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A Degree in Four Years? *Academic advisors share tips on how it's done*

Biochemistry or business? Philosophy or physics? Art history? Zoology? Any of the above? None of the above?

It's not unusual for students to arrive at UW–Madison answering the question "what's your major?" with more questions. As a parent, you may understandably be concerned if it's a priority that your student graduate from college in four years, and if taking the time to explore different areas seems like a luxury you can't afford.

But actually, UW–Madison academic advisors say, students who try out a variety of subjects in their first few semesters finish on time at a higher rate than those who come in with a specific major in mind. Deciding early, while it may seem intuitively sensible, sometimes backfires.

"I think it's really important that students explore their options, rather than choosing something early on just to finish in four years, and then not ending up having chosen the thing that's a good fit for them," says Wren Singer, undergraduate advising director. "Students who tend to choose very early on may end up taking longer to graduate because two or three years into it, they realize it wasn't the right thing. Then they have to readjust and start something else, and that takes longer."

Advisors have been repeating this mantra for years, and experience bears them out. While being undecided as a first- or second-year student is prevalent, the average time to graduate from the UW is 4.06 years — and contrary to a common misconception, it has been trending downward. The majority of students finish in four. In fact, UW–Madison boasts one of the best four-year graduation rates in the nation, according to Timothy Walsh, director of the Cross-College Advising Service.

With nearly 150 majors in eight undergraduate colleges, each with different requirements, how can students get on the right track? Singer and Walsh say that meeting with an advisor at least yearly is key.

"It's really vitally important that students meet with their advisor to talk about what they're doing. Even if students aren't sure what they need to talk about, it's always a case of students not knowing what they don't know," says Walsh, whose office specializes

in helping undergraduates who are undecided, who are considering a number of majors across different schools and colleges, or who need to change direction after an intended major didn't work out.

Being undecided does not mean that a student has no academic path to follow. To make an advising appointment most productive, students can do some preparation on their own before the meeting, narrowing down their list of general interest areas and searching program websites in those areas for prerequisites and course requirements. Then the advisor can use the appointment time in the most useful way — helping students look at the big picture of how it all might fit together in a four-year plan, while also discussing other important areas, such as internships and possible career paths.

There are a couple of important caveats, though: Some majors, such as pharmacy and education, are not designed to be completed in four years. In highly structured, sequential four-year programs such as music and engineering, students who do not start in their first year may find themselves behind schedule. (For a complete list of majors and entrance requirements, including when students should apply/declare, see pubs.wisc.edu/ug/majors_entrance.htm.)

Advisors *do* see students whose interests don't require two years of exploring. "For the people who are sure and were right about being sure, we accommodate that, and they just go straight to that department or that major and they know exactly what they have to do," Singer says.

Why do some students take longer than four years? Rarely is course availability the problem. Neither is studying abroad, which has been shown to not increase time to graduate. The two most common reasons, Walsh says, are students changing their minds after several years down the path of one major, or students not being admitted to a limited-enrollment major (business, nursing, engineering, or teacher certification, for example) and having no back-up plan.

It might be frustrating that there is not a bright line between "explore" and "decide," but the truth is that it's an individual decision that varies with each student.



Key Dates

S	M	T	W	T	F	S

Key Dates

May 11

Last day of classes

May 12

Study day

May 13

Exams begin

May 17

Last day to accept financial aid for spring term and/or academic year

May 18-20

Commencement weekend

May 19

Exams end

May 20

Residence Halls close at noon

“They have to strike a balance,” Singer says, “and at the earlier part of a student’s career, it’s heavier on the exploring. As they move through, it’s got to be more balanced on the deciding. But without the exploring, they can’t make a good decision.”

Students are generally expected to decide on a major by their fourth semester, which leaves time to take a variety of classes to test whether a field is a good potential fit.

How can parents help? For one thing, Walsh and Singer say, resist the urge to tell your students which classes to take based on your knowledge or past experience. Don’t try to substitute your experience for that of an advisor. And realize that not all students need to be put on a career trajectory immediately.

