

## CHOOSING A COLLEGE MAJOR

by Dr. Heather Ricker-Gilbert

What do you want to be when you grow up? What are you going to do after high school? What do you plan to study in college? What will your major be? What kind of job do you plan to get? What are you going to do with your life! These are all questions often thrown at young people as they approach the end of their high school careers and look ahead to the future. Answers will vary, of course, but it's important to follow your passion and your interests in deciding what you'd like to do during the rest of your life. Nylsa Ubarri-Young, a counselor at Manchester Community College suggests that career planning should be an extended process, and you need to take into account your abilities, values and personality when considering a possible major and career. If you love children, then consider being a nanny or an early childhood educator; if you love art and computers, try graphic arts; if you like calculus and math, consider economics. You need to spend time doing some research to learn what courses and training are required for certain majors and occupations. It is also important to remember that many jobs of the future don't even exist today. What you think you want to do in the future, may change many times over before you settle into your first career.

Over half of the jobs in this country require training and skills, but do not require a four year college degree. For example, you can be a paralegal assistant, an occupational therapy assistant, a dental hygienist, an electrical engineering technician with an associate degree. The twelve community colleges in Connecticut offer a wide variety of associate degree programs. You can be welder, a fitness trainer and aerobics instructor, a licensed practical nurse or an architectural drafter with postsecondary vocational training.

For those who decide to pursue a baccalaureate degree, choosing a major is often a challenging dilemma. Fortunately, college offers you an opportunity to experience a variety of courses which, in turn, allow you to explore different areas of interest. In college, you will have the opportunity to take courses that probably were not available in your high school such as *Genetics, the Sociology of Gender, Environmental Pollution and Control, Chinese Philosophy or Broadcast Performance*. In addition to exploring novel course work, you may want to take some self-assessment career surveys and tests such as The Holland Theory of Career Planning or the Myers Briggs Personality Inventory. Additionally, you may want to volunteer, intern, or work-part time in a professional office or organization to learn about a certain industry or vocation. Not only will such activities help you identify what you might like to pursue professionally, they will help you make contacts since future jobs may come your way through networking.

I recently was talking with a young woman who apologized for wanting to major in English even though she loves her English literature courses and likes to write. She thought she should be thinking about a career-focused major to be certain she would get a job. What better skill to have than to be able to write well? It is a sound credential for many professions. This young student might want to go to a liberal arts college such as Wesleyan University or Connecticut College or Trinity College where she will find strong programs not only in English, but in such areas as foreign languages, political

science, economics, biology and physics. The analytical, creative thinking and communication skills gained through studying the liberal arts are basic to many careers and are skills potential employers seek in a job applicant. Liberal arts majors provide good preparation for law or medical school.

However, in today's economic environment, many students and their parents feel a need to focus on a specific applied or pre-professional major. Kathy Wroblewski, Director of Communications and Marketing at Bay Path College states that in the current "financial landscape" she sees students who are choosing to major in job specific programs such as business, pre-legal studies, forensic science and criminal justice. At the University of Hartford, popular programs include communication, music, physical therapy and engineering technology. Nursing, which is offered at Southern Connecticut State University, the University of Connecticut and most recently at Central Connecticut State University is a competitive and sought after major. In the coming years, according to Dr. Mitch Bornstein, owner of Career Treking in Boston, jobs will most likely be plentiful in the areas of engineering and computer technology, accounting, alternative/renewable energy, education, gaming, health care and public service.

In addition, in the current recession many adult students are returning to school to retool or finish a degree. For such students, Wesleyan University offers a Graduate Liberal Arts Program which is designed "to make the small liberal arts college experience available to working adults ...in a part-time format". This post-graduate adult-oriented program at Wesleyan is holding an open house and seminar for perspective students on June 3, 2009 at 6:30 p.m. The University of Hartford's Bachelor of University Studies and the University of Connecticut's Bachelor of General Studies are both programs designed for working adults to take courses at convenient times and earn a four year college degree.

With a knowledge and understanding of what is available and what certain majors require you might become a politician, a nonfiction writer, an agricultural economist, a police officer, a mechanical engineer, a professor, or a lawyer. Choose your major wisely based on what you enjoy doing as you look ahead to your future.

**Heather Ricker-Gilbert, D.Ed is an independent educational consultant specializing in college selection and admissions. She works with students from all of Greater Hartford. Heather can be reached a [collegegateways@comcast.net](mailto:collegegateways@comcast.net) For more information visit: [www.collegegateways.com](http://www.collegegateways.com)**