

Guide to Choosing a Major

What can I do with my major?

Your major can open up a variety of job possibilities rather than one specific position. Your liberal arts degree will equip you with a variety of knowledge bases and will help you gain skills that can be applied to many different jobs. Often, it is not your specific degree that leads you to your career but rather your skills, interests, strengths, abilities, and personality. Based on these things, you can either choose a major and then a career or choose a career and then a major.

Liberal Arts Degree

Your major may not necessarily lead to a specific career. In fact, research shows that the average number of jobs a person will hold in his or her lifetime is 12-15. A liberal arts education prepares students for the multiple careers they are likely to have by providing a broad exposure to many subjects, along with a depth of knowledge in one area. Here at Bethel, Liberal Arts is defined as the “pursuit of understanding through studying the various aspects of God and creation using various approaches.” Your liberal arts degree will help you build a foundation of knowledge that will allow you to apply your skills to a range of job opportunities rather than to one job alone.

Preparing for your Career

Many factors including skills, interests, experiences, and circumstances can reveal a diversity of opportunities that will ultimately help you figure out what career path is the best fit for you. According to NACE’s Job Outlook 2012 Survey, the top 5 skills employers look for are:

- Team work skills
- Verbal communication skills
- Ability to take initiative
- Analytical skills
- Strong work ethic

Great ways to gain skills and experience are to conduct informational interviews, get internships in specific fields of interest, plug yourself into campus clubs and activities within your field of interest, develop connections and network with others, and volunteer or work a part-time job related to your specific area of interest.

Discovering Your Identity

Examine your interests, strengths, abilities, and personality by taking self-assessments such as:

- Strong Interest Inventory
- StrengthsFinder
- Myers Briggs Type Indicator

Think about what you value in work and undergo career exploration. A few examples of values could include: helping society, working under pressure, group affiliation, stability, security, working as an individual or in groups, and work-life balance.

How to choose a major?

Choose a major, then find a career.

Choose a field of study based on your greatest area of interest and then gain experience and build skills that will qualify you for jobs within the field. Search for an appropriate major by looking at the Bethel course catalog and read about the different majors offered. Look at the overall requirements and also at each specific class that you would need to take. Talk to students and professors in that major and carefully read each course description and evaluate whether those classes would hold your interest for your duration at Bethel .

As you take the courses think about what it is that specifically sparks your interest. For example, if you chose biology, is it the labs that you love? Maybe you would enjoy being a researcher. If you chose psychology, is it the relationships that you love? Maybe you would enjoy being a therapist? Or maybe it is the diagnosis piece that you love and being a mental health practitioner would be a great fit.

Decide on a career that fits you, then select a major.

Instead of picking a major first, then figuring out what jobs you will be qualified for, search for a fitting career first. Once you know a career that fits your personality, values, interests, and skills, then you select the major that will qualify you for that career. For example, once you know that you want to help people in the field of medicine, you will likely need to get a degree in nursing, medicine, or another health degree to be qualified for those career paths.

This path may seem like you are working backwards from the traditional path of choosing an interesting major and then figuring out a job for which you are qualified. So how do you “work backward?” Explore possible careers through activities such as: job shadowing, informational interviewing, mentoring, intro and career classes, part-time jobs, volunteering, internships, class projects, student groups, and researching companies and job titles on O*Net.

If it is hard for you to decide which jobs fit you, it is probably because you need to more clearly know your skills, interests, values, and personality. Career counseling and assessments are one way to better know yourself and your fit.

Helpful Resources

Websites like O*Net (onetonline.org) and iseek (iseek.org) are very useful online tools for the career exploration process.

For more information on careers related to specific majors visit the “potential careers” sections on each of Bethel’s academic department websites.

Let us come along side you in your journey to find the right career path! Visit our office in CC322 or call 651.638.6460 to make an appointment with our Career Specialists.