
Choosing a Major

Career Center
For Vocation & Development



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.

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 about those activities were energizing for you? 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! Consider taking a self-assessment inventory 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 something that suits 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 for you?
- b) **“What Can I Do with a Major in...?”** - These informational sheets are available in the Career Center and on our website: <http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/jobsearch/jobbymajor.html> They are meant to be a starting point for further exploration. They give a basic overview of typical career paths.
- c) **Faculty Members** – Make an appointment to talk with a faculty member who teaches in the department you're considering. What is their perspective? 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 in the post-graduation survey 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?
- e) **Exploratory Courses** – Even after you’ve done all the suggested research, sometimes it’s helpful to 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 counselor about some options.
- f) **Information Interviews & 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 preferred in a given field, as well as any other qualifications. If you’ve tapped your personal network and are still having a difficult time identifying someone, let us help you!

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. In addition to your classes, build your skill sets and breadth of experience by taking advantage of the opportunities available to you – student clubs and organizations, service learning and volunteer work, athletics, off-campus study, internships, and more. What you do with your time will speak volumes to employers and graduate schools, so choose your activities wisely! Sometimes, these are equally, if not more important, than your major itself! 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 much 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 sought by employers.
- 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 counselor 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 counselor.

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 have graduates from this major gone on to do after graduation (employment and/or graduate schools)?

11. Who is the department Chairperson? _____
12. Who is the department Secretary? (important when scheduling appointments!)

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

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

Academic Majors 2008-2009

School of the Arts

Arts Management

Department of Music

Music

Music Education (K-12)

Department of Theatre

Theatre

Department of Visual Arts

Art Education (K-12)

Art History

Studio Art

School of Education & Social Sciences

Department of Education

Early Childhood Education (N-3)

Elementary Education (K-6)

Elementary & Special Education Dual
Certification (K-12)

Department of Human Development & Family Science

Family & Consumer Sciences Education

Human Development & Family Science

Department of Psychology

Biopsychology

Psychology (B.A.)

Psychology (B.S.)

Department of Sociology, Social Work, & Criminal Justice

Criminal Justice

Social Work

Sociology

School of Health & Natural Sciences

Department of Biological Sciences

Biochemistry & Molecular Biology

Biology

Biology with Teaching Certification (K-12)

Biology & Environmental Education Dual
Certification (K-12)

Biopsychology

Environmental Science

Environmental Studies

Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry

Biochemistry & Molecular Biology

Chemistry

Chemistry with Teaching Certification
(K-12)

Department of Health & Human Performance

Adventure Education

Athletic Training

Health & Exercise Science

Health & Physical Education

Health & Physical Education with Teaching
Certification (K-12)

Sport Management

Department of Nursing

Nursing

Department of Nutrition & Dietetics

Nutrition & Dietetics

Pre-Professional Health Programs

Pre-Allied Health Programs

Pre-Medical

Pre-Physical Therapy

School of the Humanities

Humanities

Department of Biblical & Religious Studies

Bible & Religious Studies

Christian Ministries

Department of Communication

Broadcasting

Communication

Department of English

English

English with Teaching Certification (K-12)

Journalism

Department of History

History

History with Social Studies Teaching
Certification (K-12)

Department of Modern Languages

French

French with Teaching Certification (K-12)

German

German with Teaching Certification (K-12)
Spanish
Spanish Business
Spanish with Teaching Certification (K-12)

Department of Philosophy

Philosophy

Department of Politics

Politics

Politics with an M.S. in Public Policy &
Management – Carnegie Mellon
University

**School of Mathematics, Engineering, &
Business**

Department of Engineering

Engineering

Department of Management & Business

Accounting
Business Administration
Business Information Systems
E-Marketing
Economics (B.A.)
Economics (B.S.)
Entrepreneurship
Human Resource Management
International Business
Marketing

Department of Mathematical Sciences

Computer Science
Mathematics
Mathematics with Teaching Certification
(K-12)
Physics