“Within the context of graduating in four years, it’s obviously important that a student make their decision about a major in a timely manner,” Walsh counsels. “However, it’s also important for parents not to put a lot of pressure on an incoming freshman to make up his or her mind right away, because that kind of pres-

sure ... often results in a student making a quick and sometimes shallow decision.”

“I think where the parent can be helpful is as a coach and a mentor, and talking to their student, letting the student talk about what he or she is dealing with, and listening and just reinforcing that the parent believes the student can handle it,” Singer adds.

The most important words a parent can say on the subject, she says, are, “Why don’t you talk to your advisor about it?”

—Bill Graf

Four-Year Graduation Resources

- **Graduating in Four Years**
pubs.wisc.edu/ug/geninfo_study_fouryears.htm
- **Entrance Requirements for Undergraduate Majors**
pubs.wisc.edu/ug/majors_entrance.htm
- **Why It’s OK to be Undecided**
www.ccas.wisc.edu/undecided.html

Improving Student Advising

UW–Madison has allocated \$1.5 million through the Madison Initiative for Undergraduates to improve academic and career advising in response to student feedback.

Twenty-four new advisors were added across campus. Technology was improved with a new system in which advisors use a software system to coordinate sharing notes for each student with other advisors. And Wren Singer was hired in a new position to lead and coordinate advising throughout the university.

“It was a huge influx of money for advising, and I think it made a big difference in the way advisors see the importance of what they do and the way the campus views advising as part of the educational mission of the institution,” Singer says. “So it’s been fantastic.”

In addition — to go to where the students are, rather than requiring them to come to the advisor’s office — Cross-College Advising Service now has walk-in satellite offices in five residence halls with night hours added at the College Library.



School of Education advisor Christina Nagel (left) works with incoming first-year undergraduate Ariel La to computer-register for her classes during a Student Orientation, Advising and Registration (SOAR) session. Photo: University Communications



Health and Wellness Web Chat

Tune in to an hour-long web chat on health and wellness, which will take place on April 25, beginning at noon. A panel of experts from University Health Services, the Division of Student Life (formally the Dean of Students Office), and the McBurney Disability Resource Center will be available to answer questions from you or your student. Visit www.parent.wisc.edu to find the chat link.

Talking with Your Student About Study Drugs

While alcohol still tops the list of substance abuse problems among college students, the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs is a growing problem. According to a 2011 survey, 12 percent of UW–Madison students reported using prescription drugs that were not prescribed to them within the last year.

In particular, Adderall and similar stimulants (aka “study drugs” or “smart pills”), which are generally prescribed to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), are becoming common study aids on college campuses. Students who don’t need the drug for medical reasons are turning to these stimulants to stay alert and focused during tests and late-night study sessions; some also combine Adderall with alcohol to stay up late partying or use the drug to aid in weight loss.

The use of these drugs can lead to serious medical consequences, not to mention legal and academic implications.

“We’re talking about a drug that is similar to cocaine in terms of its high potential for abuse and addiction,” says Eric Heiligenstein, a University Health Services (UHS) psychiatrist. “The side effects depend on the person, but these medications can be very dangerous — and sometimes fatal — when mixed with other drugs or alcohol.”

Side effects of Adderall can include depression, shortness of breath, stroke, heart attack, seizures, hallucinations, and addiction, among many others. Additionally, obtaining, selling or distributing prescription drugs may result in significant fines and jail time and/or disciplinary sanctions for university misconduct.

Although students perceive Adderall to be a quick and easy fix to help them focus and be more productive, there is no evidence that ADHD drugs help students get better grades. In fact, Adderall may only make them feel more productive, rather than actually improving their productivity.

“[Students] think that the only way they can study and pass their tests is if they take the drug, and that can lead to a dangerous cycle of abuse,” Heiligenstein says. “Learning to manage their time and stress, and seeking academic or mental health help when needed, are better bets when it comes to getting good grades. And these are skills that they’ll use throughout the rest of their lives.”

Just as we encourage you to talk to your students about alcohol, we encourage you to do the same

The Wisconsin Experience: The Wisconsin Idea Scholarship

The Wisconsin Idea is the principle that the university should improve peoples’ lives beyond the classroom. This year’s senior class gift is supporting this idea by establishing the Wisconsin Idea Scholarship. The senior class aims to inspire future generations of service-oriented Badgers to live the Wisconsin Idea as students and alumni.

