

# How Assessment Can Help You Choose a Major or Career

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When you were a kid, you probably knew exactly what you wanted to be when you grew up.

Today, you may not be so sure.

The good news is that if you haven't yet declared your major or zeroed in on a career you'd like to pursue, there's still time. Better yet, you don't have to agonize over these decisions. Your career center can steer you in the right direction

The center staff can't make academic or career decisions for you. You can, by scheduling counseling sessions with the staff and using other resources available through your career center, including assessment tools.

These tools can tell you a lot about yourself, including things you aren't aware of or haven't thought much about. Or, they may verify what you already know.

"One of our students had a great deal of interest in art and law," recalls A. Charles Kovacs, director of career services at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. "We used various tools to gauge her interest in these fields. We then looked at potential career opportunities that would correspond with her interests, such as a graphic designer for a law firm or a legal adviser/consultant to artists."

In general, assessment tools help you:

- Identify your strengths and weaknesses—what you do well and what you could do better.
- Pinpoint your interests and match them with your strengths.
- Clarify your values, specifically what matters to you, e.g. making a lot of money or feeling that what you do makes a difference, working alone or as a part of a team.
- Look at the overlap among your strengths, interests, and values to identify corresponding majors or careers.

"It depends on what the issue is," says Jean Wilcox, career counselor at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. "Assessment can help an undecided freshman pick a major or help a sophomore consider career options. Assessment can also help a junior focus on a career goal and look at course work to meet that goal or give the senior a start on his or her job search."

Career counselors also recommend that students do not look at assessment as a once-and-done proposition, but to do it periodically. After all, your interests and skills will change over time.