

PLANNING A CLASSROOM VISIT

Observing classes has proven to be one of the most useful ways for students to learn about potential majors. Being in the courses that majors take will give you a good sense of the departmental “personality”. You will get a chance to see if you are intrigued by the types of things majors study and whether you would share interests in common with these students. You will also have a chance to see if you like some of the faculty members in the department and the teaching methods used by the department.

Here are some helpful hints to make your classroom observations most useful:

Don't Be Anxious

Most instructors enjoy sharing their disciplines with interested students. . In fact, they often say that they would appreciate more students finding out about their classes so that students can make wiser registration decisions. Instructors are interested in helping you to find the right major so relax, many have gone through the same process when they were undergrads.

Select Several Courses

Select several courses in your potential major. Occasionally an instructor will have a valid reason for not permitting you to observe her or his class. Having several classes in mind that interest you and that work with your schedule will make it easier for you to plan other options in case your original idea does not work.

Find Out Who Is Teaching

Contact the department to confirm who is teaching each course. It is not unusual for a course to be taught by someone other than the person listed in the class schedule. You do not want to spend several days tracking down an instructor who does not even teach the course. Use the Undergraduate Major Advisor (UMA) list that you received in this workshop to contact the appropriate major advisor.

Call During Office Hours

You can save yourself quite a bit of effort by calling the instructor when she or he is likely to be in the office. Although instructors occasionally are not available during their office hours, this is your best opportunity to speak with an instructor.

Get Permission

Given the size of the University, students are often tempted to observe classes without getting permission. This is not really a good idea. Instructors are usually very cooperative about class observations but sometimes they have good reasons to not want you in class that day. Some reasons maybe that an exam is planned, there is a guest lecturer or students will be making presentations. Please be polite and ask first before observing a class.

Thank The Instructor

Write a thank you note, letter or email. After you have observed the class, be sure to thank the instructor. If you have positive things to say about your observation, let the instructor know because many instructors do not hear often enough that they are doing a good job. If you do not necessarily have positive things to say, let the instructor know that observing their class helped you to get a better idea about the things that people study in that major.