A lasting service-based scholarship designed to attract the nation’s most innovative young leaders to UW–Madison, the Wisconsin Idea Scholarship will provide service-oriented scholarships to prospec-

tive student leaders. Furthermore, the Wisconsin Idea Scholarship will inspire thousands of prospective students to discover the Wisconsin Idea and its far-reaching opportunities for undergraduates — all before beginning their own Wisconsin Experience.

At UW–Madison, these service leaders can develop their skills and become effective catalysts for a better world as Badger alumni.

For more information, or to make a gift to the campaign, visit: wisconsinideascholarship.wisc.edu/



about prescription drugs such as Adderall. And with finals and looming project deadlines right around the corner, there is no better time than the present.

Check out these tips for getting the conversation started:

- Start an ongoing conversation, not a one-time speech on drug use. Students aren't likely to bring up the topics, but they'll listen if you do.
- Encourage your student to think about how drug use can affect his or her life in the short and long run; there are health risks and legal consequences.
- Ask your student what he or she would do if offered prescription drugs or if a roommate is taking them.
- Stay involved. Call, write, or send e-mails frequently. Find out how your student is doing. Encourage your student to seek help if he or she is having trouble managing stress or other health issues.
- If you suspect your student may have a problem, address it immediately. If you'd like advice on how to talk to your son or daughter, UHS can help. Visit www.uhs.wisc.edu or call 608-265-5600.
- And finally, if you have an incoming or current student who is being treated for ADHD, talk about the risks of sharing or selling medication. For more information about transferring care to UHS, visit www.uhs.wisc.edu/services/counseling/how-we-can-help/psychiatry.shtml.

Summer Health Services

Students who are staying in Madison for the summer — but are not taking classes — can pay the Student Health Fee to have continued access to University Health Services (UHS). UHS is open Monday through Friday during the summer months, with the same hours and services as the academic year. The fee is a one-time payment of \$86 that grants eligibility for UHS visits from May 27 until August 31.

The fee must be paid prior to a student's first summer appointment. UHS will begin accepting payments on May 27. Payments may be made online via credit card or in person via cash, check with ID, or credit card at the cashier in room 8501, Student Services Tower, 333 East Campus Mall. Hours are 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Students covered by the Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP) have access to UHS without paying the summer fee.

As a reminder, access to UHS is not a substitute for having comprehensive health insurance, which is recommended for all students.

For more information about UHS or insurance options, visit the University Health Services website, or call 608-265-5600.

Mark Your Calendar for Parents' Weekend 2012

Did you know that Parents' Weekend is not just for first-year parents? Set aside September 21–23, 2012, for a weekend of family fun in Madison unlike any other. Spend quality time with your Badger while exploring the beautiful fall campus, experiencing an official BADGER HUDDLE®, and more. Packages go on sale Thursday, May 31, so be sure to bookmark www.uwalumni.com/parentsweekend today.

Badger Family Spring Visit

If you attended Badger Family Spring Visit this month, we hope you enjoyed the time you spent on campus and in the community with your student!

If you have not yet registered for Badger Family Spring Visit, an event that showcases free and low-cost family friendly events during April, there are still plenty of events to choose from. Select a time in April that works for you and take advantage of all there is to see and do in Madison. www.parent.wisc.edu/visit





Career Corner: Using Social Media in the Job Search

For some college students, “job searching” and “social media” may not always go hand in hand. But for Katie Kruse, a senior and Parent Program intern studying Life Sciences Communication, social-media outlets provide a direct line of communication in a world where connections are one of the best ways to find a job.

Kruse’s coursework at UW–Madison has allowed her to expand her social-media skills. Through her classes, she has built a personal website, assisted in rebranding a company, and networked with top social-media bloggers.

“Social media is becoming a new form of a resume,” says Kruse. “It’s important for students to utilize websites in a more professional way, not just as an outlet to talk to friends.”

While attending UW–Madison’s All Campus Leadership Conference this year, Kruse was the only person still standing when a speaker representing Global Lead, an Atlanta-based company asked, “How many of you follow us on Twitter?”

