Top 10 College Majors

College offers you many academic freedoms. You can cultivate existing passions and explore new interests—and find a major that will put you on the career path you want.

Whatever major you choose, don't pick based on the courses that come easiest to you, or what your friends are studying, because you'll be cheating yourself out of some great opportunities and self-discovery!

We compiled this list of best college majors based on research covering job prospects, alumni salaries, and popularity. That doesn't mean every course of study listed here will guarantee you a job, or a huge paycheck—but each of these majors does offer unique intellectual challenges and will help you develop skill sets that will be applicable in a variety of professional positions.

1. Computer Science

Not only will you learn more about computers—hardware and software—but you'll also learn about the applications of such knowledge, such as how technology fits into a business scenario. As a computer science major , you'll be exposed to areas such as robotics, natural language recognition programs, artificial intelligence, programming languages, numerical analysis, and gaming technology. Problem solving is a major component of computer science, no matter which segment of the industry you want to pursue.

2. Communications

Communications majors tend to be great storytellers with quick wits and fiery personalities. You'll spend a significant amount of time scrutinizing different kinds of presentations—such as speeches and scripts—and the strategies behind the messages that speakers and writers use to make their points. You'll learn about verbal and nonverbal messages, audience reaction, and the varied effects of different communication environments. It will prepare you for a wealth of career options in business, advertising, human resources, public relations, government, education, media, and social services.

3. Government/Political Science

Because it often deals with current events and sophisticated statistical analysis, political science is timely, fascinating, and perpetually changing. In a nutshell, it's the study of politics of government, and some of the common concentrations are American government, public policy, foreign affairs, political philosophy, and comparative government. Political science majors develop excellent critical thinking and communication skills, and more broadly, an understanding of history and culture. There will be lots of reading, writing, and math. Possible career paths are diverse—from lawyer to politician to journalist.

4. Business

Think you're a born leader? You'll need stellar people skills—no room for shrinking violets here—and talents in problem solving , number crunching, and decision making. And don't forget great communication skills! While studying business, you'll get a thorough grounding in the theories and principles of accounting, finance, marketing, economics, statistics, and human resources functions. You will be a whiz on how to budget, organize, plan, hire, direct, control, and manage various kinds of organizations –from entrepreneurial–type start–ups to multi–million–dollar corporations. The business major will also get you thinking about issues such as diversity, ethics, politics, and other dynamics that play a role in every work environment. Make sure those competitive juices are flowing; the business world is all, well, business.

5. Economics

Economics is the study of choices—those of individuals, businesses, governments, and societies and how they choose to spend their time and money and otherwise allocate their resources. And you guessed it: Economics involves heavy doses of critical thinking and math. This study of the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services is an indispensable tool for making sense of the intricacies of the modern world. It is also an excellent preparation for a future in business, as well as for graduate studies in law, public policy, and international studies.

6. English Language and Literature

If you find yourself generally immersed in some book—anything from Shakespeare to Cheryl Strayed—you will likely find others just like you in the English department studying the trochaic octameter of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," the stunning word choices of narrative nonfiction author Annie Dillard, or the experimental elements of the writings of Walter Abish. English programs focus on literature, language, and writing, and an English major will encounter a wide array of absorbing works of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction from around the world and throughout history. Analyzing the works of the greatest minds and imaginations that human civilization has produced will surely sharpen your critical, emotional, creative, and moral faculties. The study of literature also helps to shed some light on the answers to the enduring questions of the human condition. This degree is tremendous preparation for a future in law, journalism, publishing, graduate studies, and just about anything else.

7. Psychology

If you find yourself delving into why certain people react to certain aspects of their environments in a certain way, then studying psychology will help you learn about the biology of our brains. Psychology majors focus on such features of the human mind as learning, cognition, intelligence, motivation, emotion, perception, personality, mental disorders, and the ways in which our individual preferences are inherited from our parents or shaped by our environment. Within the field, psychologists seek to educate, communicate, and resolve many of the problems surrounding human behavior. In the job market, this degree can set you up to be a therapist or counselor, obviously, but also a teacher, child development specialist, lawyer, or consultant, depending on the experiences and post-grad studies with which you complement your degree.

8. Nursing

Compassionate individuals with a great mind for the intricate–and sometimes heartbreaking–world of medicine will be well–suited for a nursing career. In the course of evaluating, diagnosing, and treating health problems there is also the chance to work with ever-evolving and ultra-sophisticated technology. Nursing majors take the traditional science and liberal arts courses as a first–year student and begin clinical rotations at hospitals and other health care facilities during the second semester of their sophomore year. Certification exams are required after graduation from an accredited nursing program before you can be officially registered. And the job prospects for nurses are not only plentiful but also varied, available in fields such as geriatrics, neurology, oncology, obstetrics, and pediatrics.

9. Chemical Engineering

Chemical engineers harness chemical reactions to produce things people want. It's a very broad field that overlaps considerably with other branches of engineering , chemistry , and biochemistry . Chemical engineering majors learn how to reorganize the structure of molecules and how to design chemical processes through which chemicals, petroleum, foods, and pharmaceuticals can undergo. You'll learn how to build and operate industrial plants where raw materials are chemically altered. You'll learn how to keep the environment safe from potential pollution and hazardous waste, too. Paper mills, manufacturers of fertilizers, pharmaceutical companies, plastics makers, and tons of other kinds of firms will be looking for your expertise.

10. Biology

From microscopic organisms to cloning procedures, biology encompasses pretty much the whole world. Biology majors can study human, plants, animals, and the environments in which they live, and studies are conducted at the cellular level, the ecosystem level, or anywhere in between. You might find yourself looking to uncover secrets and for ways to solve problems, such as finding a cure for a disease. Biology majors may find themselves in med school, or in one of many growing fields such as genetics and biotechnology or working as a veterinarian, optometrist, ecologist, or environmentalist.

ABOUT ROB FRANEK

Rob Franek, Editor-in-Chief at The Princeton Review, is the company's primary authority on higher education. Over his 26-year career, he has served as a college admissions administrator, test prep teacher, author, publisher, and lecturer. Read more and follow Rob on Twitter: @RobFranek.