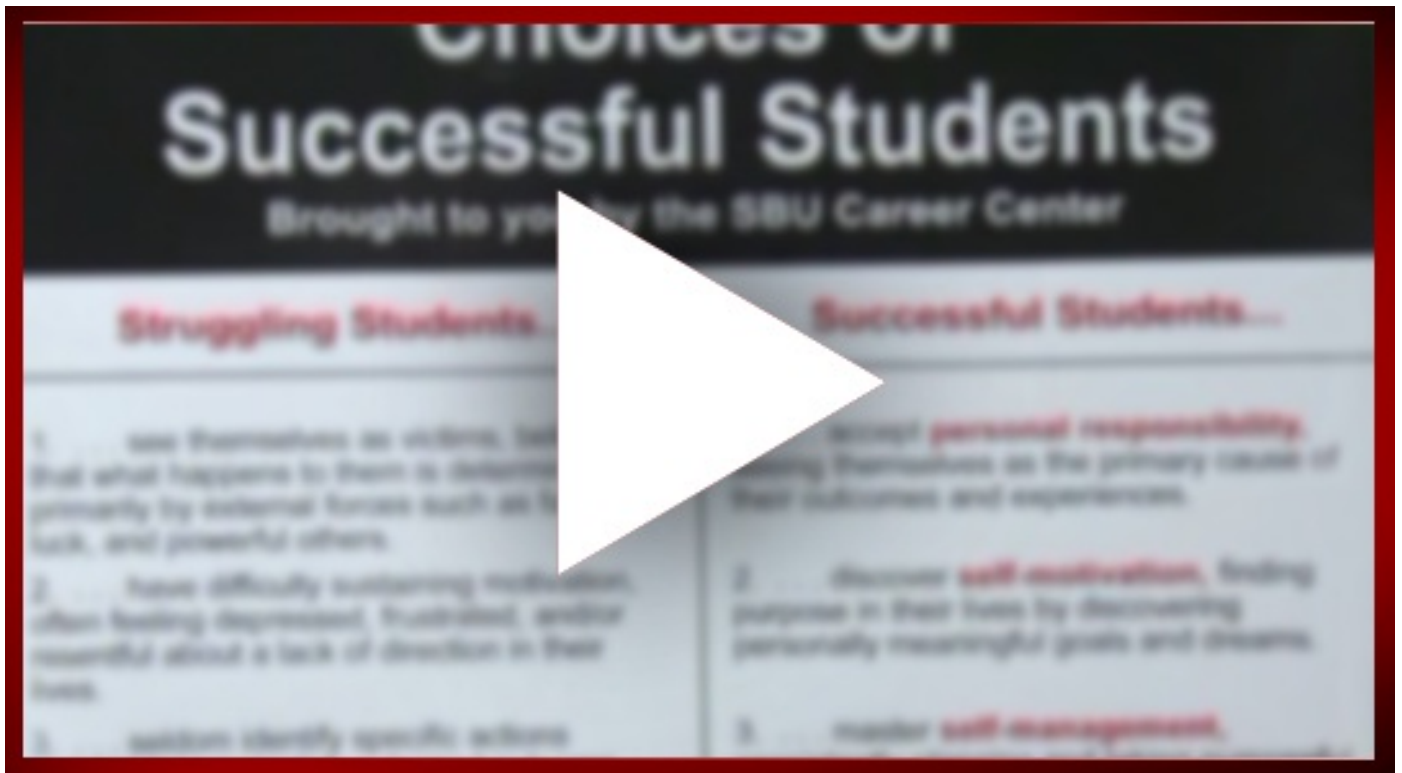


"From my time at the Career Center, I have learned that it is never too early or too late to start thinking about your future. Extremely valuable experiences can be found here on campus and you have to take initiative to get what you want from them."

