I’m thinking about a health career - medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, physical therapy, physician’s assistant, and other stuff like that. What do I major do I need?

There is an old adage “If you’re employed at something you love, you’ll never work a day in your life.” Students want us to tell them the “right” major, but the answer is that you must major in something you like and something you’d want to do. Graduates must be well-rounded in both sciences and liberal arts. They must be able to think well, write well and speak well. You must make the most of your general education in all courses as well as the pre-requisite courses for your profession. In making a decision about your major, the first thing to consider for undergraduate work is whether you want a health care major or a non-health care major.

Shouldn’t I pick a health care major?

Not necessarily. The undergraduate majors at Salisbury University that lead directly to health care employment are medical lab science, nursing and respiratory therapy. Related majors include exercise science, community health and social work. You could go on to post-graduate health professions schools after these majors if you also take the school pre-requisites along with the regular curriculum. The advantages to doing so are that you would have clinical hours that schools are looking for already built into your degree, you would be exposed to the health care setting and become sure it is right for you and you would be immediately employable with your college degree. One disadvantage is that it can be difficult to get all those courses completed during a four year period and maintain a high GPA. Other disadvantages are that you would be very specialized in health care and have fewer opportunities in the liberal arts and sciences, including earning minors that would enhance your application and/or assist in preparation for entrance exams.

Why would I pick a non-health care major?

If non-health care careers are still options for you, pick a non-health care major that you like. You can still do the pre-requisites for various professional schools, but you can also keep other options open such as scientific research, teaching and so on. It’s always a good idea to have more than one potential career path in mind in case you don’t get the grades you want or you simply change your mind. Having a more traditional major also allows you to get a well rounded education, including a minor that might really enhance your professional school application (foreign language, gerontology, business, psychology, etc.). You do not have to have a science major. For example, one Salisbury University graduate majored in International Studies and was accepted at Texas Tech at El Paso Medical School. Traditional majors have to get medical experience hours outside of class work (job shadowing, service learning, jobs, etc.) for professional school applications and must plan for the fact that they cannot go directly into a health care job after graduation.
How many students does Salisbury University get into professional schools every year?

The short answer is none. Students get themselves into schools. Anyone can declare that they are “pre-med”, “pre-vet”, “pre-pharmacy”, and so on. Salisbury University does not have any criteria that would exclude a student from declaring such an ambition, but students must understand that seats in health care programs, both graduate and undergraduate, are competitive. You are admitted on the basis of college academic records, admission test scores, clinical experiences and exploration/extracurricular activities. Exploration activities include those which are medically related and community service as well as research and fun. Student athletes who can balance the demands of a sport with academic demands are well-respected. You must show you have a broad array of abilities and experiences, so therefore only you can get yourself into the school of your choice. Having said that, Salisbury University does provide support services through individual advisors within majors, Career Services and the Health Professions Advising Program. Although only you can get yourself into a school, we are also doing everything we can to support you here and get you to the career of your choice.

What should I be doing to prepare myself?

You must become your own advocate and expert. Educate yourself regarding various health care careers, both familiar and unfamiliar. If you want to be something, you should be able to tell someone what the career entails, why you want to do that job, what courses you are required of you and what schools offer the program. Consider job shadowing in the profession that interests you as well as others. You may spend a day watching a job and discover it’s exactly what you want or completely different than what you expected. Only you know what geographic areas and school types appeal to you, so you should start researching which schools offer your program and what they require in terms of courses, GPA, entrance exam scores, clinical hours and so forth. First and foremost, however, you must work hard academically. There are no classes and no grades that are unimportant. There is little, if anything, you can do to make up for weak grades or weak scores on entrance exams. Incoming freshmen to Salisbury University are advised not to get overly involved in job shadowing and outside activities. A firm academic foundation is the absolute first priority.

How do I learn more?

The Health Professions Advising Program (HPAP) has a website: 

http://www.salisbury.edu/henson/hpap/

that is updated periodically with on-campus events and new information. Questions can be sent anytime to:

HPAP@salisbury.edu

Also be sure to consult the professional websites associated with the careers which interest you. They have a wealth of excellent information.

Good luck with your decisions and we hope to have you here soon!