



SELECTING A COURSE OF STUDY/MAJOR

There are innumerable options available to students today as they explore courses of study. Gone are the days of you must be a doctor, lawyer, banker, or engineer in order to be successful. Also gone are the days of studying a narrow pre-professional course. In today's global employment arena well-roundedness and diversity are most highly valued. A so-called *Liberal Arts* philosophy of education is preferred. This is seen not just in the US, where liberal arts is the most popular education model, but increasingly around the world (evidenced by dual-degree programs, multidisciplinary and joint degrees, and more.)

The liberal arts philosophy places emphasis on developing both depth and breadth in a student's curriculum. Depth is achieved through specializing in one or two key subject areas (called majors in the US), while breadth is achieved by requiring the student to explore other important subject areas to a lesser degree. The result is a student who has a clearly defined expertise in an area of interest, but also a number of general, widely-applicable skills that any university graduate should possess, including good critical thinking skills, strong oral and written communication skills, an understanding of the basic concepts behind economics, intercultural exchange, management and leadership, appreciation of the arts, capacity in at least one foreign language, etc.

With the value of this diversity to study comes a requirement that students and families have an open mind and an exploratory approach to the university search and course selection process. Here are a few important things to keep in mind:

- 1) You must reject the old assumptions that math/science are good tracks, humanities are bad tracks and that you must be a doctor, lawyer, banker or engineer to be successful.
- 2) It is absolutely OK to be unsure of what you want to study or to be when you're entering the university process. Through exploration and self-reflection you'll identify your strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, ideal learning environment, and more. There is plenty of time and there are many options to explore in university. Focus on earning strong grades and being active in extracurricular activities. The rest will come.
- 3) You should not limit yourself to one subject or track of study at ALA, nor at university. Explore as broad a range as possible of study and career options.
- 4) Follow your strengths! Do not try to force yourself into a math/science track, for example, if that is not where your skills lie.
- 5) Follow your heart! Do not resign yourself to studying something uninteresting to you just because you think it's a good career, or because you'll make a lot of money. Remember: If you love what you do it will never feel like work. But if you dislike what you do, it will always be labour.
- 6) What you study in university *does not equal* what your career will be. In today's marketplace engineers become entrepreneurs, bankers become teachers, lawyers become businessmen, doctors become human rights activists, and on, and on, and on. Choosing a course of study that will equip you with a variety of widely applicable skills and introduce you to a wide range of career options is the way to go!