—KRISTEN, STONY BROOK STUDENT

Making Career Decisions



You've made many decisions in your life, including choosing to attend Stony Brook University. Making career decisions may sound scary, especially if you expect that a choice now will exclude you from other options in your future. In reality, though, we make decisions all the time. Some are easy; we don't think about them – *"I think I'll leave for school an hour early this morning so I can study for my exam."* *"I'm going to join the debate club to improve my public speaking skills."* Some decisions are more complex, and therefore may seem larger, have greater risk, and require more time and consideration – *"Should I pursue the study abroad option or a summer internship?"*; *"Do I accept the position that pays more, or the one I know I'll love?"*

Before making a career-related decision, which doesn't necessarily mean deciding on your long-term career path but could mean something smaller and more immediate such as choosing a major or identifying internships that interest you, you must first be willing to D.E.C.I.D.E.

We recommend a systematic decision-making approach developed by psychologists Krumboltz and Hamel called "DECIDES."

Define the situation as specifically as possible. Remember that big life decisions should be divided into smaller, manageable mini-decisions. An example of poor problem definition: to choose a satisfying career. Better problem definition: by the end of this semester I will narrow down major and career options that best match my interests, skills and values.

Establish an action plan, with specific deadlines. You may read the Bulletin and specific course descriptions and speak to academic advisors before the registration period begins.

Clarify values. What is really important to you as it relates to work? For example, if you're looking at internships in investment banking, are you willing to adjust your lifestyle to accommodate the long hours? If you want experience in media, are you willing to accept an unpaid position?

Identify alternatives. You may be able to think creatively and brainstorm options on your own. However, this is an opportune time for you to work with a career counselor, who likely has resources to assist you.

Discover probable outcomes. Can you reasonably predict outcomes of each alternative? For example, if you wish to major in computer science, you may not have time to take many elective courses. If you major in health science, you'll be spending most of your senior year on the east campus.

Eliminate alternatives systematically. Compare them with what makes you who you are (values, interests, skills). For example, you may consider a double major in computer science and biochemistry, yet pursuing such a rigorous program would not give you time to also run for USG president and/or have an active social life. Will you sacrifice social life for study time?

Start action! Clearly doing something to pursue your goals is preferable to sitting back and waiting for your career to happen to you. If you are concerned that this approach is too rigid for your taste, remember that these are guidelines – the elements are key, not the order. Let us consider a real life example...

Sofia's Dilemma

Example: Sofia is a freshman. Her strong subjects in high school were math and physics. She is confused about how to choose a major, and whether that also means she should choose a career. She heard that quantitative skills are good for business and that business pays well. What exactly does that mean? What skills? What business? And how well exactly does it pay? Sofia visited the Career Center and found a dazzling array of career opportunities for students of math and physics: actuary, researcher in a national lab, university professor, computer programmer, teacher, Wall Street analyst, veterinarian, and financial advisor. She also discovered a broad range of salaries and years of training required. Sofia was overwhelmed by all this information. When her career counselor asked her if she also had considered applied math and economics, she felt faint. Fortunately she had taken economics in high school and hated it, so she turned that down easily. But applied math? Is it different from plain math and how? To what does it apply? Here are some of the mini-decisions that Sofia made:

1. She ruled out economics on the basis of her previous experience (she disliked it).
2. She read the Applied Math section of the Bulletin, including description of major, classes, and faculty specializations. This sounded intriguing enough for her to decide to take the first statistics course next term.
3. After studying the requirements for the math major, she felt less confident that she could do well in 300-level classes. She decided to give it one more try, and enrolled in a 200-level course.
4. After speaking with the physics advisor, she learned that this major involves many labs. She recalled that she was not fond of this type of hands-on science. She also didn't feel like she blended well with the crowd at the physics department, and decided not to pursue physics.

Epilogue: At the end of the following semester, Sofia learned that she really loved statistics; she felt that formulas came alive when applied to real life problems. Meanwhile, the 200-level math class required a lot of effort and though she did reasonably well, she was not particularly excited about climbing to a higher level. Her mini-decisions allowed her to confidently choose Applied Math & Statistics as her major.