Choosing a Major


CAREER CENTER
for Vocation & Development

MESSIAH COLLEGE
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/jobsbymajor.html](http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/jobsearch/jobsbymajor.html) These are meant to be a starting point for further exploration with basic overviews 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 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?

e) 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. Ask us about FalconNet, the alumni career network.

f) 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 coach about some options.

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 in practical, relevant settings – 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 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? ____________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________
ACADEMIC OFFERINGS 2010-2011

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
- Arts Management
- Department of Music
  - Music
  - Music Business
  - Music Education
    (Teaching Certification K–12)
  - Music Performance
- Department of Theatre
- Department of Visual Arts
  - Theatre
  - Art Education (Teaching certification K–12)
  - Art History*
  - Studio Art

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, EDUCATION, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
- Department of Education
  - Education with Pre-K–Grade 4
  - Education with Dual Certificate in Pre-K–Grade 4 and Special Education (N – Grade 8)
  - Education with Middle Level, Grades 4–8
- Department of Human Development and Family Science
  - Human Development and Family Science
  - Family and Consumer Sciences Education
    (Teaching Certification K–12)
- Department of Management and Business
  - Accounting
  - Business Administration
  - Business Information Systems
  - Economics
  - International Business
  - Marketing
- Department of Psychology
  - Biopsychology
  - Biopsychology (B.S.)/MSOT in Occupational Therapy – Thomas Jefferson University
  - Psychology
- Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Criminal Justice
  - Criminal Justice
  - Social Work
  - Sociology and Anthropology

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, AND HEALTH
- Department of Biological Sciences
  - Biology
  - Biopsychology
  - Environmental Science
  - Molecular Biology
  - Sustainability Studies
  - Dual Teaching Certification in Biology (7–12) and Environmental Education (K–12)
  - Teaching Certification in Biology (7–12)
- Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
  - Biochemistry
  - Chemistry
  - Teaching Certification in Chemistry (7–12)
- Department of Engineering
  - Engineering
    Biomedical
  - Computer
  - Electrical
  - Environmental
  - Mechanical
- Department of Health and Human Performance
  - Adventure Education
  - Athletic Training
  - Health and Exercise Science
  - Health and Physical Education
    (Teaching Certification K–12)
  - Sport Management
- Department of Informational and Mathematical Sciences
  - Computer Science
  - Mathematics
  - Physics
  - Teaching Certification in Mathematics (7–12)
  - Teaching Certification in Physics (7–12)†
- Department of Nursing
  - Nursing
- Department of Nutrition and Dietetics
  - Nutrition and Dietetics
  - Nutrition and Food Services Management
  - Nutrition Science
  - Pre-Allied Health-variou###s related fields
  - Pre-Dental
  - Pre-Medical-variou###s related fields
  - Pre-Physical Therapy
  - Pre-Veterinary

SCHOOL OF THE HUMANITIES
- Humanities
- Peace and Conflict Studies (Sider Institute)
- Department of Biblical and Religious Studies
  - Biblical and Religious Studies
  - Christian Ministries
- Department of Communication
  - Broadcasting*
  - Communication
- Department of English
  - English
  - Journalism*
  - Teaching Certification in English (7–12)
- Department of History
  - History
  - Teaching Certification in Social Studies (7–12)
- Department of Modern Languages
  - French
  - German
  - Spanish
  - Spanish Business
  - Teaching Certification in French (K–12), German (K–12), and Spanish (K–12)
- Department of Philosophy
  - Philosophy
- Department of Politics
  - Politics
  - Politics (B.A./M.S. in Public Policy and Management) – Carnegie Mellon University
- Pre-Professional Programs
  - Pre-Law

* Portions of this program completed at the Philadelphia Campus
† PA Dept. of Education approval pending Interdisciplinary
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.
   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, nurses, a nursing 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 majored 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: www.messiah.edu/offices/career/liberalArts.html

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 one before they graduate.* This is part of the natural exploration process.

5. A career assessment can tell me what major to declare.
   FALSE – No assessment or inventories 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.

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

CAREER CENTER
for VOCATION & DEVELOPMENT

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