

# WHEN IN DOUBT....

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Having doubts about what you are studying? Let's look at your options.

Most students have times of wondering whether they've chosen the right course – let's face it, tertiary study isn't fun and challenging all of the time, and most people have bouts of feeling a bit jaded. (Particularly before a test or assignment when you can think of a whole lot of things you would rather be doing!). But if you find that you are generally unhappy, demotivated or really bored with your course to the extent that it is affecting your ability to enjoy the rest of your life, then a rethink may be necessary. But being bitterly unhappy isn't the only reason to have a rethink; let's look at some common reasons for doubts...

## ▶ NOT KNOWING WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO DO CAREER-WISE WHEN YOU GRADUATE

Lack of focus about career options that are open to you can certainly make you feel insecure. We need to firstly clarify that there are various outcomes to degrees: some are clearly vocationally based, like medicine, or chartered accounting and others are broad-based, providing a general education, with no single obvious career outcome. The latter is not a weakness, by the way, just a difference. Interestingly, many graduates can (and do) work in an area that bears no resemblance to the subject matter of their degree. But be careful, some professions have specific requirements. The point is, many don't, and what employers require is for employees to display a broad

range of skills and attributes: interpersonal skills, self-awareness, problem-solving, flexibility and teamwork to name just a few. None of these are unique to a particular subject or degree, but can be acquired through a range of study areas, as well as part time or voluntary work and extramural involvement.

So if your doubts are about career direction, and you are otherwise enjoying your studies and passing, there are a number of things you can do. Start by looking at what gives you a buzz, what you are good at and love doing in all aspects of your life, coupled with finding out what sort of work environments you would thrive in. This doesn't just happen, it's a process you have to take on. If you are not sure how to go about this, chat to a Careers Advisor to get you started.

## ▶ NOT LIKING THE OBVIOUS CAREER OPTIONS FOR YOUR DEGREE

There is no rule that says you have to take on the obvious career outcome of your degree. There are many ways to find out alternatives to direct career options – research what alumni have done, talk to your lecturers, interview people who work in the industry that you are keen on, use the resources (books, DVDs) at the Careers Service's Career Information Centre. Explore the world of work – this may open up a world of opportunities, liberating you from narrow ideas about what your degree has actually prepared you for.



GETTING  
STARTED

## WHEN IN DOUBT (continued)

### ▶ NOT ENJOYING YOUR SUBJECT OR DEGREE

Start by asking yourself why you chose this course in the first place. Did you have limited access to information about your options? Did you not get into your first choice and are landed with a second choice you put down just for the sake of it? Or were you heavily influenced by your peers, a sibling, parent or teacher? Some students even take on a course because with it they could get a bursary, and without this funding they would not be able to study.

Also look carefully at whether it is your whole degree that you are unhappy with, or just one or two courses, or even a part of a course. Sometimes that can put things into perspective, and help you to identify your unhappiness.

If you look back and identify that you took your degree for the wrong reasons, imagine that you were back at the beginning. Using the knowledge and experience gained, what would you study if you could choose all over again? Look thoroughly at your options, and make sure you research the course content. ✱



### WHAT TO DO AND WHERE TO SEEK HELP:

- **See** a Careers Advisor at the Careers Service to chat through your options and get ideas for researching career options.
- **Visit** the Career Information Centre (CIC). The CIC manager and CIC student interns will direct you to relevant resources and online sites.
- **Consult** a curriculum advisor to find out the possibilities of changing streams or majors within your faculty. This may not be difficult and there may be options you have not thought of.
- **If** you are looking to change to a degree in another faculty, consult a curriculum advisor in that faculty to see if you would get credits for courses you have already passed.
- **Ask** other students in courses you want to move to if you can have a look at their textbooks or course outlines. This may be more detailed and informative than what is in the faculty handbooks.
- **If** you are a bursary holder, rather be honest about being unhappy and discuss options available to you, than keeping quiet, failing, and losing your bursary anyway.
- **Realise** that if you are down, unmotivated and unhappy, it is very difficult to perform – you may need support from the UCT Student Wellness Service.