

# What's Your Major?

13 tips to pick your perfect major (without driving yourself crazy)

Picture your college education as a delicious apple pie—or Key lime or cherry or whatever your fancy. Only about one-third of that pie is dedicated to your major. The second third consists of general education or core curriculum. Elective credits make up the final slice.



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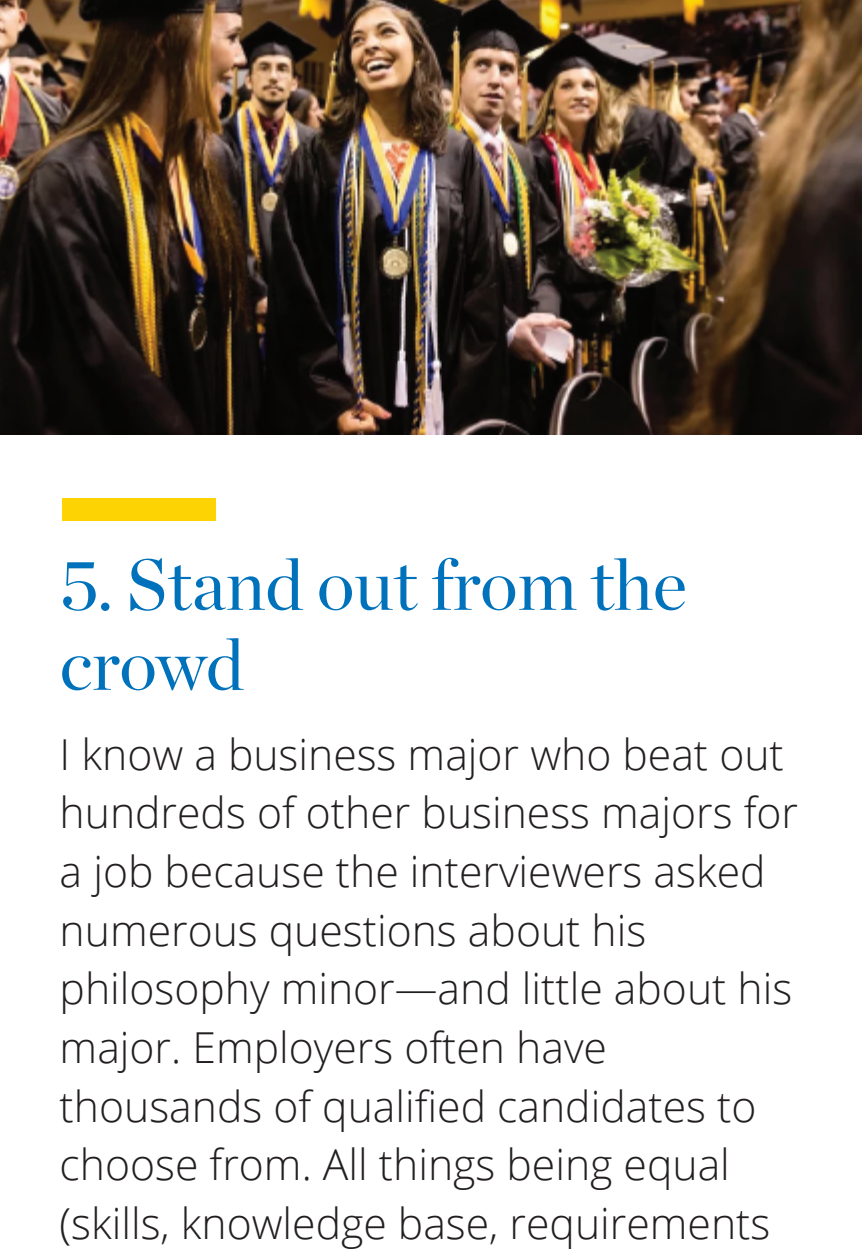
I've seen too many students get too stressed out when trying to pick a major, struggling to keep it all in perspective. After all, a major is just one line on your resume—and you are so much more than just one line.

That said, a major is required for graduation, and it's also a significant piece of your college education. Here are some tips to make an informed, well-thought-out decision when the time comes.



## 1. Many majors (not just one) can develop the skills you'll need

Employers look at much more than just your major. Internships, leadership experiences, and elective courses also factor into the mix. In addition, qualities such as the ability to work on a team, communication and problem-solving skills, work ethic, organization, and information analysis rate among the most important attributes employers are seeking.



## 2. Most Americans have careers unrelated to their major

This doesn't mean your major is a waste of time or that you'll have to redo college because you made the wrong choice. In fact, most career paths will remain open regardless. For example, a buddy of mine from high school majored in math. Fast-forward 20 years and he is a master sommelier (wine guru) working as an executive for a global beverage distributor. He tells me the math comes in handy, but the critical-thinking skills he gained through his well-rounded liberal arts education (as well as a nose for wine) have made the difference for him professionally.



## 3. Being undeclared is OK

If you really don't know what you want to do with your life after 12 weeks at college, don't worry. You are normal! It's better to explore your academic passions than think you've got it all figured out right away. Let the college experience shape you before committing to a major.



