

Choosing a Major

Tips & Strategies



CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Understanding the Facts

Choosing a college major is an important decision to make, and often times there's anxiety about making the "right" decision. **Understanding the relationship between major and career options is critical.** In some cases, career fields demand a specific academic path. For example, engineers are expected to have an engineering degree, nurses, a nursing degree, accountants, an accounting degree, and so on. In most cases, however, the relationship is not so clear cut. A major opens the doorway to many career possibilities, but it's up to you to make the most of your experience both in and out of the classroom.

Ultimately, your academic major is just one factor in determining your future career path and job prospects. Other factors include: breadth and diversity of coursework, out-of-classroom activities, skills acquired through related experiences such as internships, and personal fit with your natural talents and abilities.

Finding a Fit

The following tips will help you to find a major that's a good fit for you:

1) KNOW YOURSELF

The most foundational step in choosing a major is a thorough assessment of your strengths, interests, abilities, and values. Try making a list after considering what you have enjoyed from past experiences – school subjects, hobbies, activities, and so on. Then, go one step further and ask yourself **what it was about those activities that were energizing for you?** Try and get as specific as you can. Did they allow you to interact with people? Use your creativity or work with your hands? Often, this is a more difficult task than anticipated! You're strongly encouraged to utilize the [FOCUS](#) system through the Career and Professional Development Center to go a bit more in depth with this exercise.



2) KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

There are many options as far as majors go, so it's important to do your research before choosing one. Above all else, choose a major that is most congruent with your interests, strengths, and abilities. Below are some suggestions for gathering more information. You're encouraged to use the "Exploring Majors Exercise" later in this guide to document your progress.

- a) **Courses Related to Major(s) of Interest** – Carefully read through the full [list of majors](#) available at Messiah College. Identify the majors that strike your interest or that you might like to know more about. Eliminate the majors you would definitely not want to pursue due to lack of fit with interests/abilities. Be open to majors you may have never heard of or considered. Notice any themes? Patterns? Now, take time to read through the **course requirements and descriptions** for those majors you liked. How do they measure against one another based on what you know about yourself?
- b) [Career Resources by Major](#) – Wondering what career paths are more often associated with the majors you're considering? This resource on the CPDC's website will give you this information, in addition to employment and graduate school statistics of Messiah alumni in any given major.

- c) **Academic Departments/Faculty Members** – First, check out the [website\(s\) of departments](#) which house the majors you’re considering. Make an appointment to talk with a faculty member who teaches in the department you’re considering – they’re eager to talk with you! What suggestions do they have? What do they see as the strengths of the major?
- d) **Upper-class Students** – Get an insider’s perspective by consulting a junior or senior in the major. As a faculty representative for recommendations of students. Why did they choose the major? What do they like/dislike about it? What do they hope to do after graduation? Ask for referrals from faculty members in the academic department.
- e) **Information Interviews and Job Shadowing** – One of the best ways to explore a career field of interest is to speak with/observe someone currently working in that field. Find out what majors, if any, are strongly preferred in a given field, as well as any other qualifications. If you’ve tapped your personal network and you are still having a difficult time identifying someone, let us help you. Connect with Messiah alumni by joining the **Messiah College Professional Network** on LinkedIn. If you have questions or need assistance, talk with a career coach in the Career and Professional Development Center.
- f) **Exploratory Courses** – Even after you’ve done all the suggested research, it’s often helpful to sit in on a class or take an introductory-level class within a major you’re considering to see if it’s really something you would enjoy. Talk with your advisor or a career coach about how to do this.

3) KEEP PERSPECTIVE

Remember that your major is **one piece** of the package. What you do with your time as a college student is up to you. We encourage you to make the most of the complete experience by applying knowledge gained from the classroom in practical, relevant settings – [student clubs and organizations](#), [service learning and volunteer work](#), [athletics](#), [study abroad](#), [internships](#), undergraduate research, work study, and more. Experience is what sets college graduates apart in the job search process. Here are some other things to keep in mind:



- a) **Value of a Liberal Arts Education** – not so excited about taking general education or “[QuEST](#)” requirements? The reality is that there is lifelong, practical value in a liberal arts education. Not only does it prepare you to be a well-rounded and global citizen, it also provides an opportunity to develop perspectives, skills, and abilities that are highly sought by employers and today’s dynamic workplace.
- b) **Transferable Skills** – Virtually all employers want to hire someone with certain skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, organization, etc. There are many ways – and majors – to help you develop skills in these areas. **Most always, a college major is not enough in and of itself to get you hired.** Job candidates must be prepared to articulate and demonstrate the skills and experiences they have to offer. Talk with a career coach about setting goals to gain marketable/professional experience to complement what you will learn in the classroom.

“Exploring a Major” Exercise

GETTING STARTED

- a) Review the complete list of Messiah College majors in this guide.
- b) Circle any majors that are of interest to you.
- c) Cross out those that you are confident you are not interested in pursuing.
- d) If you don't know what a major is but the title is intriguing to you, put a question mark beside that major to explore further.

ACADEMIC INFORMATION

- a) For the majors in your “Interested” and “Need More Info” columns, click on each major at messiah.edu/majors to find a list of course requirements for that major, making sure to read through course descriptions. If a significant amount of the courses seems uninteresting, this could be a sign that it's not a good fit for you.
- b) Access the [department websites](#) for each major to learn more about prospective topics of study and future opportunities in the field.
- c) Take notes for each major on what you see as the academic pro's and con's.

