

KEYS TO SUCCESS

# CHOOSING A MAJOR



## Lebanon Valley College

EDWARD AND LYNN BREEN  
CENTER FOR GRADUATE SUCCESS

Lebegern Learning Commons | Lower Level, Mund College Center

[www.lvc.edu/breen-center](http://www.lvc.edu/breen-center)  
717-867-6560 | [breencenter@lvc.edu](mailto:breencenter@lvc.edu)

## Developing Your Career Path

### Know yourself.

The first step in choosing a major is a thorough assessment of your Values, Interests, Personality, Skills, and Strengths (VIPSS). The Edward and Lynn Breen Center for Graduate Success has resources available to help you better understand your VIPSS through the use of assessments that we can administer and interpret to create an individualized report.

### Determine your interests.

Think about what you are passionate about and what you enjoy doing in your spare time.

### Recognize your skills.

What do you do well? What skills do you want to develop?

### Evaluate your work experience and education.

What are your accomplishments? Do you have acquired knowledge that will help you advance toward your desired career path?

### Recognize your personal qualities.

These are traits that make you a strong candidate for a career. What unique characteristics define you?

### Select potential career areas.

These are areas of career interest for further research and exploration. What career fields do you gravitate toward?

### Understand the relationship between major and career options.

This is critical for you to build the foundation of your research into majors. In some cases, career fields demand a specific academic path (teachers and actuaries for example). In most cases, however, the relationship is not so clear cut.

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

Other factors include your academic transcript, choice of coursework, extracurricular activities, skills acquired through related experiences, and personal fit.

### Keep perspective.

Remember that your major is just one piece of the package. What you do with your time as a college student is up to you. However, we encourage you to make the most of your complete experience by applying knowledge gained from the classroom in practical, relevant settings—student clubs/organizations, community service, volunteer work, athletics, study abroad, internships, undergraduate research, and more. **What do you with your time will speak volumes to employers and graduate schools, so choose your activities strategically.** Here are some other things to keep in mind:

- **Value of a liberal arts education.** Not so excited about taking general education requirements? Believe it or not, there is great value in a liberal arts education. Not only does it prepare you to be a well-rounded, global citizen, it also provides an opportunity for you to develop perspectives, skills, and abilities that are highly sought by employers.
- **Transferrable skills.** Almost all employers want to hire someone with certain skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, organization, etc. There are many ways- and many majors-

to help you develop skills in these areas. **Most always, a college major alone is not enough to get you hired.** Job candidates must be prepared to articulate and demonstrate the skills and experiences they have to offer.

## Myths about Majors

Many college students have misperceptions about majors and the impact that choice will have on their lives. Often, these misperceptions hold students back from following their dreams. Below are some of the common misperceptions:

1. **My major will determine my career.** While some majors such as education, accounting, and physical therapy prepare students for specific career paths, most majors provide a background and skills that are transferable to many career fields.
2. **I can ensure employment after graduation by choosing a career in a “high demand” field.** The job market moves in cycles. Jobs that are considered “high demand” right now may not be when you graduate. Jobs also change over time. Some current jobs will become obsolete and new jobs will emerge.
3. **It is a good idea to get my general education courses out of the way first and decide on a major later.** General education requirements can vary, so it is essential that you begin to explore majors as early as possible in your college career and work closely with your faculty advisor each semester to choose your courses.
4. **Choosing a major means that I have to say “no” to many other areas of interest.** For most academic areas, there are many ways to combine interests in more than one major. Some possibilities include declaring a double major, adding a minor, or choosing a concentration. If these are not viable options, you can be intentional about seeking opportunities to develop experience in your areas of interest.
5. **Students who declare a major in arts, humanities, or social sciences will not have many career options after graduation.** Liberal arts majors are well-prepared and are hired for a variety of careers. LVC alumni are successful in a variety of areas, such as business, teaching, nonprofits, government, and the helping professions, just to name a few. The specific skill sets you develop in these majors are vitally important to a diverse range of career fields.
6. **A career assessment can tell me what major to declare.** No assessment can give you a magic answer to what major to declare or what career to pursue. However, assessments can help you and your career coach identify patterns or themes of values, interests, skills, and strengths, which are indicators of best-fit majors.

## Truth about Majors (and minors)

### Academic Majors

A major is an in-depth study in a specific discipline. Each major has a specific set of degree and course requirements which leads to attainment of a bachelor’s degree.

### Academic Minors

A minor is an academic program that is less comprehensive than the major, usually requiring 18-24 credits to complete. An academic minor may be chosen to complement your major; a minor can also be chosen simply based on personal interest. If you are interested in selecting a minor, consult with your faculty advisor and a staff member in the Breen Center.

## Did you know?

- **Up to 80%** of entering college students admit that they are not certain about what they want to major in, even if they have chosen a major.
- **50-75%** of all college students change their major at least once.
- Being **uncertain** about a major actually puts you in the majority of college students.

