

**Discover What Matters:
The Sophomore Year at Dickinson**

Contents

Welcome Back!	2
Academic Decision Points	3
Major impact	3
Thinking from the inside out	3
Talking the talk	4
A brief word about your future career	4
Think twice about double majoring	5
The dreaded ‘sophomore slump’—myths & realities, tips & advice	6
Get to know your new advisor	7
Opportunities in Student Life	8
Student Organizations	8
Student Leadership Retreats	8
Governance and Event Planning	8
Mentoring Opportunities	9
Global Study	11
Career Development	12
Civic Engagement	14
Acknowledgements	15

Welcome Back!

Your sophomore year at Dickinson offers an exciting range of experiences, whether in the classroom, around campus, or beyond. The good news is that you're now a seasoned expert: you've met hundreds of other students (bright and dynamic, one and all), you know what to expect from the college calendar (how much material can you actually read during reading days?), and you know your way around (meet at the Biblio after Clarke Forum?). Overall, you've accumulated a new store of hard-won wisdom about matters great and small.

As you move forward, you'll find that the sophomore year is about *discovering what matters*. The discovery process will be different for each student, and it will vary from one area of your life to another, but overall the sophomore year at Dickinson is unified by themes such as continuing exploration, decision-making, and balancing plans for the future with experiences in the here-and-now. Sometimes, determining what really matters may involve an exhilarating choice to add something new. Other times it may involve a difficult decision to let something go. Despite individual differences in the discovery process, the themes addressed during the sophomore year connect directly to the College's mission by *preparing aspiring students for engaged and fulfilling lives of accomplishment, leadership and service to their professions, to their communities, to the nation, and to the world*.

To help you navigate, the Office of Academic Advising, Student Life, the Career Center, and the Center for Global Study and Engagement have put together this short booklet. Remember that a guide like this is only the beginning. Our goal is to help you jumpstart your year by addressing important questions that many students share, but your best resource will always be other real, live Dickinsonians. Come visit us! Talk to your profs! Talk to your friends! Sit down for a heart-to-heart with a junior or senior! You have decisions to make, and you'll find the process easier and more fun if you collaborate.

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 **faculty advisor** will be able to help you address specific options as well as to connect with professors in other departments.
- **Profs** in specific departments can provide deep insight about their fields, explain requirements, and advise about study abroad opportunities.
- **Fellow students** will have tips about favorite electives and professors.
- Your **college dean** can help you connect with even more people and resources.
- **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. At the same time, 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

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.

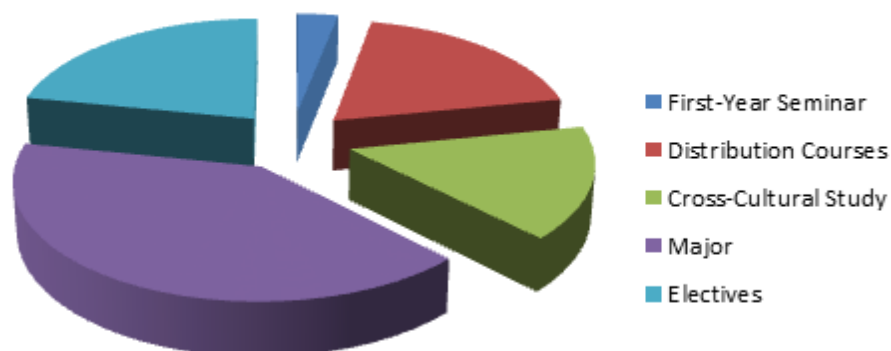
Office of Academic Advising and the Office of Career Development work together closely to ensure that you have access to the best possible guidance.

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 contacts that will prepare you for... the most interesting choice that becomes available *next*! Twenty-first-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.

Think twice about double majoring

For some students, a double major can provide a valuable opportunity to develop a rich field of knowledge. However, double-majoring is not for everyone, and you should weigh carefully the potential advantages and disadvantages of taking this route through the Dickinson curriculum.



A Typical Dickinson Education with a Single Major

First, remember that you don't necessarily need to major in a particular field to gain exposure to it. You can take courses that address your interests without committing to a full program of specialization. In fact, this approach may offer the advantage of allowing you to *selectively* enhance your expertise in a particular area. Bear in mind also that the Dickinson curriculum only requires 32 credits for graduation. Because your first-year seminar, distribution requirements, and cross-cultural studies may

account for 12 credits, you should think carefully about how two majors will limit your flexibility. That flexibility will matter! For example, it may affect your decision about studying abroad. Will you go abroad? For one semester or two?

