

Academic Decision Points: The Sophomore Year

Major impact!

Choosing your major is one of the most exciting decisions you will make at Dickinson. It is also one of the great privileges of a liberal arts education. **You** get to discover and define your interests. **You** get to determine your course of study. And **you** have access to a village of professors, staff and administrators who are eager to help!

Dickinson offers more than 40 academic programs. This may seem overwhelming! In high school, most American students take courses in only a handful of subjects—which means that dozens of new areas are now available for you to explore.

In the midst of all this complexity, our advice about choosing your major is simple:

- **Think from the inside out!** Start with what you love to do. What intellectual pursuits provide the most “serious fun?”
- **Read** the Bulletin and **explore** department websites.
- **Talk!** To your advisor, other professors, fellow students, and members of the Dickinson community.
- **Take courses!** You won’t be sure about anything until you have firsthand experience.
- **Talk again!** The more you discover, the more you will have to say...and the more help we will be able to offer.

Thinking from the inside out

We recommend that you “think from the inside out” for two important reasons. First, if you can explain to yourself and others why you enjoy certain kinds of intellectual activities, you will be able to discover new opportunities in our curriculum. You probably don’t know all the possibilities that are available to you.

Choosing a Major—Myths

- Your major determines your career.
- Your outside or lifelong interests have nothing to do with choosing your major.
- You shouldn’t talk to a prof until you’ve made up your mind.

‘Serious Fun’ Matters

Sometimes, we all have to work to be disciplined. But if you’re not having fun, you probably want to talk to your advisor. Dickinson profs didn’t find their way here by accident! They love what they do, and they can help you find the serious fun in the program that’s right for you.

Second, many people have misconceptions about academic disciplines—misconceptions that may extend to ideas about future careers. We have a variety of experts on campus who can guide you to

the best possible information: this is one reason you chose to come to Dickinson. On the other hand, **you** are the campus expert when it comes to you and your interests!

Unsure about the differences between Bio and Biochem? We have dozens of PhDs ready to answer questions. Anxious about the marketability of a degree in sociology? Talk to your profs, our Career Development staff, fellow students, and our alumni! (In fact, the market is strong and opportunities are multiplying!)

Ultimately, the decision is yours to make. Get informed, get serious about your “serious fun,” and get going!

Talking the talk

As you gain clarity about your interests and learn more about our offerings, you will benefit enormously by reaching out to people around the campus community.

- Your advisor will be able to help you address specific options as well as to connect with professors in other departments.
- Faculty members in specific departments can provide deep insight about their fields, explain requirements, and advise about study abroad opportunities.
- Fellow students may have tips about favorite electives and professors.
- Alumni can share the benefit of their experiences—in part by explaining how their studies at Dickinson enhanced their professional development and career satisfaction.

Dickinson’s liberal arts tradition puts **you** in charge of the decision-making process: you gather advice and information, and you reflect on your strengths and interests. But we encourage you to make use of our resources so you can make the best possible decisions!

A brief word about your future career

Here and across the country, many students are anxious about how the choice of a major may affect future career opportunities. Our view is that *some* level of concern is rational and appropriate. In fact, we devote a great deal of attention to this and related issues!

For these very reasons, we encourage you to respond to any ‘pre-professional anxiety’ related to your major by following the advice we are providing here. At Dickinson, the Office of Academic Advising and the Office of Career Development work together closely to

Working with the Career Center—Myths

- The Career Center is only for future doctors, lawyers & MBAs
- You should have a career plan before you make an appointment.
- First-years and sophomores can’t get internships.

assure that you have access to the best possible guidance.

Sometimes students assume a one-to-one correspondence between a given major and a future career outcome—a degree in economics, say, and a career in finance. It is true that certain graduate programs and professional fields require specific training, and we encourage you to investigate the decision about your major from all angles. At the same time, however, it is important to remember that such *no such one-to-one correspondence exists*. The way you approach your academic endeavors—the quality of the energy you invest and the nature of the experiences you accumulate—will be at least as important as your field of academic specialization.

Survey your options and pursue the *most interesting* choice available! You will find yourself becoming more engaged, having more fun, and developing knowledge and contacts that will prepare you for... the most interesting choice that becomes available *next*! Imagine branching decision points and social networks: 21st-century career paths are anything but linear, and your adaptability is one reason (among many!) that your liberal arts education carries the value it does.