Transferability: cross-training for your career
By: Glennie Fitzgerald Sewell
Career Services Graduate Assistant

Based on circumstance, geographic limitations, and even opportunity, students sometimes need to identify alternative career choices. It can be realistic for students seeking to enter the working world to consider more than one viable career path: one as the main interest, and others as viable fall-back interests. One example of this practice could be an English education major transferring his or her strong communication skills to be a successful food service or seasonal restaurant manager (the hospitality industry), during the summertime.

Granted, this is but one example of many paths. Students may also wish to take courses that develop useful technical or conventional business skills, such as web-design, internet sales, management, accounting, or marketing. Often, career choices can require different training or practice; however, would-be applicants may wish to look carefully at how a secondary career choice may relate to and benefit from the knowledge and experience developed for the primary job choice.

Consider the liberal arts or education major with a summer (or evening job) working in amusement park restaurant management. Writing and speaking clearly is a must in running any business. The ability to openly and positively communicate with employees, guests, and customers is essential in the smooth operation of any successful business, not to mention a satisfying and warm communication between those who serve and those being served. For any major, these communication skills are an important necessity for the job. An education major preparing for a teaching position but wishing to keep other options open might consider a summer position or co-op in public service, an education-related non-profit, or government agency. Ultimately, this student may use the secondary job as a workable fall-back option, but it could lead beyond employment flexibility and offer a desirable alternative career path.

Similarly, students in business or technical majors can increase their options and employability by seeking classes or opportunities in which they learn and practice additional communication and analytical skills. Courses in the humanities or liberal arts not only hone these skills but prepare a colleague to converse about many topics, a networking advantage. By writing for a newsletter, assuming leadership roles in campus organizations, or pursuing a co-op, students can engage with their community and develop skills that make them better job applicants.