

Does Your Minor Matter?

By Peter Vogt, MonsterTRAK Career Coach

Many students spend so much energy deciding on college majors that they sometimes overlook a related – and sometimes equally important – question: What minor, if any, should you choose?

As with so many career issues you'll face during the college years, there is no straightforward correct answer. Insofar as prospective employers are concerned, it all depends. But one thing is certain: Choosing the right minor always benefits you somehow – sometimes just in a small way, but quite possibly in a more significant fashion.



A Minor's Major Benefits

Most employers will tell you that your college major is more important than your minor, and many employers will stress that hands-on experience gained during college is the most critical hiring variable of all. But that doesn't mean you should ignore the potential edge a well-selected minor can give you. "Minors do matter and could well help to shape the future path a career will take or even open some possibilities for careers one might hope for," says Nancy Monti, a human resources professional with the Milwaukee Office of Extendicare Health Services. Extendicare is a large [healthcare](#) organization that hires clinical specialists such as nurses and therapists. According to Monti, some of these employees go on to become managers in the organization, not only in their own specialties but facility-wide. "The clinicians we hire with, maybe, a minor in business or computer systems, or who speak Spanish can be extremely attractive," Monti says. "The same is true for more generalist hires in accounting or finance. A minor in computer science, or a foreign language for that matter, might enable the student to work on special projects and hybrid teams, and in some cases gain access to opportunities that might not have developed had it not been for an added depth of specialization."

The Tiebreaker

Sometimes, having the right minor can serve as a sort of tiebreaker between you and an otherwise equally qualified competitor for the same job, according to Doug Pitchford, a human resources professional with Nidec-Shimpo America Corp. in Itasca, Illinois. "If the applicants are similar in degree and experience levels, then the person with a minor in business or marketing would have an edge over, say, someone with a minor in history or music," Pitchford says. "More than likely in the interview process, the person with a minor in business or marketing will be better prepared to answer the questions than the other candidate would be."

How to Choose?

So what's the best minor for you to pursue? Some employers suggest you select your minor with a specific future company or industry in mind. "For example, someone with a bachelor's degree in computer information systems and a minor in finance or accounting or business is great for our company since those are the fields our clientele are in," says Denny Voyles, a recruiter for the Orlando office of London Bridge Group. "That type of combination would really allow a candidate to come in on the technical side but also allow him to take advantage of the business applications." You can also choose a minor that seems a natural complement to your major "but at the same time doesn't have too much overlap," says Voyles. For example, pairing your advertising major with a writing minor or your fashion design major with a marketing minor.

Minor Passions

There's another approach to consider: Pick your minor because of the passion you have for a particular topic of study. "Having a strong minor sends me a message: The student I am talking to went out of their way to give extra attention to something they really have an interest in," says Monti. "They may or may not have concrete plans about what to do with the minor in the real early years of employment, but the fact of having a minor gives a student – a prospective employee – a greater depth and breadth in the eyes of a prospective employer."

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