

An aerial photograph of the Messiah University campus. The central focus is a large, multi-story brick building with a prominent white steeple. The building is surrounded by lush green lawns and mature trees. In the background, a baseball field is visible, along with other campus buildings and a parking lot. The entire scene is set against a backdrop of rolling green hills under a clear sky.

CHOOSING A MAJOR: tips and strategies

Viewing this in print? To access the links throughout this document, view the electronic version at messiah.edu/careerguide.

Choosing a college major is an important decision to make, and you may have 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, engineers are expected to have an engineering 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.

Ultimately, your academic major is just one factor in determining your future career path and job prospects.

Other factors include breadth and diversity of coursework, out-of-classroom activities, skills acquired through related experiences such as internships and personal fit with your natural talents and abilities.



The Career and Professional Development Center (CPDC) is here to help. Our career coaches are prepared to walk alongside you as you discern your next steps.

Finding a fit

The following tips will help you to find a major that’s a good fit for you:

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 it was about those activities that was energizing for you?** Try and get as specific as you can. 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!



IN CONJUNCTION WITH A CAREER COACH AT MESSIAH, UTILIZE THE FOCUS SYSTEM THROUGH THE CPDC TO GO A BIT MORE IN DEPTH WITH THIS EXERCISE.

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 a major that best aligns with your interests, strengths and abilities. Below are some suggestions for gathering more information.

USE THE “EXPLORING A MAJOR” EXERCISE LATER IN THIS GUIDE TO DOCUMENT YOUR PROGRESS!

- ♦ **Courses related to major(s) of interest** – Carefully read through the full [list of majors](#) available at Messiah University. Identify the majors that strike your interest or that you might like to know more about. Eliminate the majors you would definitely not want to pursue due to lack of fit with interests/abilities. Be open to majors you may have never heard of or considered. Notice any themes? Patterns? Now, take time to read through the **course requirements and descriptions** for those majors you liked. How do they measure against one another based on what you know about yourself?
- ♦ **Career resources by major** – Wondering what career paths are more often associated with the majors you’re considering? This resource on the CPDC’s website will give you this information, in addition to employment and graduate school statistics of Messiah alumni in any given major.
- ♦ **Academic departments/faculty members** – First, check out the [website\(s\) of departments](#) that house the majors you’re considering. Make an appointment to talk with a faculty member who teaches in the department – they’re eager to talk with you! What suggestions do they have? What strengths and abilities do they see as necessary for the major?
- ♦ **Upperclass students** – Get an insider’s perspective by consulting a junior or senior in the major. Ask a faculty representative for recommendations of students. Why did they choose the major? What do they like/dislike about it?
- ♦ **Information interviews and 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 strongly preferred in a given field, as well as any other qualifications. If you’ve tapped your personal network and you are still having a difficult time identifying someone, let us help you. Connect with Messiah alumni by using the [alumni search tool on LinkedIn](#). If you have questions or need assistance, talk with a career coach in the CPDC.
- ♦ **Exploratory courses** – Even after you’ve done all the suggested research, it’s often helpful to sit in on a class or 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 how to do this.





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. We encourage you to make the most of the complete experience by applying knowledge gained from the classroom in practical, relevant settings – [student clubs and organizations](#), [service learning and volunteer work](#), [athletics](#), [study abroad](#), [internships](#), [undergraduate research](#), work study and more. Experience is what sets college graduates apart in the job search process. Here are some other things to keep in mind:

- ♦ **Value of a liberal arts education** – There is lifelong, practical 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 and today’s dynamic workplace.
- ♦ **Transferable skills** – Virtually all employers want to hire someone with 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/professional experience to complement what you will learn in the classroom.



Getting started

- Review** the complete list of Messiah University majors in this guide.
- Circle** any majors that are of interest to you.
- Cross out** those that you are confident you are not interested in pursuing.
- If you don’t know what a particular major entails but the title is intriguing to you, **put a question mark** beside that major to explore it further.

