

CHOOSING A MAJOR

Developed by Career Services at the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay
SS 1600 | 920.465.2163 | careers@uwgb.edu | www.uwgb.edu/careers

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 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 picked 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.

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. 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 skills that are gained through a college education, not just the courses taken. 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, and many others, 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 considering. 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. Therefore, 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 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 a staff member in Career Services to discuss which one would be most appropriate for you. After taking an assessment, you will meet with the career counselor 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. 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 networking tools such as LinkedIn. Once you create a LinkedIn account, you can join the UW-Green Bay Alumni group and UW-Green Bay Career Services group, and search for other groups and organizations related to your field.

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. Note that for some majors, such as Social Work, Communication, and Education, students must meet special admission criteria to be accepted as a major. See department websites for specific information.

Majors and Minors

See a complete and current list of majors and minors in the UW-Green Bay Undergraduate Catalog and link to each department's webpage.

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). 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 at 920-465-2163.