

What Is An Academic "Minor?"

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Universities have a specialized language that is not always clearly explained to newcomers. This can be tragic since new college students are expected to make mature, important decisions that impact their future lives. In the university's lexicon, is the term: "minor." This essay explains what a minor is and how it is important to a college student's future.

First, it is important that the term: "major" is understood. A major is the area of study a student chooses to develop most strongly. Typical majors consume one third of students' college course work; averaging about 12-15 courses. Some majors lead to single, specialized vocations such as: Accounting, Criminal Justice, Education, Nursing, and Social Work; other majors prepare students for a variety of vocations such as: Communication, Economics, Mathematics, Psychology, and Sociology.

Labor, census, and counseling research indicate that current college graduates can expect to change careers anywhere from 3-5 times during their adult lifetimes. Such career changes are due, in part, to emerging technologies, geo-economic shifts in work forces, in raw material location changes, as well as purchasing shifts. Such predictable career changes require members of the work force to be adaptable, to be versatile, and to be able to be retrained at minimal cost and time.

In my lifetime, many vocations have disappeared or have radically changed. Examples are: daily milk delivery; slide rule manufacture; record player manufacture and repair; ice delivery for ice boxes [before electronic refrigerators]; local auto mechanics; television tube making [before transistors]; city street car operation, repair, and manufacture; and big mainframe computer use. I have seen the emergence of plastics, the computer, lasers, the transistor, the space shuttle, micro surgery, industrial robots, and atomic energy in my lifetime. Your life will see even more change and innovation.

Going through college with single, narrow interests and foci renders students less competent to shift to changing workplace demands. Those students who widen their interests and develop sharper skills are more likely to be perceived by employers as adaptable and retrainable and thus are more likely to be chosen for new or

upgraded career moves.

Academic minors are such opportunities. Minors are secondary academic interests typically requiring 6-8 courses to complete. Rather than seeking a minor closely allied to one's major, students are better advised to enhance skill development by taking a minor. Examples of skill development minors include: artistic skills [ie: art, music, theatre], communication skills, computational skills [ie: mathematics, statistics, and computer science], history competence, an awareness of individual and community health issues, philosophic understanding, scientific awareness, and writing skills. If your major does not require these skills, it is wise to choose a minor and take elective courses that will strengthen these areas. Being facile in more of these areas will render you more versatile and able to adapt to innovations.

Choosing what to take in college requires more than choosing convenient times, favorite teachers, or fun courses; it requires preparing for those 3-5 career changes that will force their way into your lives. Course selection is serious business.