Academic information

- For the majors in your “interested” and “need more info” categories, **click on each major in our [academic program listing](#)** to find a list of course requirements for that major, making sure to read through course descriptions. If a significant amount of the coursework seems uninteresting, this could be a sign that it’s not a good fit for you.
- Access the [department websites](#)** for each major to learn more about prospective topics of study and future opportunities in the field.
- Take notes** for each major on what you see as the academic pros and cons.



ONE WAY TO COMBINE INTERESTS FROM MULTIPLE AREAS IS TO CONSIDER ADDING A MINOR TO YOUR MAJOR. FIND MINORS OFFERED AT MESSIAH IN THE [ACADEMIC PROGRAM LISTING](#).



Connecting majors to careers

- **Review** popular or more typical career paths associated with the majors you're considering on the CPDC's [career planning by major](#) website. On this same site, you will find data for paths Messiah alumni have pursued relative to their majors.
- **Take notes** for each major on what you see as the career related pros and cons.

Prioritizing your options

- **Prioritize** the majors on your "consideration list" based on the academic and career information you have gathered. Which rise to the top of your list and why?
- **Make an appointment with a career coach** in the CPDC to discuss your options. Also, make appointments with chairs in the departments that house the majors at the top of your list. They can offer a helpful and unique perspective based on their intimate knowledge of the major.



Digging a little deeper

Use the following questions as you explore each major you are considering. Discuss with your academic advisor and/or a career coach.

Major option: _____ **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?
4. Are there any prerequisite 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 catalog) appeal to you? Why?
7. What about the major is concerning or not appealing to you?
8. What interests and abilities are critical for students to succeed in this major?
9. Does this major require any time off campus for activities such as internships and/or study abroad?
10. What are sample internships that students in this major have completed? (Find out from the CPDC.)
11. What have graduates from this major gone on to do after graduation (employment and/or graduate schools)?
12. Who is the department chair?
13. What steps do you need to take to learn more about this major?
14. What other majors might be similar to this one?

80+ majors

To search a full list of our majors, plus minors and concentrations, visit messiah.edu/majors.

Art and Design (SACS)

- Art Education (K-12) (B.S.)
- Digital Media (B.A.) – Interactive Design
- Graphic Design (B.F.A.)
- Studio Art (B.A.)
- Studio Art (B.F.A.)

Biblical, Religious and Philosophical Studies (SACS)

- Biblical and Religious Studies (B.A.)
- Christian Ministries and Leadership (B.A.)
- Philosophy (B.A.)
- Youth Ministries (B.A.)

Biological Sciences (SSEH)

- Biology (B.S.)
- Biology with Secondary Teaching Certification (B.S.)
- Biopsychology (B.S.)
- Environmental Science (B.S.)
- Molecular Biology (B.S.)
- Sustainability Studies (B.A.) – Conservation and Agriculture

Business (SACS)

- Accounting (B.S.)
- Business Administration (B.A.) †
- Business Administration (B.S.)
- Economic Development (B.A.)
- Economics (B.S.)
- Economics (B.A.)
- Finance (B.S.)
- International Business (B.S.)
- Marketing (B.S.)

Chemistry and Biochemistry (SSEH)

- Biochemistry (B.A.)
- Biochemistry (B.S.)
- Biochemistry (B.S.) – American Chemical Society Certified
- Chemistry (B.A.)
- Chemistry (B.S.)
- Chemistry (B.S.) – American Chemical Society Certified
- Chemistry with Secondary Teaching Certification (B.A.)

Communication (SACS)

- Broadcasting and Journalism (B.A.)
- Communication (B.A.)
- Digital Media (B.A.) – Digital Video and Story
- Film and Media Arts (B.A.)
- Public Relations (B.A.)

Computer and Information Science (SSEH)

- Computer and Information Science (B.S.)
- Cybersecurity (B.S.)
- Digital Media (B.A.) – Mobile Application and Game Design

Education (SACS)

Programs leading to certification in grades K-12 and 7-12 are housed in their primary academic department.