CONNECTING MAJORS TO CAREERS

- a) Review popular or more typical [career paths](#) associated with the majors you're considering on the CPDC's website (“[Career Planning by Major](#)”).
- b) On this same site you will find data for paths Messiah alumni have pursued relative to their majors.
- c) Take notes for each major on what you see as the career related pro's and con's.

PRIOTIZING YOUR OPTIONS

- a) Of the majors on your “consideration list,” prioritize them based on the academic and career information you have gathered. Which rise to the top of your list and why?
- b) Make an appointment with a career coach in the Career & Professional Development to discuss your options. Also, make appointments with Department Chairpersons in the departments that house the majors at the top of your list. They can offer a helpful and unique perspective based on their intimate knowledge of the major.

One way to combine interests from multiple areas is to consider adding a minor to your major. Search minor options under the “Academics” tab at messiah.edu

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Department of Education

- Education with Teaching Certification in Grades Pre K-4
- Education with Dual Teaching Cert. in Pre K-4 and Special Education (N-8)
- Education with Teaching Cert. in Grades 4-8

Department of Human Development & Family Science

- Human Development & Family Science
- Family and Consumer Science Education

Department of Business

- Accounting
- Business Administration
- Economics
- Economic Development
- Finance
- International Business
- Marketing

Department of Psychology

- Psychology (B.A. or B.S.)
- Biopsychology
- Biopsychology B.S. w/ MSOT in Occupational Therapy

Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminal Justice

- Criminal Justice
- Sociology & Anthropology

Department of Social Work

- Social Work

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE, ENGINEERING & HEALTH

Department of Biological Sciences

- Biology
- Biology w/ Teacher Certification
- Environmental Science
- Molecular Biology

Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry

- Biochemistry (B.A. or B.S.)
- Biochemistry w/ Doctor of Pharmacy (3+ program)
- Chemistry (B.A. or B.S.)
- Chemistry w/ Teacher Certification

Department of Computer & Information Science

- Computer and Information Science

Department of Engineering

- Engineering

Department of Health, Nutrition, & Exercise Science

- Adventure Education
- Applied Health Science
- Applied Health Science/MSOT in Occupational Therapy
- Athletic Training
- Health & Physical Education w/ Teaching Certification
- Nutrition and Dietetics
- Sport Management

Department of Mathematics, Physics & Statistics

- Actuarial Science
- Mathematics
- Mathematics w/ Teaching Cert.
- Physics (B.A. or B.S.)
- Physics w/ Teaching Cert.

Department of Nursing

- Nursing

Pre-Health Professions

- Pre-Chiropractic
- Pre-Dental
- Pre-Medical (M.D. or D.O.)
- Pre-Occupational Therapy
- Pre-Optometry
- Pre-Pharmacy
- Pre-Physical Therapy
- Pre-Physician Assistant
- Pre-Podiatry
- Pre-Public Health
- Pre-Veterinary

SCHOOL OF THE HUMANITIES

Department of Biblical & Religious Studies

- Biblical & Religious Studies
- Christian Ministries

Department of Communication

- Communication
- Film & Media Arts
- Journalism
- Broadcasting and Media Production
- Public Relations

Department of English

- English
- English w/ Teaching Certification

Department of History

- History
- History w/ Social Studies Teaching Certification

Department of Modern Languages

- Chinese Business
- Chinese Studies (Teaching Cert. available)
- French (Teaching Cert. available)
- German (Teaching Cert. available)
- Spanish (Teaching Cert. available)
- Spanish Business

Department of Philosophy

- Philosophy

Department of Politics & International Relations

- Politics and International Relations

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Department of Visual Arts

- Studio Art (B.A. or B.F.A.)
- Art History
- Art Education w/ Teaching Cert.
- Art Business
- Digital Media

Department of Music

- Music
- Music Business
- Music - Music and Worship
- Music Performance
- Music Education w/ Teaching Cert.

Department of Theatre & Dance

- Theatre
- Theatre Business
- Dance
- Musical Theatre

INTERDISCIPLINARY MAJORS

- Biopsychology
- Digital Media
- Sustainability Studies
- Ethnic and Area Studies
- Peace and Conflict Studies

3+ MAJOR PROGRAMS (3 years at Messiah College + more time at another College or University)

- Applied Health Science/MSOT in Occupational Therapy (*In partnership with Thomas Jefferson University*)
- Biochemistry/Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) (*In partnership with University of the Sciences*)
- Biopsychology/MSOT in Occupational Therapy (*In partnership with Thomas Jefferson University*)
- Politics/M.S. in Public Policy and Management (*In partnership with Carnegie Mellon University*)

Digging a Little Deeper...

Use the following exercise to answer questions about each major you are considering. Discuss your answers with your academic advisor and/or a career coach.

Major Option #1: _____ **Department:** _____

1. How many courses/credits are required to complete this major? _____
2. How much freedom is there for free elective courses and flexibility in the order of when classes are taken?

3. Is there a minimum GPA I would need to maintain for this major? _____ GPA _____
4. Are there any pre-requisite classes for entering the major? _____
5. Is it possible to minor in this area? _____
6. Approximately what percentage of the required coursework and course descriptions (college catalogue) appeal to you? _____ Why?

7. What about the major is NOT appealing to you? _____

8. What interests and abilities are critical for students in this major? _____

9. Does this major require any time off campus for activities such as internships, study abroad?

10. What are sample internships that students in this major have completed (find out from the Career and Professional Development Center)? _____

11. What have [graduates](#) from this major gone on to do after graduation (employment and/or graduate schools)? _____

12. Who is the department Chairperson? _____
13. What steps do you need to take to learn more about this major? _____

14. What other majors might be similar to this one? _____