## Additional Strategies for Exploring Majors

There are many options as far as majors go, so it is important to do your research before choosing one. Make sure to choose a major that is most congruent with your interest, strengths, and abilities. Below are some suggestions for gathering more information:

1. Research College Majors: <http://www.princetonreview.com/majors/all>
2. [Online LVC catalogue](#). Carefully read through the full [list of majors](#) offered at LVC. Identify the majors that are of interest to you or that you might like to learn more about. Eliminate the majors that you would definitely not want to pursue. Notice any patterns? Now, take time to read through [the course requirements and descriptions](#).
3. [What can I do with this major?](#) Wondering how to connect majors to careers? Use this online tool to research majors of interest to see outlines of common career areas, employers, and strategies designed to maximize career opportunities.
4. **Academic Departments & Faculty Members.** First, check out the websites of departments which house the majors you're considering. Make an appointment to talk with a faculty member or department chair to discuss your interest in a major. They are eager to talk with you!
5. **Upper-class students.** Get an insider's perspective by consulting a junior or senior in the major. Why did they choose the major? What do they like/dislike about it? What do they plan to do after graduation? If you don't know of any upperclassmen in that major, as a faculty member to recommend a few to you.
6. **Informational interviews.** 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. Use resources like LinkedIn to identify professionals and request to connect – ask questions like:
  - Please describe a typical workday in this industry
  - How did you first become interested in this field?
  - How did you prepare for the work that you do?
  - What skills and qualities are needed to be successful in this field?
  - What is most rewarding about your work?
  - What advice would you give a student interested in pursuing this field?
7. **Get involved.** Join club and organizations directly related to specific majors and careers. Getting involved in one of these groups may help you to meet and interact with students and faculty with interests similar to your own and also may help you to identify a major. For a list of student organizations on campus, visit:

## Additional Strategies for Exploring Careers

1. **Occupational Outlook Handbook:** <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>. Information on occupations, including job outlook, earnings, and educational requirements.
2. **O\*Net:** <https://www.onetonline.org/>. Information on hundreds of occupations from the Bureau of Labor/Employment and Training Administration.

3. **Test your interest in an occupation by job shadowing.** Connect with a professional currently working in a field. You will learn more about the occupation, understand what a particular job is like on a daily basis, build your professional network, and experience the culture of an organization.

*Still unsure?* The process for narrowing options and deciding on a major can sometimes be difficult. If you are having a hard time making sense of all of your ideas and interests, contact the **Breen Center for Graduate Success** to make an appointment.

## Evaluate Your Options

Now that you have done some research into potential majors and careers, you are ready to evaluate your options and make a decision.

- Prioritize your options by weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each option based on your research. Be sure to keep in mind your own interests, values, and skills.
- Talk with your faculty advisor, a staff member in the Breen Center, your family, or anyone else who could be a resource to you about your ideas and options. Expressing your ideas and talking with others will help you gain new perspectives and perhaps new possibilities.
- Visit the academic department of your intended major to learn about the current entrance requirements and to determine how your credits/completed courses can be applied to the major.
- Explore the possibility of taking an introductory course in the major.

## Declaring Your Major Checklist

Are you ready to declare your major? Use the following checklist to help determine your readiness to make a decision about your academic major. If you answer “yes” to the questions below, you are probably ready to declare a major. If your answers fall into the “no” or “unsure” columns, you should obtain additional information using the resources listed before making a final decision.

This major corresponds with my values, interests, personality type, skills, and strengths	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>No</b>
I know what careers are associated with this major and I have researched several of them that interest me	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>No</b>
I understand the qualifications necessary to enter each occupation as well as the economic outlook	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>No</b>
I have talked with upperclassmen and faculty in the major and have a good understanding what is expected in the program	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>No</b>
I have reviewed the major requirements and read the descriptions of courses required in the major	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>No</b>
I know the entry requirements for the major and I meet the stated requirements (if applicable)	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>No</b>
I know the campus and community organizations related to this major and the importance of getting involved with these groups	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>No</b>
I have used the Center for Career Development resources to explore opportunities for internships, volunteer work, and employment in the field	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>No</b>
I am ready to declare this major	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>No</b>

## Procedures for Declaring a Major/Minor

All majors, minors, and specializations (including concentrations and teacher certifications) must be officially declared to appear on a student's record. To declare one of these options, students should go to the [Registrar's Office](#) to request their **Major Card**. The card should be taken to the appropriate department chair to obtain approval and be assigned an academic advisor. The card is then returned to the Registrar's Office and the student's degree audit will be updated accordingly.

Students pursuing a **self-designed major** must submit an application form (available in [PDF](#) and [Word](#) format) along with their major card.

For more information on a self-designed major at LVC, visit the registrar's office.

## Department Chair Information

If you would like to discuss your interest in declaring a certain major, but feel like you want to learn more about it, contact the department chairperson for that academic department. For information regarding department chairs, visit the specific program's website at <http://www.lvc.edu/academics/programs-of-study/>.