- Education with Teaching Certification in Grades PreK-4 (B.S.)
- Education with Dual Teaching Certification in Grades PreK-4 and Special Education PreK-8 (B.S.)
- Education with Dual Certification (Grades PreK-4) and Special Education (PreK-12) (B.S.)
- Special Education N-12 with Teacher Certification PreK-12 (B.S.)

Engineering (SSEH)

- Biomedical Engineering (B.S.B.M.E.)
- Civil Engineering (B.S.C.E.)
- Electrical Engineering (B.S.E.E.)
- Engineering (B.S.E., 3 concentrations)
- Mechanical Engineering (B.S.M.E.)
- Robotics Engineering (B.S.R.E.)

English (SACS)

- English (B.A.)
- English with Secondary Teaching Certification (B.A.)

Health, Nutrition and Exercise Science (SSEH)

- Applied Health Science (B.S.)
- Athletic Training (Accelerated) (B.S.)
- Health and Physical Education (K-12) (B.A.)
- Nutrition and Dietetics (B.S.)
- Sport Management (B.A.)

History, Politics and International Relations (SACS)

- History (B.A.)
- History with Secondary Social Studies Teaching Certification (B.A.)
- Politics and International Relations (B.A.)

- Politics and International Relations (B.A.) with M.S. in Public Policy and Management (B.A.)
- Public History (B.A.)

Human Development and Family Science (SACS)

- Family and Consumer Sciences Education (K-12) (B.S.)
- Human Development and Family Science (B.A.)

Mathematics, Physics and Statistics (SSEH)

- Actuarial Science (B.S.)
- Mathematics (B.A.)
- Mathematics with Secondary Teaching Certification (B.A.)
- Physics (B.A.)
- Physics (B.S.)
- Physics with Secondary Teaching Certification (B.A.)

Language, Literature and Writing (SACS)

- Chinese Studies (B.A.)
- Chinese Studies with K-12 Teaching Certification (B.A.)
- Spanish (B.A.)
- Spanish with K-12 Teaching Certification (B.A.)

Music (SACS)

- Music (B.A.)
- Music (Music and Worship) (B.A.)
- Music Education (K-12) (B.S.)
- Music Performance (B.M.)

Nursing (SSEH)

- Nursing (B.S.N.)

Pre-Health Professions Advising (SSEH)

- Pre-Chiropractic
- Pre-Dentistry
- Pre-Forensic Science
- Pre-Medical (D.O. and M.D.)
- Pre-Occupational Therapy
- Pre-Optometry
- Pre-Pharmacy (3+ and 4-year)
- Pre-Physical Therapy
- Pre-Physician Assistant
- Pre-Podiatry
- Pre-Veterinary

Students interested in health careers receive specialized advising to develop a course of study that ensures they meet all undergraduate prerequisites necessary for graduate school admittance.

Psychology (SACS)

- Biopsychology (B.S.)
- Psychology (B.A.)
- Psychology (B.S.)

Criminal Justice (SACS)

- Criminal Justice (B.A.)

Sociology (SACS)

- Sociology and Anthropology (B.A.)
- Sustainability Studies (B.A.) – Community Development

Social Work (SACS)

- Social Work (B.S.W.)

Theatre and Dance (SACS)

- Dance (B.A.)
- Digital Media (B.A.) – Church Media
- Musical Theatre (B.F.A.)
- Theatre (B.A.)

Interdisciplinary majors

- Biopsychology (B.S.)
- Digital Media (B.A.)
- Peace and Conflict Studies (B.A.)
- Sustainability Studies (B.A.)

3+ Partner Programs

- International Relations (B.A.)/M.S. in Public Policy and Management – Carnegie Mellon University

Accelerated Programs

- Athletic training (B.S. in applied health science with pre-athletic training concentration and MSAT), 5 years
- Business Administration (Bachelor's/MBA) – 5 year accelerated
- Occupational therapy (B.S. in applied health science OR psychology with pre-occupational therapy concentration and MSOT), 5 years

† This major is a secondary major only. Students cannot declare it as their sole major.

SACS School of the Arts, Culture and Society

SSEH School of Science, Engineering and Health