

Choosing a Major

Tips & Strategies



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CAREER 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, teachers are expected to have an education 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. Refer to the "transferable skills" section in this handout for more information. Also, visit the "[Exploring Options](#)" section of the Career Center website, which has a more extensive list of resources and information.

Ultimately, your academic major is just one factor in determining your future career path and job prospects. Other factors include: your academic transcript, choice of coursework, out-of-classroom activities, skills acquired through related experience, and personal fit.

Finding a Fit

The following pointers 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 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. Here are some suggestions for gathering more information:

- a) [College Catalogue](#) – Carefully read through the [list of majors](#). Circle those majors which are of interest to you or that you might like to know more about. Cross out the majors you would definitely not want to pursue. Notice any themes? Patterns? Now, take time to read through the course requirements for those majors you circled. How do they measure against one another based on what you know about yourself?
- b) "[What Can I Do with a Major in...?](#)" – View typical career paths and options associated with majors of interest. This is intended to be a **starting point** for further exploration!

- 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. What suggestions do they have? What do they see as the strengths of the major? What does it take to be successful? What have alumni gone on to do after graduation? (This information is also available from [post-graduation survey data](#) in the Career Center).
- d) **Upper-class Students** – Get an insider’s perspective by consulting a junior or senior in the major. 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 Center.
- f) **Exploratory Courses** – Even after you’ve done all the suggested research, sometimes it’s 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. However, 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](#), and more. **What you do with your time will speak volumes to employers and graduate schools, so choose your activities strategically!** Here are some other things to keep in mind:



- a) **Value of a Liberal Arts Education** – not so excited about taking general education requirements? Believe it or not, there is lifelong 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. Check out the [“Liberal Arts in the Workplace”](#) section on the Career Center’s website.
- 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 experience.

Choosing a Major Exercise

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, time at the Philadelphia Campus, etc.? _____
10. What are sample internships that students in this major have completed (find out from the [Internship 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. Who is the department Assistant? (Important when scheduling appointments!)

14. What steps do you need to take to learn more about this major? _____

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

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, EDUCATION AND 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 Middle Level (Grade 4-8)

Department of Human Development and Family Science

- Human Development & Family Science
- Family & Consumer Science with K-12 Teaching Certification

Department of Management and Business

- Accounting
- Business Administration
- Economics
- International Business
- Marketing

Department of Psychology

- Psychology (B.A. or B.S.)
- Biopsychology

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, & Criminal Justice

- Criminal Justice
- Ethnic and Area Studies
- Sociology & Anthropology
- Sustainability Studies

Department of Social Work

- Social Work

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND HEALTH

Department of Biological Sciences

- Biology
- Biology with Teaching Certification
- Biology and Environmental Education Dual Certification
- Biopsychology
- Environmental Science
- Molecular Biology
- Sustainability Studies

Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry

- Biochemistry (B.A. or B.S.)
- Chemistry (B.A. or B.S.)
- Chemistry with Secondary Teaching Certification

Department of Engineering

- Engineering

Department of Health and Human Performance

- Adventure Education
- Athletic Training
- Health & Exercise Science
- Health & Physical Education with K-12 Teaching Cert.
- Sport Management

Department of Informational & Mathematical Sciences

- Business Information Systems
- Computer & Information Science
- Mathematics
- Mathematics with Secondary Teaching Certification
- Physics (B.A. or B.S.)
- Physics with Secondary Teaching Cert.

Department of Nursing

- Nursing

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

- Nutrition and Dietetics
- Nutrition and Food Service Management
- Nutrition Science

Pre-Professional Health Programs

- Pre-Dental
- Pre-Medical
- Pre-Physical Therapy
- Pre-Veterinary

SCHOOL OF THE HUMANITIES

Department of Biblical & Religious Studies

- Peace and Conflict Studies
- Biblical & Religious Studies
- Christian Ministries

Department of Communication

- Broadcasting
- Communication
- Digital Media
- Film & Media Arts
- Journalism
- Public Relations

Department of English

- English
- English with Secondary Teaching Certification

Department of History

- History
- History Major with Secondary Social Studies Teaching Certification

- Humanities

Department of Modern Languages

- Chinese Business
- Chinese Studies
- French
- French with K-12 Teaching Cert.
- German
- German with K-12 Teaching Cert.
- Spanish
- Spanish with K-12 Teaching Cert.
- Spanish Business

Department of Philosophy

- Philosophy

Department of Politics

- Politics

Pre-Professional Programs

- Pre-Law

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Department of Visual Arts

- Studio Art (B.A. or B.F.A.)
- Art History
- Art Education with K-12 Teaching Cert.

Department of Music

- Undergraduate Programs:
- Music
- Music (Business)
- Music Performance
- Music Education with K-12 Teaching Certification

Department of Theatre

- Theatre
- Dance
- Musical Theatre

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

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

TRUE OR FALSE?

Common Myths for Undeclared Students

1. Choosing a major means that I have to say “no” to many other areas of interest.

FALSE – For most academic areas, there are many ways to combine interests in more than one major. Some possibilities include declaring a double major, adding a minor (or minors) to your academic plan, or choosing a concentration. If these are not viable options, you can be intentional about seeking opportunities to develop experience in your areas of interest.

2. What I major in has a direct impact on my future career options.

IT DEPENDS – In some cases, such as applied areas, career fields demand a specific academic path. For example, public school teachers are typically expected to have an education degree, engineers, an engineering degree, and so on. In most cases, however, the relationship is not so clear cut. A major can open the doorway to many career possibilities, and it is up to you to make the most of your experience both in and out of the classroom and apply it to a particular field.

3. Students who declare a major in arts, humanities, or social sciences will not have many career options after graduation.

FALSE – Liberal arts majors are well-prepared – and are hired – for a variety of careers. Messiah College alumni are successful in a variety of areas, such as business, teaching, nonprofits, government, law, medicine, and the helping professions, just to name a few. The specific skill sets you develop in these majors are vitally important to a diverse range of career fields. To learn more about the value of a liberal arts education, consult the Career Center’s [website](#).

4. The majority of students entering college are still undecided about their major.

TRUE – Almost 80% of students entering college are uncertain about what they want to major in, even if they have initially declared a major. And over 50% of first-year students will switch majors at least once before they graduate.* This is a natural part of the exploration process.

5. A career assessment can tell me what major to declare.

FALSE – No assessment can give you a magic answer which will tell you what major to declare or what career to pursue. However, [assessments](#) can help you and your career coach identify patterns or themes of strengths and interests which are indicators of best-fit majors.

6. The most important factor for me to explore as I am considering a major is a potential career field.

FALSE – Knowledge of your own interests, skills, and abilities is just as important as your understanding of potential career options. A career coach can be an excellent resource as you engage in this exploration process. To schedule an appointment, please contact the [Career Center](#).

**Source – “Major Decisions – Pennsylvania State University” by Michael Leonard.*