



Choosing a major: tips and strategies



MESSIAH
COLLEGE®

CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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Choosing a college major is an important decision to make, and you may have 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.



The Messiah College Career and Professional Development Center is here to help. Our career coaches are prepared to walk alongside you as you discern your next steps.

Finding a fit

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

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 was 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!



IN CONJUNCTION WITH A CAREER COACH AT MESSIAH, UTILIZE THE **FOCUS** SYSTEM THROUGH THE CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER TO GO A BIT MORE IN DEPTH WITH THIS EXERCISE.



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 best aligns with your interests, strengths and abilities. Below are some suggestions for gathering more information.



USE THE "EXPLORING A MAJOR" EXERCISE LATER IN THIS GUIDE TO DOCUMENT YOUR PROGRESS!

- ♦ **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?
- ♦ **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.
- ♦ **Academic departments/faculty members** – First, check out the [website\(s\) of departments](#) that house the majors you're considering. Make an appointment to talk with a faculty member who teaches in the department – they're eager to talk with you! What suggestions do they have? What strengths and abilities do they see as necessary for the major?
- ♦ **Upperclass students** – Get an insider's perspective by consulting a junior or senior in the major. Ask a faculty representative for recommendations of students. Why did they choose the major? What do they like/dislike about it?
- ♦ **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 using the [alumni search tool on LinkedIn](#). If you have questions or need assistance, talk with a career coach in the Career and Professional Development Center.
- ♦ **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.





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:

- ♦ **Value of a liberal arts education** – 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.
- ♦ **Transferable skills** – Virtually all employers want to hire someone with 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.



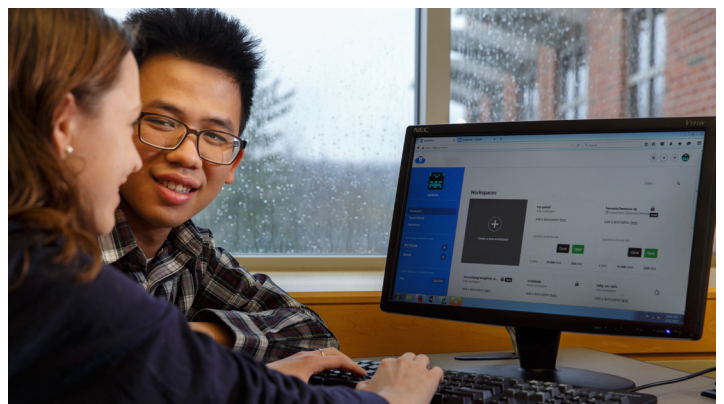
Getting started

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



Academic information

- ☐ For the majors in your “interested” and “need more info” categories, **click on each major in our [academic program listing](#)** to find a list of course requirements for that major, making sure to read through course descriptions. If a significant amount of the coursework seems uninteresting, this could be a sign that it's not a good fit for you.
- ☐ **Access the [department websites](#)** for each major to learn more about prospective topics of study and future opportunities in the field.
- ☐ **Take notes** for each major on what you see as the academic pros and cons.



ONE WAY TO COMBINE INTERESTS FROM MULTIPLE AREAS IS TO CONSIDER ADDING A MINOR TO YOUR MAJOR. FIND MINORS OFFERED AT MESSIAH IN THE [ACADEMIC PROGRAM LISTING](#).



Connecting majors to careers

- **Review** popular or more typical career paths associated with the majors you're considering on the CPDC's [career planning by major](#) website. On this same site, you will find data for paths Messiah alumni have pursued relative to their majors.
- **Take notes** for each major on what you see as the career related pros and cons.



Prioritizing your options

- **Prioritize** the majors on your “consideration list” based on the academic and career information you have gathered. Which rise to the top of your list and why?
- **Make an appointment with a career coach** in the Career and Professional Development Center to discuss your options. Also, make appointments with chairs 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.



Digging a little deeper...

Use the following questions as you explore each major you are considering. Discuss with your academic advisor and/or a career coach.

Major option: _____ **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?
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 concerning or not appealing to you?
8. What interests and abilities are critical for students to succeed in this major?
9. Does this major require any time off campus for activities such as internships and/or 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 chair?
13. What steps do you need to take to learn more about this major?
14. What other majors might be similar to this one?

85+ majors offered at Messiah College

Accounting	Economic Development	Politics and International	Family and Consumer
Actuarial Science	Economics	Relations (B.A.)/M.S.	Sciences Education
Applied Health Science	Electrical Engineering	in Public Policy and	(K-12)
Art (Business)	Engineering	Management 3 + 2	French (K-12)
Art History	English	Carnegie Mellon	Health and Physical
Art, Studio	Environmental Science	University	Education (K-12)
Athletic Training	Ethnic and Area Studies	Psychology	History/Social Studies
(Accelerated)	Film and Media Arts	Public Relations	(7-12)
Biblical and Religious	Finance	Social Work	Mathematics (7-12)
Studies	French	Sociology	Music Education (K-12)
Biochemistry	Graphic Design	Spanish	Physics (7-12)
Biochemistry	History	Speech and Language	Spanish (K-12)
(ACS-certified)	Human Development	Pathology*	
Biochemistry (B.A.)/	and Family Science	Sport Management	
Doctor of Pharmacy	International Business	Sustainability Studies	
(PharmD) 3 + 4	Journalism	Theatre	
University of the	Marketing		
Sciences	Mathematics		
Biology	Mechanical Engineering	Majors leading to	Pre-health
Biomedical Engineering	Molecular Biology	teaching certification	professions advising
Biopsychology	Music	Art Education (K-12)	Pre-Audiology
Broadcasting and Media	Music (Business)	Biology (7-12)	Pre-Chiropractic
Production	Music (Music and	Chemistry (7-12)	Pre-Dentistry
Business Administration	Worship)	Chinese Studies (K-12)	Pre-Medical (D.O.)
Chemistry	Music Performance	Education with Dual	Pre-Medical (M.D.)
Chemistry	Musical Theatre	Teaching Certification	Pre-Occupational
(ACS-certified)	Nursing	in Grades PreK-4 and	Therapy
Chinese Business	Nutrition and Dietetics	Special Education	Pre-Optometry
Chinese Studies	Peace and Conflict	Education with Teaching	Pre-Pharmacy
Christian Ministries	Studies	Certification in Grades	Pre-Physical Therapy
Civil Engineering	Philosophy	4-8	Pre-Physician Assistant
Communication	Physics	Education with Teaching	Pre-Podiatry
Computer and	Politics and International	Certification in Grades	Pre-Public Health
Information Science	Relations	PreK-4	Pre-Veterinary
Cybersecurity		English (7-12)	
Dance			
Digital Media			

* This minor includes requisite coursework required to pursue graduate-level studies in speech and language pathology.

Pre-health professions advising

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

Students interested in health careers receive specialized advising to develop a course of study that ensures they meet all undergraduate prerequisites necessary for graduate school admittance.

To search and filter Messiah's 150+ academic programs (including minors and concentrations) by your personal and career interests, visit messiah.edu/majors.