

Exploratory Family Guide

University of Florida
College of
Liberal Arts and Sciences



Introduction

Transitioning from high school to college is a huge step, both for students and their families. This transition will affect each person differently, and it is important for families to foster an environment with open communication as their students adjust to this new way of life. Becoming acclimated to the University of Florida is a process and this will not occur overnight. Being a *facilitator* of information can aid your student in finding the information they need to answer their own questions. Your student may have questions regarding many topics as they get settled, and we hope the information found throughout this guide can serve as an aid in finding the answers for your students' inquiries.

Above all else, we congratulate you. By reading through this guide, you are demonstrating your commitment to your student and willingness to better help him/her explore majors and career options at the University of Florida.

What is “Exploratory” and what does it mean for your student?

“Exploratory” is a classification students can elect if they have not yet decided on a major. Exploratory students have a higher degree of freedom to take classes from multiple colleges/disciplines and do not have to worry as much about meeting tracking requirements for a specific major. However, Exploratory students should be purposeful in all of their decisions, particularly when it comes to choosing classes for the following semester to be sure they are taking courses to “test out” potential majors. They must also be responsible for narrowing down the list of UF majors to one that fits their aspirations and abilities. Exploratory students will need to be admitted to a major before they register for their fourth fall/spring term (or their fourth spring/summer term if in the Innovation Academy).

We have found that the greatest concern regarding the exploratory track is the idea that students will get behind if they are not in a major upon enrollment at UF. Fortunately, this is not usually the case. Each student who graduates from the University of Florida needs at least 120 hours to graduate, and all college level courses the student takes will count toward these hours. Courses used to explore majors can also count towards general education requirements, double majors, minors, or certificates that are also available at UF. Besides, data gathered over the years reflects that students who have declared a major coming into UF are 61% likely to change majors within their first two years anyway.

Tracks

There are three tracks within the exploratory option. These tracks can be seen more as focus areas based upon your student’s primary interest(s) while still giving students the freedom to explore various areas of interest. In fact, we *encourage* students to actively explore all disciplines that appeal to them! The exploratory tracks are listed below:

- **Exploring Science and Engineering**
Examples: Engineering, Chemistry, Health Science, Forest Resources & Conservation
- **Exploring Social and Behavioral Sciences**
Examples: Education, Psychology, Food & Resource Economics
- **Exploring Humanities and Letters**
Examples: English, Music, Art, Journalism, Philosophy

Timeline

Incoming freshmen, regardless of the amount of incoming credit they have earned, may be exploratory for their first three fall/spring semesters of enrollment or first three spring/summer semesters if in IA). But it is important to note that a student may declare a major anytime within these three semesters. In order to choose a major, students should take several important action steps to understand their options, gain relevant insight, and decide within the time frame the major that fits them best (with the understanding that students might/can change their minds). To get an idea of what this process can involve and to motivate your student along the way, you may find it helpful to review this suggested [timeline](#).

Understanding Your Impact on Your Student's Career Decision

Every student handles major and career decision-making differently. Some feel they can handle it on their own, while some like to speak to others (teachers, parents, friends, professionals in their field of interest) at every step of the process. In all of your interactions together, remember that your student's way of handling decisions may be very different than your own. Look back on how your student has made past decisions to gain a better understanding of how they may go about choosing a major and/or career and to realize how you may better help them throughout the process.

Research has shown that families do have a significant impact on their student's occupational goals. Students may be seeking approval or support or may follow the career path of important people in their lives. Students may internalize parental expectations or aspirations from behaviors and interactions, such as a parent saying the student may choose anything, but more often than not mentioning the same occupation or major as a good option. Some family members may unconsciously involve themselves in the student's career decision making due to their own job dissatisfaction. As an important person in a student's life,



your every comment, belief, and interaction may consciously or unconsciously affect a student's thoughts.

As a family member of an exploratory student, it is important to familiarize yourself with what it means to be exploratory, as well as with critical dates, campus resources, and academic requirements. All of this information is pertinent to your student's success at the University. This may be a time of some stress for your student, but also of great excitement. At UF, there are many resources available to provide support and encouragement to help alleviate some of this stress, but the family can often be the greatest support, especially during this period of uncertainty in your student's life.

Steps for Choosing a Major

The Exploratory Student Advising Team has developed a free, non-graded course in Canvas to guide students through the major exploration process. The course gives students access to activities, student interviews, advisor videos, TEDTalks, handouts and other useful resources to support them through their exploratory journey. Students can self-enroll by clicking on the "enroll in Exploratory Roadmaps" link off the [exploratory student advising page](#).

The information is organized into four general steps and each step includes goals for reflection and action. To find a major requires a student to be proactive and responsible, and you can encourage your student to reference Exploratory Roadmaps as a guide on how to breakdown the process.

I. Self Assessment

Even before exploring options, it is crucial that students understand their interests, skills, personality, and values. Students can utilize [C.H.O.M.P.](#), "Career Help fOr Major Planning", an online self-assessment facilitated by UF's Career Connections Center that will help them understand these personal qualities and explore options. The "Discover Yourself" module in Exploratory Roadmaps includes links to additional assessments.

