.				
2.				
3.				

4.				
5.				

◆ Now that you know the basics of some careers that interest you, how will you go about finding out more so you can make a fully informed decision? We recommend several options for more research:

- **Conducting informational interviews** (see the worksheets **[Resource 2]** at the end of this packet),
- **Job shadowing, and**
- **Attending career fairs.**

Begin now to make personal contacts that will help you gain in-depth insights from professionals in the field!

**S** **STEP 7: Reality Check.** Now that you have a better understanding of yourself and several potential career paths, it's time to conduct an honest appraisal of your skills, interests, and values. Are they a good match with the careers that most excite you? Think about this example ... Louie Loper has dreamed of becoming a doctor for years. Recently it has become obvious that he does not have the math or science skills necessary to succeed in medical school. Does Louie have to give up his dream completely, or is there another career that is similar, yet more compatible with his true abilities? Louie may think about Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, or Nursing as alternative paths to pursue. Are there others you can think of?

Now, for your own situation... you have, by now, researched a number of careers. In looking back at the careers you have looked into, can you see that some are **not** a good match for your skills, abilities, or values? If so, now is the time to investigate alternatives. List below, in the left column, careers you are most interested in. In the right-hand column list careers that are similar to, and might serve as realistic alternates to the first list.

Careers that Most Interest Me	Alternatives to My Top Career Choices



**S** **STEP 8: Match College Majors to Career Choices.** For some jobs, the choice of college major is not as important as the actual degree, but choosing a major (or combination of majors and minors) that directly relates to your choice of career usually provides a deeper level of skills and experience, which leads to increased marketability when you begin your job search. In addition, your major

program can open doors to internships and part-time work experience in the field prior to graduation. Research the careers you listed in **Step 7** to help determine the college major that will help you reach that career goal. For UNK Academic Advising and Career Development \* MSAB #150 \* 308-865-8501 \* careerserv@unk.edu \* careers.unk.edu

example, if you think you want a career as a Parole Officer, what should you major in? Go back to your **Career Portfolio** in **Focus-2** to see what majors you have already saved, then list potential majors and minors here. For additional options, access the link to majors offered at UNK: <http://www.unk.edu/academics/list-of-majors.php>

Prospective Career	Appropriate Major(s) and Minor(s)

**Conclusion**

Complete this final activity to review the progress you have made.

Check the steps you have completed:	For steps you have <i>not</i> completed, or are in the process of, indicate the date that you will finish the task:
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Assessed My Interests	1. _____
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Examined My Skills and Abilities	2. _____
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Identified My Work Values	3. _____
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Completed My Personality Assessment	4. _____
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Identified My Leisure Interests	5. _____
<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Researched Occupations and Careers	6. _____
<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Stopped for a Reality Check	7. _____
<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Matched College Majors to Career Choices	8. _____

If you have finished this packet and made use of the resources offered through **Focus-2**, you have taken important steps toward finding the college major that will help you reach your future career goals. In addition, you now know a process for making well-thought-out, logical decisions. It's never easy and it's rarely quick, but going through this exercise has [hopefully] led you toward making a decision that is right for you.

★ Bring your results to the Academic & Career Services office. We will visit with you about your options and help you determine your next steps.

Find us in **Memorial Student Affairs Building #140** or  
call **308-865-8501** to make an appointment!

**Good luck, and enjoy knowing that you are on your way to a fulfilling future!**

**“Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen, others make it happen.”**

**~ Michael Jordan,  
Professional Athlete and Entrepreneur**

**Resource 1**

## **Workplace Values**

Rate the degree of importance that you place on each of the following workplace values using this scale:

**1 = Very important to me      2 = Somewhat important to me      3 = Not important to me at all**

***I am interested in jobs and careers that include:***



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_____ creating / building things</li> <li>_____ mental challenge / problem-solving</li> <li>_____ physical challenge / physically demanding</li> <li>_____ opportunity for balance between work life and family life</li> <li>_____ flexibility in work structure</li> <li>_____ intellectual status; being an acknowledged “expert” in a given field</li> <li>_____ order and structure</li> <li>_____ high degree of competition</li> <li>_____ integrity and truth</li> <li>_____ rewards for loyalty and dependability</li> <li>_____ having self-respect and pride in work</li> <li>_____ stability and security</li> <li>_____ strong financial compensation / financial rewards</li> <li>_____ being recognized for quality of work in a visible, public way</li> <li>_____ having a positive impact on others and society</li> <li>_____ using creativity, imagination; being innovative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_____ variety and a changing work pace</li> <li>_____ professional development and on-going learning</li> <li>_____ and growth</li> <li>_____ friendships and warm working relationships</li> <li>_____ teamwork and work groups</li> <li>_____ glamour, prestige, respect, and social status</li> <li>_____ routine, predictable work projects</li> <li>_____ deadlines / time demand / pressure challenges</li> <li>_____ clear opportunities for advancement</li> <li>_____ tranquility, comfort, and avoidance of pressure</li> <li>_____ regular contact with the public</li> <li>_____ using cutting edge, pioneering technologies</li> <li>_____ opportunities for supervision, power, leadership,</li> <li>_____ influence</li> <li>_____ making decisions; having power to decide courses of action</li> <li>_____ respect, recognition, being valued</li> <li>_____ autonomy, independence, freedom</li> <li>_____ precision work with little tolerance for error</li> <li>_____ adventure and excitement</li> </ul>
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Now, **circle or highlight** all the values you marked with a “1” (very important). Narrow your list down to your top 5 values ... those that you cannot live without . . . and record them below. Consider how you will integrate these values into a major, then into a career choice.

