

choosing a college major

What is a major, and how important is it?

- A major is a grouping of classes that focuses on a particular subject or field.
- Your major generally reflects the area of study that you're most interested in and that most closely matches your interests.
- Choosing a major is not the same as preparing for a career, as most majors do not lead to particular jobs. As a result, choosing a major based on a career goal may not be necessary (exceptions include nursing or other health care fields that require very specialized programs). Instead, it's common to choose a major in an area of interest that a student wants to explore in depth through courses and activities.
- To graduate with a particular major, a student needs to take — and earn passing grades in — specific courses recognized by the college as relating to that major.
- Choosing the proper major will be beneficial to you, but your major is not an indicator of future success. To learn more about available majors at your school(s) of interest, visit school Web sites, which should list all academic departments and majors.
- Even though you may select a major on your college application, you're not obligated to complete that major for the duration of your college career. You may change your major at any time. Many students select “undecided” as a major on their college application and then take some time making their formal choices.
- A student does not need to choose a major before being accepted to and/or enrolled in college. At most four-year colleges, students usually are not required to choose a major until the end of the second year, which gives them plenty of time to explore different subjects.
- If you change majors, you must fulfill the requirements of your new major. Additional time may be needed to meet all of the class requirements for the new major.
- If you're interested in studying more than one major, look into the college's policy on having a double major. It's also possible to combine classes from different departments to create an “interdisciplinary” major. For example, if you're interested in Asian studies, you might be able to create a major that includes classes from the religion department, the history department, and the sociology department.
- Truly don't know what to major in? Start off your college career as an “undecided” major, but be sure to attend a school that offers a wide variety of majors from which to choose.

How do I choose my major?

- There are many important things to think about as you start to define your major(s): your skills, interests, and abilities; things you most enjoy learning; the kind of job you want; and the type of lifestyle you want, to name a few.
- Once you've thought about these things, do some research. Search the Web for “What can I do with a major in ...?” worksheets and databases. Check out university career center Web sites, where you'll find links to lots of careers, with information on different work environments and jobs that graduates typically pursue with their particular degrees. You'll also find strategies for navigating your way into particular careers, along with links to the Web sites of profes-

sional organizations related to those careers. Talk to people, read, use career search software, job shadow, interview folks that are working at jobs that interest you; do what you can to learn as much as possible about the subjects you're interested in.

- Next, take your information about the jobs you're interested in and research the educational requirements for those jobs. What kinds of majors are likely to provide a solid foundation for those jobs? Again, talk to teachers, employers, career counselors, school counselors, etc.
- Always remember that regardless of the major you choose, you can still take classes in areas of interest outside your major. You may discover new interests along the way.

General clusters of majors

Humanities

These are the majors that teach a great deal about critical thinking, logical reasoning, problem solving, and the skilled use of language, both written and spoken. Areas of study include comparative literature, English literature, elementary education, radio and television, foreign languages, English, philosophy, communications, religion, classics, speech pathology and audiology, journalism, cinematography, special education, secondary education, family and consumer sciences, physical education, and history.

Social sciences

This is the study of societies and the behavior of the people within those societies. This major prepares a student with the knowledge of how society and individuals function. Areas of study include educational and/or developmental psychology, behavioral sciences, political science, sociology, pre-law, geography, anthropology, psychology, counseling, criminology, economics, social work, and American/African/American Indian studies.

Art

Art teaches the appreciation for and skill development of any number of artistic endeavors. Areas of study include dance, choreography, composition, art history, drama, art education, music, interior design, fine arts, fashion merchandising, graphic arts, and industrial design.

Business

This is a more specialized field of knowledge. Students learn specific skills that focus solely on the topic of choice. Areas of study include accounting, advertising, real estate, insurance, marketing, banking and finance, economics, hotel/restaurant management, business administration/management, health care/hospital administration, small business management, and international business.

Math and science

In addition to math and science, these majors utilize a great deal of logic, problem-solving, and analytical skills. Generally, science subjects require a fair amount of math, but math subjects do not necessarily require much science. Areas of study include forestry, geology, zoology, physiology, environmental science, biomedical engineering, chemistry, biology, statistics, animal sciences, botany, ecology, computer science, genetics, earth science, marine biology, landscape architecture, architecture, physics, and nuclear medicine.

Engineering

This major combines both math and science by using both areas to design and construct a wide variety of things (roads, buildings, bridges, etc.). Areas of study include mechanical engineering, aerospace studies, industrial engineering, industrial arts, chemical engineering, civil engineering, mining, electrical engineering, and environmental engineering.

Health care

This is one of the fastest growing fields, offering a wide variety of options in both career opportunities and length of study. Math and science are important to health care careers, but the depth of study required in those fields will vary depending on the area of study you choose. Areas of study include health education, holistic health, medical technology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, respiratory therapy, pharmacology, dentistry, naturopathy, nursing, public health, radiography.

Vocational

These areas focus on a specific skill and generally take a shorter amount of time to master. Specific schools offer vocational skills and programs. Areas of study include automotive mechanics, automotive body repair, cosmetology, dairy management, construction management, heavy equipment operation, landscaping, engineering technologies (electrical, mechanical, chemical), and veterinary technology.



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