

## What to do in college – a few relatively simple steps

1. Look at the job market / graduate differences when choosing a major: Suppose economists predict the demand for registered nurses will be 100,000 in 2022 and the number of new nursing graduates will be 80,000. That difference of 20,000 is very promising for those with an RN degree. However, if there are a projected 2,000 openings in architecture in 2022 for 6,000 graduates, the near-future will not be great for most of those 6,000.

Even in the much-lauded fields of math and science, the split can be daunting:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/01/education/edlife/stem-jobs-industry-careers.html>

If you must, let the exception prove the rule. If there is dependable evidence you are far superior to most in a particular major (if *Architectural Digest* has named you one of the ten young “Designers to Watch”), by-all-means, continue the pursuit. But know that choosing a field where the supply exceeds the demand may leave you in a state of perpetual competition with a pool of individuals eager to replace you.

So spend some time doing the research. Also, consider niche fields (bioinformatics, wind turbine installation, medical AI) which are small, but may still have very favorable numbers.

What if you aren’t very interested-in or don’t like any of the fields with more openings than graduates? I don’t care; it’s still my recommendation for the following reasons:

a. You really don’t know what you like and dislike. It’s very easy to dislike something because you’re a novice, just learning, and not very good at it. If you dedicate yourself to improving in a field every day over the course of many years and you still dislike doing it, then you *really do* dislike doing it. But that could also happen with something that you think you’ll like doing.

b. It’s not just about getting a job; it’s about getting a good job. If you graduate with a degree in architecture, it’s perfectly possible that you will find a job as an architect. But it may not be in a good locale or have a tolerable work-environment or pay well-enough to cover student-loan debt and costs of living. And your employer will have little incentive to improve the situation; after all, they probably have a file-full of applicants ready to take your place.

However, if you graduate with an RN degree, you will most likely have a wide range of offers to choose-from and will be free to select one in a place where you want to live with an enjoyable work environment and a comfortable salary. Your employer will likely treat you well because the difficulty in hiring a replacement incentivizes them to do so.

2. Work hard to become very good at what you have chosen: As described above, the more desirable you are in the job market, the better the position (in all sorts of ways) you will be able to secure. This means more than getting good grades. Do some research and determine what skills are most useful in potential careers. Master them – even on-your-own if they are not a standard component of your college coursework.

Also, know that sitting in a classroom is rarely the best way to learn these skills. As much as you can, do what you will do when you graduate: internships, undergraduate research, long-term design projects, etc.

3. In choosing a job, consider a few research findings which are becoming fairly-well established:

a. Find a position which is always just challenging. If your job is to pick potato chips off a conveyor belt and put one-hundred of them in every bag, the next forty years will be painfully dull. If your job is to teach juvenile delinquents the aesthetic merits of ballet and modern dance, the next forty years will be unbearably stressful. Look for something that you can do and do well, but that you can also always do better.

b. In the choice between helping others and helping yourself, go with the first. If you take the advice above, you should have many opportunities to work at a salary sufficient to cover debts and afford a comfortable lifestyle. Earning more will not have any significant effect on your enjoyment of life. What does matter is if what you do is conceivable as helpful to others. Seeing people benefit from your work can be encouraging at all times and especially when you must do what you don't want to do. Saying to yourself, "This isn't my favorite part here, but it's necessary to get supplies out to the refugees" is better (for your own sake) than having to think, "God, I really don't like doing this, but I need to plow through it to pay for those new kitchen cabinets."

4. Many people, perhaps most, will tell you that college is about more than getting a good job. It's about developing your personal self, expanding your horizons, etc. etc. Ignore these people. College is about getting a good job. Yes, you will take many classes unrelated to this goal and, yes, a few of them may have a meaningful and positive influence, but the percentage of these is unlikely to be far different from the percentage you have already experienced in your twelve years of schooling so far, i.e. not very high. Getting a good job will itself provide the leisure time in which you can "develop" as a person. And it's not going to happen in four years; it's going to take decades.