“After the session, the speaker remembered me; we now keep in contact through e-mail, and she is helping me create contacts in the event-planning industry,” says Kruse. “It’s key to learn how to brand yourself online in a way that says something about you professionally. Personal branding allows students to articulate their goals and career aspirations to potential employers.”

Here’s a brief summary of major social-media websites and how they can help a job search.

www.LinkedIn.com

LinkedIn is like having a website. Highlight accomplishments, work history, skill set, and much more. Other professionals can find potential employees through the site if they have lost phone numbers or e-mail addresses. Companies can also locate those interested in being hired for contract or full-time work. It allows students to connect to people they know, as well as professionals in their fields of interest. Using LinkedIn, a student can:

- Include recommendations from others in his or her profile, adding credibility to a resume and demonstrating professionalism within a particular industry.

- Search for job opportunities. Aside from the job-postings section, a student can join groups and participate in discussions. Many employers will post opportunities within the discussion sections of various groups. Additional job postings for current students or recent graduates can be found here: www.linkedin.com/studentgrads
- Ask for advice from professionals using LinkedIn Answers.
- Prepare for interviews. To help an interview go smoothly, a student can use LinkedIn to research companies and the people he or she will be meeting.

www.Twitter.com

Twitter can be used for building an online presence, keeping up on news, joining conversations, making connections, and learning about job opportunities. A Twitter name should be a person’s real name to ensure search engine results. Using Twitter, a student can:

- Follow people, recruiters, and companies of interest to learn about news and opportunities (ie: @socialmediajob).
- Build an online presence by using hashtags(#) to contribute to conversations, mention other Twitter users, and re-tweet information.
- Check out the Twitter tool Twellow, which searches people’s bios and URLs on their bios. A quick search will find a company a student would love to work for, as well as people from that company who are on Twitter.
- Reach out to people to network and ask for advice.

www.Facebook.com

Although Facebook is primarily a personal rather than a professional site, it can be an effective networking tool. A student can:

- Follow companies of interest to learn about announcements, recent news, and job opportunities.
- Utilize the status update to inform friends that he or she is looking for a job by posting an update on an interview or an event. A student who has a blog can share a new post.
- Post a note explaining what he or she is looking for in a future career. A note tends to stay on people’s screens longer than a status update, and a student can write much more.



You will receive a complimentary welcome bag filled with great Wisconsin giveaway items.

To view the complete list of weekend events and special attractions, and to reserve your welcome bag, view the Badger Family Spring Visit page on the Parent Program website.

Questions? Call 1-877-262-3977 or e-mail parent@uwmad.wisc.edu.

We look forward to seeing you!

Treat Your Student to a Gift Basket

The Parent Program, along with Fresh Madison Market, is excited to introduce our **new** gift basket program! Gift baskets feature items ranging from fresh fruits to gluten-free items to celebratory birthday treats. For more details and ordering information, visit the Parent Program website.



University Housing: Move-Out Week, Summer Storage

To help make the experience of move-out week (May 13–19) as pleasant as possible and to avoid delays, encourage your student to begin planning and packing early. Your student can send items not needed during finals week — such as futons, TVs, chairs, shelves, winter coats, bikes, or mopeds — home a few weeks early, saving on trips and making loads lighter for his or her official move-out day.

Did You Know?

The Parent Program has created Babcock Dairy's newest ice cream flavor just for you: Berry Proud Parent! In celebration of Badger Family Spring Visit and in appreciation of all you do for your student, we invite you to try Berry Proud Parent in April. A red-and-white delight, chocolate and raspberries unite in pure vanilla ice cream to create this Badger treat.

If your student will be returning to the residence halls in the fall, two easy options are available for summer storage:

- Your student can contact his or her building supervisor to make arrangements for storage through University Housing. Keep in mind that space is limited.
- Lazybones, Inc. specializes in summer storage, moving, and shipping. Students who are returning to University Housing in the fall can have Lazybones store their possessions during the summer and deliver them to their new rooms in the fall. Students who are not returning to University Housing can have Lazybones pick up their boxes, store them for the summer, and deliver them to their addresses next year or ship them to a specific destination. To use the Lazybones service, sign up online at www.mylazybones.com; e-mail wecare@mylazybones.com; or call 877-215-2105.

