
Understanding the University Application Cycle

Session 1: Making Choices

Reading 1: What advice can you give to your students when they are choosing their subject?

'I can't decide what to study at university. Where do I start?'

What is your student good at?

A good place to start when supporting a student in choosing a university course, is by looking at what subjects they excel at.

If they are good at a subject, they may also enjoy it more because they can understand it confidently. Taking this subject at university could allow them to excel even further in that subject and will provide them with a high potential to succeed.

Your student may be considering studying a subject that they currently find challenging. If they are looking to study something that is not necessarily their best subject, it is really important to remember that the course will become more difficult throughout university. While it is important for your student to be challenged, consider whether they will be able to balance this challenge with achievable goals.

What are they passionate about?

University provides students with the chance to study what they love most. When your student is choosing their subject, they have to bear in mind that they will be studying it at a more advanced level, by researchers who love their subject. It is crucial that they are passionate and enthusiastic about this subject because they are investing valuable time and money to study it.

Try to assess whether your student really does enjoy the subject by asking about their extra-curricular involvement and listening to how they express themselves about the subject. Do they show an interest in the subject outside of what they are taught? Is it something they may quickly lose interest in?

Future career goals

Not everybody knows what career they want to pursue and students can often change their minds. However, some students will have a clear idea of what industry they want to work in. In this case, a degree can be a stepping stone into the career that they want to pursue. For example, if they know they want a future in journalism or publishing then a degree in English may prepare them for that. Advise your students to look online at what qualifications are needed for the careers they have shown interest in. They can also book appointments with their careers advisors who can advise on what degree they may need to pursue a particular career.

Research

There is such a wide variety of courses that can be studied at university and your students won't know about them unless they do some research. Encourage your students to explore UCAS and university websites to see what courses are on offer before deciding on what course they want to study.

When we think of what courses can be studied at university, it is often the conventional, classic courses which people tend to focus on first, for example English, history, maths or geography. What about the courses that many people are unfamiliar with? Do your students know that they could study commercial song writing or Viking studies? How about special effects makeup?

Perhaps they are interested in two subjects and could benefit from a joint honours degree? Or perhaps they want to specialise in a particular part of a subject? Once they have researched what is available, it will be easier for them to narrow down their options.