

Selecting the Right Course: Tips

> By Veena Gomes-Patwardhan

When Derek Monteiro was in the fifth and final year of his MSc in Physics at IIT, Mumbai, he ended his "affair with physics" to follow his true calling in modern art. The Mumbai-based artist says he has no regrets about his radical decision. Inspired by that "surrealistic dude," André Breton, who loved the sound of the word 'marvellous,' he describes his art as 'Marvellous Nonsense'.

But not many students find it easy to change course mid-stream or almost at the finish line, like Derek did. Given the limitless options available nowadays, whether you've just completed your twelfth or your graduate degree, it is even more important to make sure you choose the right course and save valuable time and a lot of money.

According to career counsellor Swati Salunkhe, Managing Director of the Growth Centre, the most common reason for choosing the

wrong course is following the latest trend – the herd mentality. The other reasons include peer pressure, parental expectations, perceived status attached to certain professions, and the ridiculous 'percentage' factor, on the basis of which it is assumed that those scoring above 80 per cent should take up science, those obtaining between 70-80 per cent should choose commerce, and students scoring less than that should go in for arts.

NIFTY STRATEGIES

The course you pick now for higher education is going to impact your success and happiness in life. So here are a few pointers for making a smart choice and avoiding getting stuck in a career doing work you don't enjoy.

Shortlist your interests

Do you think a doctor's daughter who hates being around sick people

would be happy as a doctor? No way! So give top priority to the things that interest you while deciding on a college course.

Rami Al-Rfou', who graduated with electrical engineering in Jordan, is now pursuing a PhD in Computer Science in the US. He says, "I chose a different subject for graduate studies because I decided to focus on the extracurricular activities that I had fun doing and had motivated me during the undergraduate years." Phanindra Bhagavatula, on the other hand, persisted with computer science even for postgraduate studies. He says, "After I spent nearly four years working in the industry, I realised I wanted to gain more skills in my chosen field."





Check out the career prospects

Making career opportunities the prime reason for picking a course is definitely not a bright idea. But you've got to be practical and research where your chosen path will take you. Kunal Modi, a computer engineering graduate, was working as a software developer for an e-commerce company when he realised he was more fascinated by jobs involving the sale of software or services to clients. His next move? He opted for the Master of Science in Information Systems (MSIS) programme. Says Modi, "I chose MSIS because it would help me acquire finance and management skills and help me understand how technology marries business."

So research the different career

YOUTH INC *Says*

- **You are Godly good** – We all have our forte, so why not stick to something you are already amazing at?
- **Get real** – You are not as fantabulous as you think you are. You might be a great writer but a crappy editor, then take a course in editing and strive to be a well-grounded professional. Challenge your weaknesses and broaden your horizon.
- **Talk to your tattoo artist** – If you have been sneakily watching MTV Ink and trying hard not to drool, then unleash your true passion and explore.
- **Picking a major is like picking a life partner** – You can always have a fresh start after years of sweating. But why deal with the divorce when you can avoid it in the first place. Know the difference between a passion and a hobby.
- **Lying ain't gonna get you anywhere** – Be true to yourself. Know your strengths and weaknesses and don't leap into something that you cannot handle.

POPULAR Vocational COURSES

- Sophia Shree BK Somani Memorial Polytechnic has a Diploma Course in Applied Art
- Shree Bhagubhai Mafatlal Polytechnic has full-time and part-time diploma courses in different engineering streams
- Mumbai University offers a Diploma in Dietetics and Applied Nutrition as a specialisation course for graduate students
- The Export Trade and Training Institute conducts an Advanced Certificate Course in Foreign Trade



paths that are related to your interests and skills. Get information on salaries, employment opportunities and job security in the market for your chosen career.

Research courses that would be a good fit

Next, use all available means – the Internet, campus visits, newspapers and magazines, discussions with family and friends, ex-students, and professors – to check out the universities and colleges offering the courses you're most interested in. Go by the credentials of the institution rather than eye-catching advertisements promising "100 per cent job placements."

Also, don't make the mistake of equating higher education with a degree course. There are several good options offered by vocational colleges and polytechnics too, so explore these as well.

Check if you're eligible for these courses

Enrolling for certain courses requires prospective students to clear entrance exams. Some might need a minimum period of employment, such as an MBA programme. In case you're considering studying overseas, you might or might not need to take the SAT, GRE, GMAT, or TOEFL. Find out the requirements in advance as these exams need proper planning.

Check if your choices are feasible

A reality check is a must before you go any further. Consider if your financial circumstances would make it possible to cover the cost of study. If finances are a hurdle, research opportunities for bank loans and scholarships. If time is a constraint due to other responsibilities or a job, then an online, part-time, or correspondence course would be sensible options. Also, some courses are very competitive and difficult to get into. So do an honest evaluation of your potential and prospects.

Seek guidance if you're confused

Often, even students who are sure about their field of study realise they want to do something else after tapping into unknown skills and interests later on. But if you cannot figure out what to study next, it's time to consult your parents and close friends who know you better than anyone else, or even a career counsellor.

Says management student Ann Verghese, "I wasn't very sure about pursuing an MBA but valuable inputs from my friends who were in the same field helped me decide." Tania Fernandes, who chose commerce for junior college because she loved maths, says, "My parents advised me to go in for a career guidance aptitude test when I was undecided about what to do next." On discovering her potential for more creative pursuits, she is now doing her BSc in Multimedia and Animation.

Salunkhe has this advice for uncertain teenagers and young graduates: "The intrinsic way ahead would be through self-introspection, by listing their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. The extrinsic way would be through a professional career counsellor who administers aptitude, intelligence, and personality tests, thus narrowing the course options for them."

SUMMING UP

Carol Eikleberry, author of *The Career Guide for Creative and Unconventional People*, puts it nicely: "Develop your own unique potential instead of following conventional expectations to become someone else." So make sure you get on the right train and you won't find yourself getting off at the wrong career station. Having a career goal that matches your interests might not necessarily lead to wealth, but will ensure contentment and a fulfilling career. And that, in Derek's words, would be absolutely marvellous! **W**