Remember that students must vacate their rooms within 24 hours of their last final, and may not stay later than noon on Sunday, May 20.

Housing encourages residents to recycle or donate items during move-out week. Recycling and donation centers will be set up in or near all the residence halls. Last year's move-out recycling program resulted in a 32 percent reduction of trash-hauling costs from the previous year.

Because of the number of construction projects underway, more information will be sent to parents prior to move-out week. The University Housing website will also have updates about the impact of construction projects as those details become available. Students should check for specific information (such as instructions for parking) that will be posted in the halls close to move-out week. For more about University Housing move-out, visit the University Housing website.

Offering a Summer Sublet

At this time of year, many students start to think about summer plans, including subletting their campus-area rented apartments and rooms while they're away.

Finding someone to sublet a student's rental might be a good option, but keep in mind that there are many considerations, including the handling of security deposits, damage claims, watching out for scams, and

The First-Year Experience

Home for the Summer

Before you know it, your student may be packing up and coming home for the summer. We have a few tips for conversations you may want to have with your student to ensure a smooth transition for everyone.

- Schedule time with your student to make sure activities that are important to you aren't lost in the shuffle.
- Have a conversation with your student about expectations for schedules, housework, and behavior during the summer. Decide whether all of the original rules of the house still apply, and also consider some extra flexibility to take into account your student's newfound independence and autonomy.

Summer also can be a particularly good time to assess how financial arrangements worked during your student's first year, and to determine whether adjustments are needed for the future.

- Start by asking: Was it difficult to get through the first year with the amount of money available? If so, why? What changes, if any, do we need to make for next year?
- If financial problems did arise, talk with your student about taking on a part-time job. A commitment of working ten to fifteen hours per week not only provides extra income for your student,



Photo: University Communications

but also may be a valuable out-of-class experience. If your student has already had a part-time job, were his or her grades affected? If so, was that due to working too many hours?

- Lastly, if finances fell short the first year, the Office of Student Financial Aid can be an excellent resource for students and families.

roommates. You can find important advice about these topics and more on the Campus Area Housing website.

Watch Out for Sublet Scams

UW–Madison's Campus Area Housing Office reminds students to be aware of rental scams in Madison. Students trying to find someone to sublet their apartments are especially vulnerable. Here are a few tips to identify scams:

- The e-mail message will come by way of "bcc" or blind copy.
- The grammar and spelling will sometimes be poor.
- The e-mail will use broad terms, rather than specifics, about an apartment.
- The scammer will offer to send more money than required. The money will be sent as a cashier's check,

which the student cashes at a financial institution, wiring back the excess money. A few days later the bank will learn that the check is bad and will seek to recoup those funds from the student — including the money sent to the scammer.

For more information about rental scams, visit the Campus Area Housing website.

NEW ¡Haga una pregunta en español!

Ask a question in Spanish! The Parent Program is excited to announce a new service for Spanish-speaking families. We are now able to respond to e-mail inquiries in the Spanish language. For more information about this service, or to ask a question in Spanish, please visit www.parent.wisc.edu.



Message from Dean of Students Lori Berquam on Mifflin Street Block Party

Dear Parents,

On May 5, an event referred to as the “Mifflin Street Block Party” will take place on Mifflin Street in Madison. I want you to know that the party is not a university-sponsored event, and in fact, we wish it would not take place at all. The event has a troubling history and has resulted in extreme intoxication and assaults among participants.

It’s our advice that students not attend and we know that many students choose to avoid it. We want you to know that we will be communicating with your students about the potential health, safety and academic costs involved in attending. Should they still decide to attend, important safety information is posted here: <http://safeu.wisc.edu/protect/halloween-mifflin.html>

Lastly, should students be cited by the Madison Police for breaking city ordinances at the Mifflin Street block party, they can be subject to heavy fines from the city and a review of their conduct by my office. I’d encourage you to have a conversation with your student about Mifflin, if you haven’t already.

Sincerely,

Lori M. Berquam Dean of Students
Division of Student Life
University of Wisconsin–Madison