

# The Orientation Training Zone



## Choosing a Major

When it comes to big life decisions, choosing a major is certainly one of them. It's a process that deserves time and attention – one that students don't want to jump into too quickly! As an OL, you can help students who are trying to decide on a major. Encourage them not to panic or put too much pressure on themselves. Choosing a major is something that has to be done, yes, but they don't have to do it alone – or do it right away!

### **“He Knows What He Wants to Do!”**

It's easy for students to look at their peers who seem certain about their majors. Pre-med fits her, they think. He was born to be a broadcaster, they sigh. “When will I find my ‘perfect’ match?” they wonder.

This isn't some collegiate dating game! Instead, let students know that choosing a major is about examining who they are and what's important to them. It's about determining their interests and abilities. And, in the end, it's about deciding what major will satisfy them in a number of ways, including:

- Subject matter that they have a passion for

### **It's Not Just About the Major**

They might not be able to see it now, but you can also gently let students know that choosing a major is just one part of their career path. Potential employers will be looking at their major, their minor and their coursework, of course. Yet, they'll also be very interested in what they did *outside* of class. What activities are they part of? What leadership skills are they acquiring? What volunteer organizations do they donate their time to? The answers to these types of questions will have an impact. A student's employee “package” is about a whole lot more than simply what they majored in.

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- Topics that challenge them
- Class projects they look forward to
- Subjects that they like to spend time with
- Ideas that inspire them
- Tasks that speak to their interests and abilities
- The kind of work they'll be proud to do

In order to find a major that meets these criteria, students may need to take a variety of classes. Encourage them to talk with their academic advisor about smart ways to explore different subjects while still meeting their core requirements.

## **Change is Okay**

Let students know that it is not uncommon for students to change their major at least once – or more. And that's okay. It's part of the process as they "try on" different subjects.

It's best for students to get used to change, especially since they (and you!) will likely change careers several times throughout life, too. As we all evolve, we discover new interests and abilities. There's nothing saying that any one person has to be one thing for the rest of their life. That decision is up to each individual!

## **Lay It All on the Table**

There are many thoughts and emotions tied into the decision-making process. And all of them are valid. It's important for students to recognize what they're thinking and what they're feeling before going any further and just lay it all out on the table. For instance, do any of these items below look familiar to you?

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## **Feelings** About Choosing a Major

Here are some of the common feelings students experience when they are trying to choose a major:

Panic

Indecision

Anxiety

Excitement

Pride

Enthusiasm

Worry

Being “stuck”

Not wanting to let anyone down

## **Thoughts** About Choosing a Major

It's not just about feelings when it comes to choosing a major. For many, they can't get thoughts like these out of their head:

What identity am I taking on?

Will I be able to handle the course load?

Do I have the skills?

Am I being swayed by anything or anyone?

Am I smart enough?

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What kinds of jobs will I be qualified for?

Am I doing this for the right reasons?

As students process through these things and more, it can be easy for people and situations to sway them. When it comes down to it, though, students need to be their own influence. Let students know this and encourage them to take their feelings and thoughts into account first and foremost. It's important that they don't let others be their only influence when they say things like, "You'll be the next lawyer in the family" or "You need a professional major, not a liberal arts one, in order to make any kind of money." There will always be critics and people with good intentions. However, students need to remember that their voice is the one that ultimately matters. So, suggest they gather the facts, slog through the thoughts and emotions, and make their decision. Then, *trust* it.