Finally, here and across the country research indicates that students are pursuing double majors as a way to distinguish themselves with graduate schools or on the job market. A double major will only distinguish you if the decision makes sense because of your particular interests and aspirations! Excellence in a single field will likely prove more of an advantage than adequacy in two. Talk to members of the Dickinson community about whether a double major is the right decision for *you*. Useful resources include your advisor, your college dean, staff at the Career Center, or the Center for Global Study and Engagement—come talk to us!

The dreaded ‘sophomore slump’—myths & realities, tips & advice

At Dickinson, most sophomores don’t experience an academic slump. Instead, the vast majority of students tend to earn higher grades as they advance towards graduation. This is good news! If you invest a consistent level of effort and seek a high degree of engagement, your academic performance will improve as you gain experience.

Of course, some students may find themselves drifting or even struggling. If you experience this, we are ready to help.

- **Talk to your advisor or your dean as soon as possible!** You have already proven that you have the tools to succeed. Most often, sophomore success depends on interest and engagement. Come talk with us so we can help you connect to the right resources around campus. College is demanding, but you should always be able to find the *fun* in your “serious fun.”
- **Now is the time to ask big questions!** Sometimes, sophomores report that they feel overwhelmed either because the novelty of the college experience has worn off or because the gravity of future decisions (life after college!) has grown distracting. Your sophomore year is exactly the right time to confront such issues. In fact—even if you find your second year to be challenging—you will quite likely look back on it as a period of personal growth and achievement.
- **You don’t have to answer big questions by yourself!** Talk to friends and upper-level students. Reach out to a trusted professor. Visit the Career Center. Sit down with your RA. One way people succeed in overcoming obstacles is by gathering a variety of outside opinions. *Doing so will help you define your own sense of purpose.*

Most students at Dickinson earn higher grades as they progress towards graduation.

Finally....get to know your new advisor!

At Dickinson, your First-Year advisor gets to know you quite well; this is one reason our First-Year Seminar program is so successful. The working relationship that you develop with your major advisor is just as important! Because you may not have a course with your new advisor every semester, you should take extra initiative to meet with your advisor on a regular basis.

Of course you need to focus on your academic progress. In addition, however, you should share important news and developments. Did you have a life-changing internship or service-trip? Did you discover a new favorite course or area of inquiry? These things matter! The clearer you can be about your interests and aspirations, the better your advisor will be able to offer guidance.

Everyone at Dickinson wants you to succeed—but only you can define what success means to you.

Opportunities in Student Life

Getting INVOLVED at Dickinson as a Sophomore

The first year and senior year are not the only times when you can join, discover and lead student organizations. Now is the time to get involved and make an impact on campus! Getting involved not only gives **you** the opportunity to contribute to the Dickinson community, it also allows you to learn more about yourself – your talents, skills, and values.

Student Involvement

Dickinson has over 130 student organizations that **you** can be a part of! Simply visit <http://www.dickinson.edu/student-life/getting-involved/> to learn more about the variety of options available ranging from club sports, community service organizations, performing arts, Greek life, and lots more.

Our advice about getting involved:

- It is better to be **deeply involved** with fewer organizations, than barely involved in many
- This is **your** chance to become more connected to Dickinson
- Remember the importance of **trying new things** – there's no better time than college to step out of your comfort zone.
- Campus **involvement builds** lasting **friendships**

Governance & Event Planning

Becoming a leader on campus will help provide **you** with skills that will last a lifetime and you will be able to carry your experiences at Dickinson with you wherever you go.

Class Senators:

Candidacy requires 50 student signatures from your respective class. All Senators are required to attend weekly Student Senate meetings (every Tuesday evening from 6-8) and serve on at least one Senate Standing Committee. There are eight (8) Senators per class.

Class Officers:

Candidacy requires 75 student signatures from your respective class. Class Officers are a group of students that plan extracurricular events for their class during the academic year. Except for the Class President, class officers DO NOT serve on the Student Senate, though all class officers have full speaking privileges at all Senate meetings, should they choose to attend. Other Class Officers may also run for Class Senator.

Position Descriptions

Class President - The Class President presides over weekly meetings, prepares agenda items, and delegates tasks as necessary. The Class President shall strive to develop good organizational and communication skills and display leadership qualities in representing his/her class, as well as acting as a liaison to the campus community. The Class President must attend every Senate meeting (every Tuesday evening, 6-8) as well as the Student Senate Retreat in September.

Vice President of the Class - The roles of the Class Vice President vary year-to-year. Usually they assist with planning and executing events.