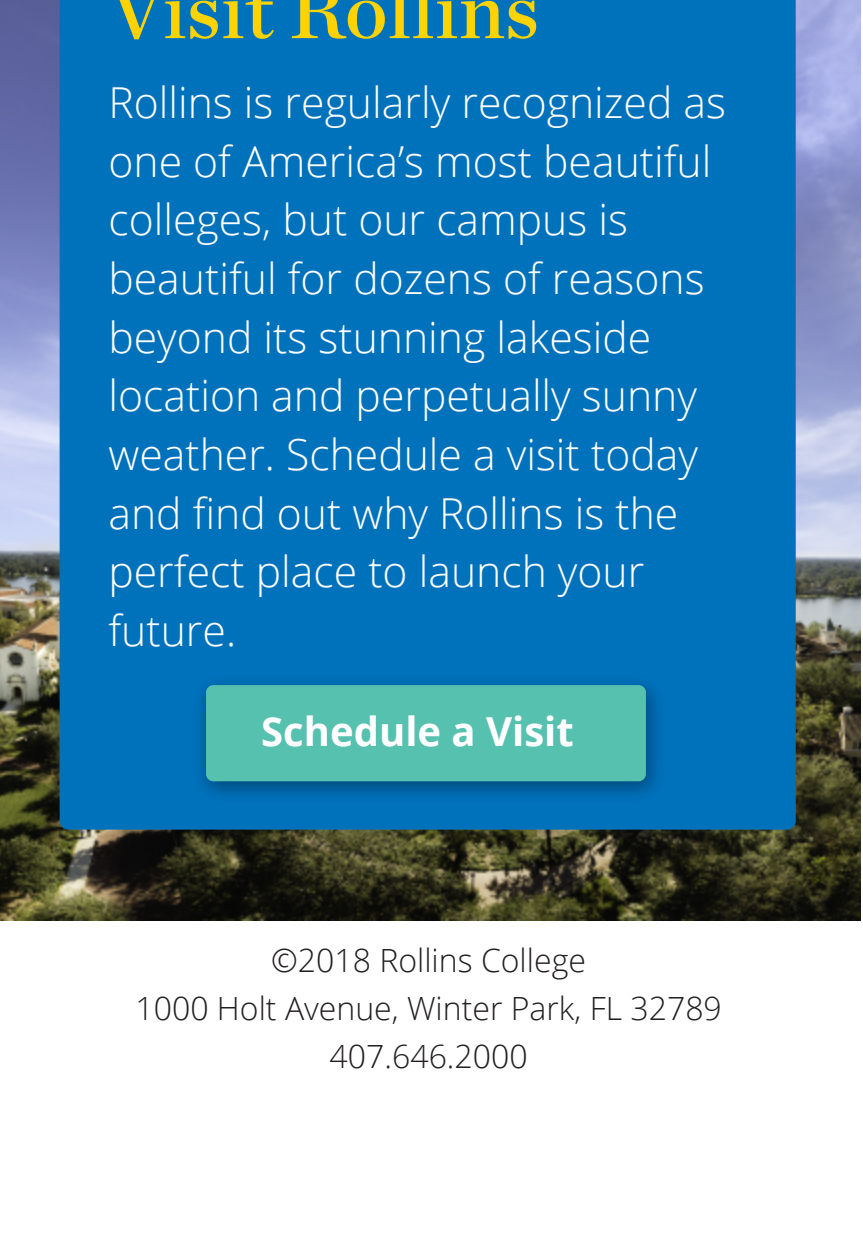
## 4. Try before you buy

Test out a few courses in the major before you commit to it. Your first semesters should consist of satisfying your general education requirements and exploring classes in new and exciting areas, as well as potential major introductory courses. Once you have a taste for what the major is all about, you'll be prepared to make a more informed decision.



## 5. Stand out from the crowd

I know a business major who beat out hundreds of other business majors for a job because the interviewers asked numerous questions about his philosophy minor—and little about his major. Employers often have thousands of qualified candidates to choose from. All things being equal (skills, knowledge base, requirements for the job), the scales tip in favor of the more interesting, versatile, and well-rounded candidate.



## 6. Diversify your learning portfolio

In the above example, it's clear our student brought more to the table than just his business major. He had critical-thinking and rhetorical skills developed in his philosophy classes—and when added to his business acumen, this made for an attractive combination that helped him make meaningful connections with his future co-workers.



## 7. Major in what you love

Explore areas of study that you love, regardless of the supposed potential future earnings in that course of study. Success comes from doing what brings you satisfaction and motivates you to go beyond yourself. Think about it: Will you be motivated to work on a paper at 3 a.m. in a subject you don't really love?



## 8. It's OK to switch

If you find you're not in love with your major path, know that it's OK to change your mind and switch. In fact, the majority of U.S. college students change majors at least once. Just be sure to speak with your academic advisor for guidance on how to stay on track for a timely graduation.



## 9. Consider a double major

Torn between two majors you love? Make it a double! More and more students find it possible to double major, but this will take some careful academic planning and possibly summer coursework. Look into complementary fields of study, but ones that are different enough to diversify your base of knowledge. For example, pair a major in a foreign language with one in business or computer science with communication. The possibilities are endless.



## 10. The careers of tomorrow don't exist yet

Think about a college education as more than just a major that will straight-line into a career. Chances are, your career in 20 years may be in a field that doesn't even exist yet and is not directly related to your major. When I started college in the early '90s, none of us even knew what the internet was, and data analytics wasn't on anyone's event horizon. So find a major that teaches you broadly applicable and versatile skills and complement it with internships, study abroad, and other transferable skills.



## 11. Do your homework, Part 1: Ask a current major

The people with the best perspective on what a major is like at your future college are the students in the major right now. Ask your admission counselor if there are opportunities to meet with students currently studying the areas that interest you.



## 12. Do your homework, Part 2: Ask alumni in the field

Colleges and universities will be happy to connect you with recent and not-so-recent alumni in the major or major you're considering. They can tell you firsthand how they translated their major experience into their current career paths. As a bonus, you'll have just made your first alumni networking connection!



## 13. Parting wisdom

May your college journey be about embracing your inner nerd, finding satisfaction and joy in all that you study, and turning your passions and dreams into a fulfilling career where work does not feel like work.

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