**My Top 5 Values**

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**Resource 2.a**

## Steps to Follow when Conducting an Informational Interview

Informational Interviews, i.e., meeting with professionals in the fields you are exploring, is a great way to learn more about occupations, and to make connections with people working in the field(s) in which you are interested. Follow the steps below to make good use of this valuable exploration tool.

**1. Define Your Interests, Skills, and Values** – It is important to know where you are going before you begin the journey. This can be done on your own, as well as with assistance from family, a mentor, professors, or an Advisor in Academic and Career Services (MSAB #140, 865-8501).

**2. Identify Occupations** – Once you have learned more about yourself, you are ready to start researching fields that match your interests, skills and values. Select one or more occupations you would like to investigate and begin your research.

**3. Identify People to Interview** – Start with lists of people you already know – friends, relatives, professors, advisors, fellow students, current or former co-workers, supervisors, etc. Company websites, professional organizations, the yellow pages, and organizational directories are also good resources. You may also call a business and ask for the name of the person by a certain job title. Some organizations screen calls so it might be necessary to emphasize that you are **not** interested in a job but in information **only**. Visit Academic and Career Services; we have contacts in many career fields. Also, remember to aim high, there's no one in the world you can't attempt to contact. \*Helpful websites: [www.switchboard.com](http://www.switchboard.com) [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

**4. Prepare for the Interview** – Read all you can about the field prior to the interview. Decide what information you would like to obtain about the occupation/industry. This will allow you to develop relevant and thoughtful questions. Having a solid base of knowledge about the topic will also enhance your credibility with professionals you interview. To learn more about an occupation you can access an organization's public relations materials or visit the website.

The more knowledge you have, the more confident you will feel about your ability to communicate effectively.

\*Helpful websites: [www.onetcenter.org](http://www.onetcenter.org) <http://stats.bls.gov/oco/>

**5. Arrange the Interview** – Contact the person to set up an interview: by telephone or e-mail, with a cover letter followed by a telephone call, or by having someone who knows the person make the initial contact for you. Arrange the date, time and a place to meet. If the person is not within traveling distance, you may ask to arrange a telephone interview. Be prepared to tell the person what you are interested in and why. You could begin the conversation with...

“Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a student majoring in \_\_\_\_\_ at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. I am interested in learning more about \_\_\_\_\_ (the work he/she does) and wonder if you might have 20 or 30 minutes during which you could talk with me about the work you do.”

**6. Conduct the Interview** – Dress appropriately, arrive on time, and be polite and professional. Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion. Take notes so you can keep a record of what you learn. Before leaving, ask if this professional can suggest others who might be helpful, and ask permission to use your contact's name when contacting these new people. Do not leave your résumé, but send one if it's requested.

**7. Follow Up** – Be sure to send a thank-you note within two days of the interview. (Handwritten is usually best, but e-mail is usually acceptable, too.)

## Informational Interviews: What Questions Should I Ask?

When you interview professionals, you want to get the most information you can in a relatively short amount of time. To get the information you need, prepare questions ahead of time. Following are some examples to get you started:

1. How did you get into this work?
2. What do you like best about this occupation?
3. What would you like to change?
4. What do you do on a typical day?
5. What do you find to be most challenging?
6. What is the most rewarding part of your job?
7. What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this field?
8. What college courses were the most helpful to you in your present career?
9. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
10. What entry level jobs are best for preparing a person for the type of work you do?
11. What is the salary range at various levels in this field?
12. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
13. Is there current demand for people in this occupation?
14. What types of training do companies offer people entering this field?
15. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
16. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this industry?
17. With what you know about my background, what other fields or occupations would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
18. Is special certification, licensing, or an advanced degree required for your job?
19. How can I gain experience in this field while still in college?
20. Can you suggest another person who might be willing to talk to me about opportunities in this field?

▶▶ **Remember: This interview is for information only . . . Do NOT Ask for a Job** ◀◀

## Evaluating the Interview

In order to make the best use of the information you gather, it is important to review and evaluate soon after conducting the interview. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What did I learn from this interview (both positive and negative impressions)?
2. How does what I learned fit with what I know about myself (interests, skills, values)?
3. Based on what I learned from this interview, how interested am I in pursuing a career in this area?
4. What do I still need to know? How or where can I find it out?
5. What should my next steps be?

## Investigating Majors: Questions to Ask

One of the best ways to obtain information about majors and/or careers is to talk to people (department chairs, professors, etc.) who work in the department. Following are a few questions to begin with; feel free to adapt these and add your own.

1. What are the program options offered by your department? What are the differences between the programs?
2. How many students graduate each year with this major?
3. What are some jobs students have obtained with this major?
4. Why types of organizations hire people with this major?
  - a. Where might these businesses be located?
  - b. How might you describe the working environment?
5. What academic background and what skills are important for a student to succeed in this major?
6. What personality traits will help people succeed in this field?
7. What types of jobs are available for someone with a Bachelor's degree? Do most positions require an advanced (Master's or more) degree?
8. How would you describe the job market, or outlook for people pursuing a career in this field?
9. What are future trends in this industry?
10. What is a usual starting salary for various jobs related to this major?
11. What are some of the first courses you would recommend for someone interested in this major?
12. Are there some specific General Studies requirements for this major – or some pre-requisites that need to be met?
13. Does your department offer, or recommend, internships?
14. Does your department have any student organizations or honor societies?
15. How could I find out more about this major?

## Career Research Guide

<b>Potential Careers for Me</b>				
<b>Career Title</b>	<b>Job Duties</b>	<b>Skills Needed</b>	<b>Education &amp; Training</b>	<b>Outlook &amp; Salary</b>