Vice President of Finance- The VP of Finance is responsible for all financial transactions of the class. This student shall correspond regularly with the Senate Treasurer and the Senate Bookkeeper to manage the finances of the class. The *VP of Finance* is critical to planning the class budget for events and securing the class fundraising account each year.

Vice President of Our Dickinson-The VP of Our Dickinson represents the sophomore class on the *Our Dickinson* Committee. The *Our Dickinson* Committee consists of a representative from each class year and members from the general student body. Students work on events that develop a sense of Dickinson spirit and pride by promoting the history and traditions of the college.

Mentoring Opportunities

Mentors serve as an excellent resource for students as they begin navigating their way through college life. Both faculty and student mentors strive to promote intellectual, social and personal development during their entire first year at Dickinson.

FIRST-YEAR MENTOR

The First-Year Mentor (FY Mentor) provides an opportunity for upper-level students to help new students experience a positive transition to college. The FY Mentors will be assigned to one First-Year Interest (FIG) Group and act as a guide through new student orientation and throughout the first year of college. Mentors offer peer insight into academic and social life at college, as well as help introduce students to activities and events on campus.

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COORDINATOR (FY COORDINATOR)

If you are interested in crafting the orientation and first-year experience for future student consider being an FY Coordinator. As a FY Coordinator, you get the chance to supervise and train a team of First-

Year mentors and have oversight over new student orientation. You would have the chance to shape the experience for future Dickinsonians.

LEARNING COMMUNITY COORDINATOR

A Learning Community Coordinator (LCC) is an upper-level student who works with faculty and the Associate Provost for First-Year Programs to help create and sustain a successful learning community. In the fall semester, LCCs work closely to support faculty efforts to guide and shape the learning communities through their work within and across particular First-Year seminars. LCCs play a faculty support role in supporting and facilitating residence-hall-based programs to explore the themes of the learning community.

RESIDENTIAL ADVISOR

RAs are intellectual, academic, and social role models who work to create an intellectually engaged diverse student community. Learn more about the Resident Advisor position.

Global Study

One of the unique aspects of coming to Dickinson is being part of a peer group with bold and wonderful ideas of how they will personalize and “own” one of Dickinson’s mantras: Engage the world.

Dickinson’s curriculum and community is globally -focused and you have had many opportunities to start broadening your perspective from the day you stepped on to this campus. In addition to taking advantage of all that the college the vibrant Carlisle community have to offer, many students (55 percent of you!) will choose to study off campus before they graduate. And, most of you will chose a Dickinson Program. Now is the time to set goals and priorities and put your global study plans into action!

Studying off-campus is a selective process and it is not too early to start understanding the eligibility requirements for the programs in which you are most interested (GPA, language, etc.). All students are expected to have declared a major before applying for a program; furthermore, many programs have important language pre-requisites. Make sure you are on track to meet the language pre-requisite for your program(s). Additionally, you also have to demonstrate that you have been adhering to Dickinson’s community standards. Before you begin the application process for study off-campus, you will do a significant amount of independent research and preparation. This means, understanding your options by consulting the [Education Abroad section of Center for Global Study and Engagement’s \(CGSE\) website](#), attending a mandatory Abroad Prep session, speaking to your academic advisor, attending a program specific info session and/or meeting individually with an education abroad advisor in the CGSE. Think carefully and critically about where you want to study and how your program choices align with your academic goals at Dickinson! You may open only one program application per term.

Important questions to ask yourself as you decide on an off-campus study plan that’s right for you include:

- Do I want to spend a year, semester or summer abroad or go abroad as part of a Globally Integrated course or Mosaic (or a combination)?
- How will I be able to continue progress towards my major and graduation requirements while studying off campus?
- How will the program I choose allow me to expand the academic offerings I currently have? (In other words, what can I get there that I can’t get here?)
- How will I be able to integrate within the host community and am I ready to be pushed outside of my comfort zone?
- How can the program I choose help me strengthen my world language skills?
- How will the program I choose support any special interests I may wish to pursue such as independent study, research or an internship?
- How will the program I chose help me work toward my career goals?

Consider these questions carefully and seek out the resources and support you need to make bold choices. Thus, speak with your professors, your academic advisors, your fellow students and advisors global ambassadors and staff within the CGSE for a spectrum of information and viewpoints. Also consult the [CGSE FAQ page](#) for answers to some of sophomores’ most commonly asked questions.

The Career Development Perspective

We want to talk to you...about you, and you don't have to have all the answers (or any of them!) before you visit us. In fact, we hope you to bring us lots of questions.

