

# Academic Decision Making

## 1. The first step in academic decision-making is to recognize that you are making a decision!

- Take responsibility!
- “Not to decide is to decide.”
- You have choices, even when it might seem like you don’t.
  - Petitions for policy exemptions.
  - This is Reed. We welcome questions here.
    - But... Don’t assume the rules don’t apply to you.
- A series of decisions over time becomes a habit. Habits are changeable, but it’s not always easy. Be aware of what decisions you’re making without thinking.

## 2. What are the decisions we need to make as students?

- When and where to work
- What to do if you get behind
  - Requesting extensions, incompletes, etc.
- What to drop (either entirely or priority-wise) when you’re very busy
- When to ask for help, and from whom
- \*How to handle academic pressure\*
- How to manage temptations of a routine sort (distractions, procrastination, etc.)
- How to manage temptations to act dishonorably

**3. Some decisions must be discussed with others**, such as your academic adviser, deans in Student Services, the registrar, and depending on your particular situation, perhaps with parents/guardians, international student office, financial aid office, etc.

**Be sure you have the relevant information before proceeding.**

- What classes to take and when/in what order
- Transferring credit in from another institution
- What to major in
- Study abroad
- Leaves of absence
- Underloads/overloads

#### 4. Strategies for making decisions you feel good about:

- For smaller, everyday decisions (like where to work):
  - Trust your gut. You probably already know the answer, so just go with it.
  - Run an experiment. Try a few different options until you know what works best under what conditions.
  - Just do something (anything!) to get unstuck. You're probably overthinking it, so action is a good solution.
  - Check in with yourself about your habits. Are the decisions you don't even realize you're making the ones you'd stick with if you were to start over?
- For bigger, more important decisions (like what to major in):
  - Talk it over with trusted individuals, including: other people who have had to make similar choices, good listeners (who won't tell you what to do), staff or faculty who have worked with students making similar decisions, and confidential listeners (counselors, for example). You can even talk to yourself!
  - Sleep on it. Give yourself some time off and come back to your choices with a fresh perspective. At the very least, don't make an important decision in a split-second moment of crisis.
  - Write about it. Make lists, freewrite/journal, explain the decision and your thoughts in an email to someone else, draft a petition, request a meeting with your adviser and catch him/her up to speed on the situation.
  - Imagine you're locked into one of your choices. How does it feel? Try flipping a coin just to see what it would be like if you "had" to go with one of your options. Does it seem right? Why? This is one way to find out what your gut thinks.
- Satisfiers vs. Maximizers: If you're waiting, researching, and analyzing to make sure that your decision is absolutely the best one possible ("maximizers"), you will agonize and always wonder "what if?" no matter how carefully you make the choice. This process also takes a lot of time. If, instead, you go with the first option that satisfies your criteria, you'll be happier. The lesson? Have criteria. Know when you have enough of the essential information to decide, and then decide.
  - For example—Instead of considering seven different possible majors and projecting every semester you could possibly have, ask yourself a few key questions (such as: do you want to go abroad?, do you want a library thesis or a data collection thesis?). Once you've found an option that satisfies these criteria, go with it.

**Remember: you're the one who has to live with the decision. There isn't a "right" answer for everyone, just better and worse choices for you.**