Outside of the structured self-assessments, students can reflect on activities they've been involved with in and out of school to also identify areas of interest to them and areas in which they already excel. Seeking out majors that connect with what we enjoy doing and are good at has the added advantage of usually translating into academic success.

II. Explore Educational Options

There are a variety of ways for students to explore their options while at UF. The most highly recommended methods are listed below:

- Read the [Undergraduate Catalog](#) for the overview, critical tracking requirements, and future semester coursework for any majors of interest.
- Speak with [academic advisors](#) in the college(s) that offers the major(s) in which you are interested.
- Take elective or major-specific introductory classes. Take the time to speak to those professors whose classes you're enjoying to find out more about their fields.
- Visit "[What Can I Do With a Major In...?](#)" to see common occupations that correlate with specific majors.



In the “Explore Educational Options” module of Exploratory Roadmaps, students get access to resources and activities that teach them how to look at majors in a different light. This new perspective should reveal qualities about majors that were perhaps not familiar to students beforehand. Once a student screens these qualities against their values, interests, personality and skills, they might even start noticing majors they were formerly overlooking.

III. Explore Career Options

The following are recommended ways students can learn about careers:

- Seek out internship opportunities
- Volunteer
- Ask to shadow professionals in their work environments
- Conduct informational interviews
- Join student organizations directly related to professional development in a specific field
- Use resources like...
 - [UF's Career Connection Center](#)
 - [The Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)
 - [O*Net](#)
 - [MyPlan](#)

This research should provide a more profound comprehension of the knowledge, skills and experience that lead to success in a given field. In turn, students can begin to understand that many majors have transferable skills that will prepare them for similar career paths.

IV. Decide and Evaluate the Major Choice

In term three, students will have a registration hold on their record indicating that it is time to declare a major. If a student still has questions about a particular major or field, they are encouraged to meet with Career Connections Center staff or college-specific academic advisors. To declare a major, a student must go to the college that houses that major. Each college handles this process differently and it is best to follow their specific directions.

We all change through experience, and these changes may affect previous decisions made. Therefore, it is always important for students to frequently conduct self-assessments as they did in Step I. Students should ask themselves, “How do major-specific classes feel? Are they covering subject material I enjoy? Can I see myself continuing these classes for multiple semesters?” These questions may help a student understand whether or not the major choice was the right one, and whether or not they need to re-assess their previous decision and other options.



Post-exploratory Life

If a student has been intentional with the classes they have taken, adjusting to the requirements of a newly declared major and its specific tracking requirements should be a relatively smooth process. After declaring a major, your student should consider getting involved in field-specific community service or work, student organizations, and/or research experience to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their new discipline. It is also important for students to gain practical experience to evaluate if they can see themselves in a particular field after graduation.

It is important for your student to speak with an academic advisor at least once a semester to make sure he or she is on track and is familiar with the many college-specific resources available. Major changing is possible if one's original choice does not fit them well or they find a better option; however, this option is less and less realistic the more semesters a student has been at UF. To determine if this is a possibility for your student, he or she should speak with an academic advisor in the major-specific college he or she is considering.

Reading Material

Several publications that you may consider reading or recommending to your student to help with their major and career decision making are as follows:

What Color is Your Parachute? by Richard Nelson Bolles

What Should I Do With My Life? by Po Bronson

You Majored in What? by Katharine Brooks

Luck is No Accident by John Krumboltz and Al Levin

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Discovering your Perfect Career by Rene Carew

The Parent's Crash Course in Career Planning by Marcia Harris and Sharon Jones

Career Coaching your Kids by David Montross, Theresa Kane and Robert Ginn, Jr.

Campus Resources

Each student will make their transition from high school to UF in a unique manner. Students can benefit from discussing their new, exciting, and sometimes overwhelming experiences with professionals at our [Counseling and Wellness Center](#), located on the west side of campus. We encourage students to utilize this valuable resource as often as they see fit. The Counseling and Wellness Center also has pertinent information for [friends and families](#).

Students may feel both internal and external pressures regarding their individual career path.

Their academic choices made while at the University of Florida will have a direct impact upon their lives not only while they are students, but also after they have graduated. The purpose of



the **Career Connections Center**, located in the Reitz Union, is to help students address the concerns associated with both academia and their career pursuits. They offer career counseling, preparation tips for job or internship searching, as well as other services specific to each student's needs.

Academic Contacts

The Academic Advising Center (AAC) is the point of contact for all Exploratory Students. The AAC is located in Farrior Hall, and their number is 352-392-1521. Advisors in the AAC can help students develop semester schedules to stay on-track for various majors, but Exploratory students may also be referred to the advisors in the individual colleges to determine if they are eligible and competitive for their major (s) of interest.

Conclusion

Being an Exploratory student at the University of Florida is a unique experience. These students are on a path of self-reflection and are utilizing the multitude of resources available as they decide which major fits them best. Our students can be constantly changing their minds due to influences from family, peers, professors, and also the many opportunities to become involved with campus groups and organizations. We hope this guide has been helpful in allowing you to gain insight into your student and all the different opportunities available to him or her at the University of Florida.