

CHOOSING A MAJOR

As a college student, one of the most common questions you are asked by family members, friends, and classmates is, "What's your major?" If you have not yet declared your major, you may feel uncomfortable responding that you are undeclared and/or undecided. It sometimes seems as if most of your peers already know what they want to do, and that something is "wrong" with you if you have not yet decided on a major. Choosing a major is one of the most important decisions a student is faced with very early in a college career, and many students feel that they are not adequately informed or prepared to declare a major. It is the hope of the staff in Career Services that this guidebook will prove to be a starting point for you in selecting an academic discipline(s) in which to major while a student at UW-Green Bay.

Does My Academic Major Have to Relate to a Career Choice?

Consistently, the staff in Career Services hears students expressing the belief that major and career choice are the same thing. It is true that certain fields do require specific degrees or substantial course work in order to qualify for certification or licensing. These fields include, but are not limited to, professional programs such as Accounting, Education, Social Work, and Nursing. Without a degree in these fields, additional course work completed after graduation or special certificate programs can provide the credentials needed to qualify. However, there are numerous careers that may require a bachelor's degree for entry into the field, but not a specific major. Most employers are concerned with the solid skill base that is gained through a college education. These transferable skills include oral and written communication skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking, organizational skills, and research and analytical skills. The ability to be trained and the ability to adapt to new environments are necessary skills to have for the work force of today and the future. Completing a college education enables you to develop and enhance these skill areas.

For some career fields, such as medicine, law, counseling, pharmacy, etc., graduate or professional school will be required after completing a bachelor's degree. Students should be aware of the admission requirements for the programs they are interested in. Many will have prerequisite course work requirements, but most will not require a specific major. So, for example, medical schools will require a specific core of science courses, but you do not have to major in one of the sciences to qualify for admission. The same is true for many other graduate and professional school programs, though there are some exceptions to this, so it is important to research the requirements as early as possible.

Because most majors are not focused on a specific job or career field, some form of practical experience is very important for making a successful transition to the world of work. Internships allow you to build on the transferable skill base gained through your college education. You then receive focused training and practical experience where very specific content or task skills are developed. So an English major can use an internship to prepare for a career in banking, or a Psychology major can do an internship in the field of human resources. Internships are the primary way for students to gain the practical, related experience that many employers are seeking.

What Should I Consider When Selecting a Major?

Students get overly concerned about selecting the "right" major. The choice of an academic major is an individual and personal choice. As the person declaring the major, you will be accountable for learning the material, completing the papers, conducting the research and taking the exams. Therefore you, and you alone, should decide what you will major in while attending UW-Green Bay.

The best place to begin with your choice of major is to think about your own interests, values, abilities, and personality. Can you imagine dreading to go to class each semester because you are bored by the material or you have no real interest in the field? When you consider the amount of time you spend on concentrated study in this field in which you have majored, interests and a desire to learn the material become critically important. You also need to think about what your goal is in choosing a major. Do you want your major to prepare you for a specific career field? Do you want your major to help you develop a depth of knowledge and skills that you can apply in many different fields of work? Or will your major simply be a subject that you enjoy studying? Not everyone has the same purpose in choosing a major, so it is important to think about what you want to accomplish.

Career Services utilizes several different assessments, including WISCareers, the Strong Interest Inventory, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which can help you learn more about yourself and your options. No “test” or inventory can tell you what you should do, but these tools can be a good place to start for those who are undecided. Before taking an assessment, you should make an appointment with one of the staff members in Career Services to discuss which one would be most appropriate for you. And after taking an assessment, you meet with the career counselor again, to help you interpret the information. There is also a one-credit Career Planning course (Human Development 225) you can take, which is designed to provide you with the knowledge and resources necessary for career decision-making in college. The class sessions and assignments will help you to assess yourself, learn major career development theories, explore career and major options, gather information about the world of work, and establish short-term and long-term goals for career/life planning.

What If I Don't Think I Am Ready to Declare My Major?

As mentioned earlier, the choice of an academic major is not an easy choice. However, many students believe that once they choose a major they are "locked" into that course of study. This is not true. You may change your major as many times as you would like. Declaring a major is never a final choice. A student merely repeats the process by completing a new declaration of major form. There are, however, a few precautions to consider about changing a major too frequently or declaring late in your college career.

The first precaution is that some departments may restrict enrollment in courses to majors only. Other courses may have prerequisites that must be taken before enrollment is possible. If you have not declared your major, there could be a limited number of courses open to you outside of the courses required in the general education program. Another precaution to consider if you declare or change your major late in your college career, is that your date of graduation may also change in order for you to complete the necessary graduation requirements for your new academic program.

This is not to say that you need to rush the decision and choose your major right now. But it is suggested that you do not delay your decision longer than necessary. You may find it easier to procrastinate because you are focused on completing general education requirements, but you need to realize that choosing a major is a decision you will need to make relatively soon – and no one else can make it for you.

Are There Benefits to Declaring My Major If I Am Hesitant?

There are some benefits to declaring a major even if you are not certain yet. When you declare a major, you are assigned an adviser in the department. This gives you an opportunity to get to know the department's procedures and policies gain first hand information about which courses to take, and receive assistance and advice from an instructor familiar with the department and the curriculum. You will also know the recommended sequences in which to take courses, and how frequently they are offered.

Another benefit you receive as a declared major is access to student organizations, honor societies, scholarships and departmental activities. All of these things can help you network more effectively with faculty, alumni, and other students in the department, who can provide a wealth of information based on their experiences. In addition to the people you meet through these groups and activities, you can connect with UW-Green Bay graduates and other community members through the Phoenix Network. The Phoenix Network is a computerized, web-accessible database of volunteers that are willing to assist students by discussing their career and education experiences. To access the Phoenix Network, log in to PRO from the UW-Green Bay Career Services web site:
www.uwgb.edu/careers

Declaring a Major at UW-Green Bay

After you have made a decision about which major to declare, you must submit a completed Declaration of Degree Plan form, signed by the designated academic department representative, to the Registrar's office. Students seeking admission to the majors in Accounting, Social Work, Communication, Education, Music, Nursing, Human Development, Psychology, or Business Administration must meet special admission criteria to be accepted as a major.

In order to meet the university requirement of an interdisciplinary academic program, students who declare a disciplinary major must also declare an interdisciplinary minor by the time they have 62 credit hours in progress. Students with an interdisciplinary major are not required to have a minor.

A complete list of majors, minors and areas of emphasis is available in the **UW-Green Bay Undergraduate Catalog**, available on-line at: <http://www.uwgb.edu/catalog/undrgrad/programs.htm>

- **Interdisciplinary Majors and Minors:** <http://www.uwgb.edu/catalog/undrgrad/interdisciplinary.htm>
- **Disciplinary Majors and Minors:** <http://www.uwgb.edu/catalog/undrgrad/disciplinary.htm>

You are responsible for planning your course of study and major with the assistance and consultation of your academic adviser. You should meet with your adviser each semester before registering for classes, and regularly check your degree progress through the Student Information System. Many majors also have specific areas of emphasis within the program. Be sure to consult the college catalog and the academic department to get specific information about program requirements, areas of emphasis, and course offerings.

Resources Available from Career Services

If you would like to learn more about major and career options, there are numerous resources available on the Career Services web site (www.uwgb.edu/careers) and in the resource library in Career Services office (SS 1916). For more information, or for assistance with choosing your major, you may make an appointment to meet with one of the professional staff members by calling the office, 920-465-2163, or stopping in during regular office hours: M-F, 7:45 am to 4:30 pm.