Selecting a Major:

As a sophomore, it's not necessary to know what you want to do for the rest of your life in order to select a major. The critical thing is to select something you are seriously interested in and have the capacity to do well at. Employers and graduate schools are almost universally more interested in how well you have done than exactly what it is you studied. So choose a major based on what YOU want and what interests YOU, not what someone else tells you to do, or thinks is best for you.

This may sound like very general advice, and no different to what you may hear from the faculty and others at the College. But consider this: you are in a liberal arts environment that emphasizes the development of critical faculties rather than training for a particular job. Most college graduates are hired not for their majors but for their potential, and for the most important qualities that employers value- critical reasoning, strong quantitative skills, creativity, excellent writing and presentation skills, and first-class research ability.

Career choice is just that- a choice. That choice is not confined by the major selected.

Career Exploration:

Sophomore year is an excellent time to begin to explore possible career fields, long before there is any need to commit. Start by meeting with a counselor to examine your interests and ideas- or generate some, if you are totally unsure. Many sophomores think they are the only one who doesn't have it figured out- you are NOT! But, by starting to explore now, you can begin to develop ideas and test them out while still in College.

It is also a great time to connect, with the help of a counselor, with alumni volunteers in the fields in which you may have an interest. You can talk to them about their profession- why they chose it; what they enjoy or don't; what is necessary to be successful. All the questions you'd like to ask, but didn't know you could. And the alumni are EXTREMELY receptive to talking with students just starting out on their career journey. After all, most of them can remember being in your shoes, and either got similar help, or wish they had.

Career Programs:

In addition to meeting with a counselor and talking with alumni volunteers, you will find Career Development offering numerous presentations and workshops through the year. Almost all of these are open to you, and several are specifically for sophomores. Some focus on skill building (e.g. "Internships for Sophomores") while others focus on career fields (e.g. "Activism in Action: Careers in Social Justice").

All of them can be potentially useful to you, either as launching pads for your ideas, or building on the things you have already done.

Internships:

Sophomores often have lots of questions about the importance of internships. The word itself causes problems- does it mean any summer work; can it be in the academic year; does it have to be recognized by the college; does the employer/sponsor have to officially call it that; what if it is unpaid; are there so many hours it has to last? The short answer is- talk to a counselor in the career office! There are many different forms of internships, and other kinds of experiences that can be just as valuable. What is common to all of them is that they are opportunities to try out fields, to gain some experience, and to help you see more clearly where you want to go.

Almost every student at Dickinson will have at least one “internship” during their four years, with many having multiple experiences. Not only can they be good resume- and skill-builders, they can also be a great source of references. Most importantly, though, they can really help you figure out where you see yourself in the future, and help you to get there.

Get Involved:

Everyone at Dickinson feels so busy. Everyone feels they don’t have time to do all they want to. But you have to be an agent for your own future. Career Development isn’t “required”, and we don’t give you a grade. Some students put off connecting with us because it all seems so far off; some because they think we couldn’t help them with their particular interest; and others because they don’t know where to start. It’s never a waste of time to meet with a counselor and talk through your ideas, develop a plan, or just let us help you get started. The key is to make an appointment or come to a presentation- the key is to get involved.

You are not closing any doors at this point- you are probably opening a lot of new ones. You are not committing to anything, you are just taking a look. You are not making a decision, you are evaluating options. Career Development is ready to help you with your journey.

To make an appointment: call 245 1740; or come to the ground floor of Biddle House.

Civic Engagement

A Dickinson education prepares you for a life of engaged citizenship in many ways. You have a broad range of opportunities, both in and out of the classroom, on campus and in the wider community, to make a difference.

In your sophomore year, you can explore new ways to be engaged in your community, and to prepare yourself deeply for a life of engaged citizenship. For some, this will mean active involvement in volunteer service through CommServ, APO or participation in a service trip. For others, this will mean choosing a course that offers community-based service learning or a course that helps them better understand a critical issue locally or globally. For others still, it may mean taking a leadership role in a campus organization, learning and practicing new skills to contribute to the campus community. The critical dimension for sophomores is to begin to connect your educational opportunities at Dickinson to the world beyond “the limestone walls,” and particularly how you want to use your education to prepare yourself to make a positive difference in the world.

Acknowledgments

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In this regard, we are grateful to Dean Sarah Bolton of Williams College for her permission to make use of Williams' SophomOrientation guide. We will continue to look to SophomOrientation as a model as we endeavor to enhance our own work at Dickinson.