Major Decisions for Your Student

One of the most important decisions your student will make is choosing what field in which to become an expert. Of course, that kind of decision cannot be made overnight.

If your student has already declared a major, do not assume the hard part is over—the challenge will be deciding whether this is the right choice, and if not, exploring other options to make a change. Remember, a majority of college students change majors at least once during college. Now is the time for your student to experiment and really discover his or her passion. Your student may also decide to add a major or minor, so he or she should keep his or her eyes open for classes that seem exciting. Each student is encouraged to think about how to make intentional decisions about becoming involved in student clubs, pre-professional organizations, leadership activities, study abroad, service, and internship experiences. The following information could help in that process.

Know Thyself

Before your student can decide whether a potential major or career is the right one, it is important to remember that finding the perfect fit means understanding his or her personal strengths, interests, and values. Your student should ask him or herself the following questions and think about the answers in the context of their future:

- What are my strengths? What do my friends and family say are my strengths?
- Are there some subjects that I enjoy more than others?
- What event or activity in my life made me feel the happiest or most fulfilled?
- What am I doing when I lose track of time? What are my hobbies? Outside interests?
- Is it more important for me to be making money or helping people?
- Do I prefer working outside with my hands or inside at a desk?
- Where do I see myself five or 10 years from now?

Once your student has taken the time to reflect, he or she will be better prepared to judge whether certain majors and careers will lead to a fulfilling life after college.

Major vs. Career: Where to Begin?

Choosing a major can be stressful for you and your student. One of the best ways to be supportive is to be aware of their anxiety: his concerns about his or her major are often compounded by another hidden stressor . . . their desire to please you! If you are feeling
anxious about your student’s choices, below are a few tips and readings to place major selection in context:

1) Every LMU major prepares students for the workplace and life after college. Students develop transferrable skills that are critical as career landscapes continue to shift quickly.

2) Very few majors are directly tied to a specific career path. Example: Engineers need an Engineering degree, but majors such as Business, Communications, or Political Science are not tied to a specific industry. What does this mean to you? It is important to be aware of how majors connect with careers, but it is very unlikely that your student will be “locked out” of a dream job or industry based on her major.

The ideal major for your student is one that combines personal academic strengths with interests. LMU’s office of Career and Professional Development (CPD) helps students with the process of identifying interests, and also with tools for exploring career opportunities. The Academic Resource Center also has advising resources to help connect your students’ interests and strengths to LMU’s academic programs and procedures.

Career and Professional Development:

Your student does not have to work towards these major decisions alone. By first focusing on his or her career path, your student can work backwards to find the majors that will provide the necessary skills to make that dream a reality. Career and Professional Development (CPD) can guide students through the career development process:

**Self-assessment:** As we have explained, getting to know one's self is the first step in mapping out a future. Self-assessment tools can help your student pinpoint interests, skills, values and personality type.

**Career Exploration:** Your student will need to gather specific information on the occupations that interest him or her, including educational requirements and necessary training. CPD can guide students who wish to develop their own professional network, conduct informational interviews with experienced professionals, or develop a formal mentoring relationship with an expert in their chosen field.

**Matching Careers to Majors:** Once your student has completed steps one and two, he or she will be able to use that information to identify career fields and the majors that can lead to them.

**Finding the Job:** When the time is right, your student will identify available jobs, prepare for interviews, and secure a position.

**Get to Work!**
One of the best ways for students to explore potential careers is to experience them firsthand. That is why internships, volunteer experiences, and part-time employment opportunities can be so valuable.

By pursuing an internship or employment related to a chosen major, your student will have the opportunity to see what life in the working world is really like, then judge whether that particular
career is truly right for him or her. Meanwhile, your student will be able to gain valuable experience and maybe even credit toward graduation and some extra spending cash. First year students have the support of the First Year Experience office devoted entirely to them. FYE can direct your student to the Career and Professional Development office and University Advising and provide a network of support to ensure their success. FYE is located in the Malone Student Center Building, Suite 301 and students can stop by anytime or call 310.338.5252.

Be on the lookout for our next article, Balanced Living, later this month!

Until next time!

Lisha Maddox  
Associate Director of Student Success

If you have any questions or concerns, please email us at lmuparentprograms@lmu.edu.

Visit our Parent Pride website for additional articles and resources!