



UNIVERSITY ADVISING CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Take Action!

1. List any majors you are considering and explain why.
2. List any majors you have absolutely ruled out and explain why.
3. Meet with an academic advisor: Talk about your goals, strengths, and areas that need improvement. Learn about academic options and review “what if” degree audits.
4. Meet with a career specialist to take Focus 2 and learn about your career options. Attend appropriate career workshops and events.
5. Meet with faculty members. Ask them questions such as What are the most difficult courses in the major? What skills will the major help me to develop? What minors complement this major? Will graduate school be necessary to work in fields usually associated with the major?
6. If you're experiencing significant difficulty or anxiety with the process of selecting a major, consider meeting with a counselor from the Health Services Counseling Center.

Review these helpful websites:

UMass Boston Academics:
www.umb.edu/academics/

University Advising Center:
www.uac.umb.edu

Office of Career Services and Internships:
www.careers.umb.edu

Healey Library streaming videos:
www.atoz.ebsco.com/Customization/Tab/961?tabId=7276

What Can I Do With a Major In?
www.umass.edu/careers/majors/default.html and
<http://uncw.edu/career/WhatCanIDoWithaMajorIn.html>

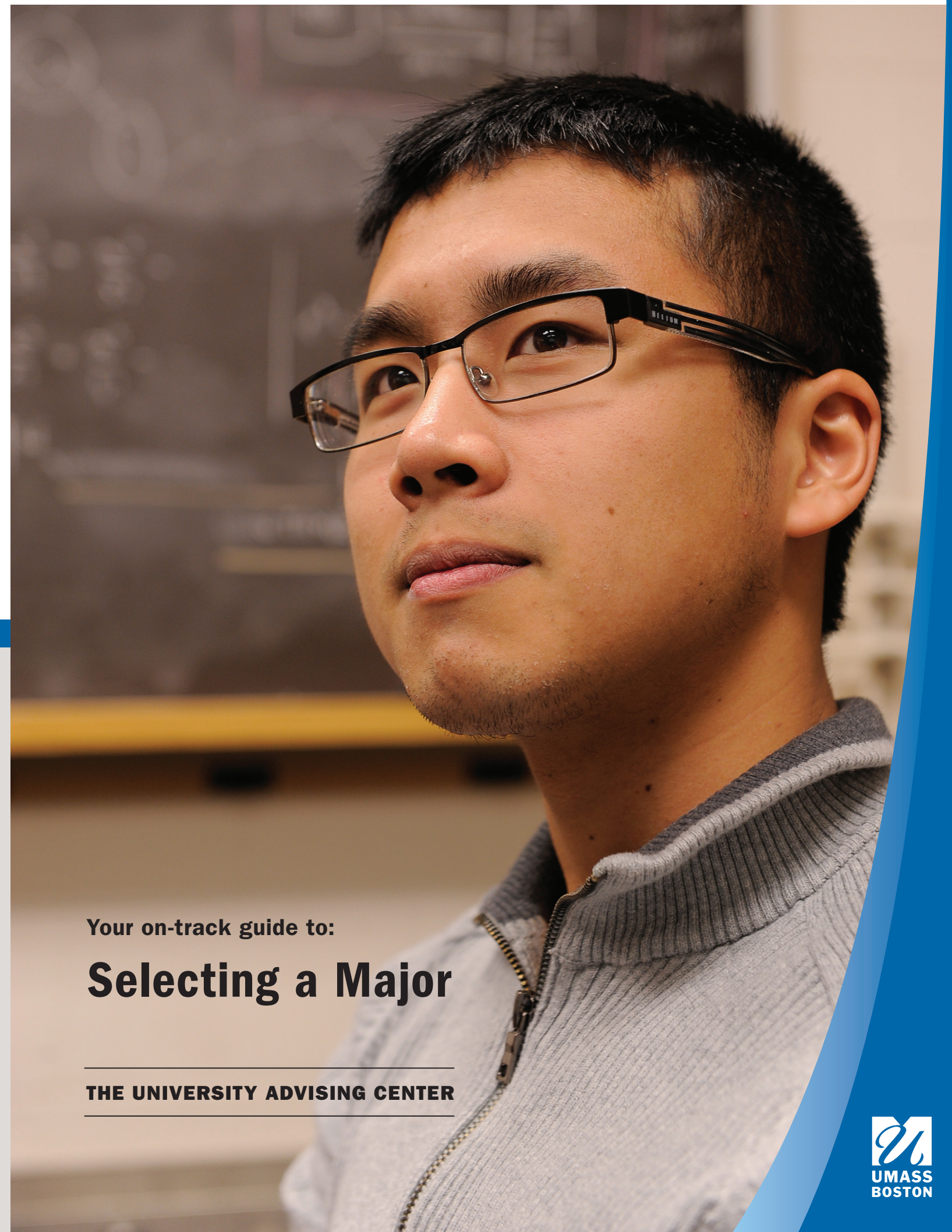
UMass Boston Health Services Counseling Center:
www.umb.edu/healthservices/counseling_center

Contact us:

University Advising Center
Campus Center, 1st Floor, Room 1100
University of Massachusetts Boston
Boston, MA 02125

617.287.5500

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Your on-track guide to:

Selecting a Major

THE UNIVERSITY ADVISING CENTER





Where are you going?

If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else is a book by a famous career theorist, David Campbell. Think about that title; do you know where you're going and how you'll get there? If you're not sure, or if you feel lost, rest assured—we're here to help you find an academic and career path that's right for you!

Although the process of selecting a major can feel overwhelming, confusing, and even scary, if done well, it can lead to a fulfilling academic experience and meaningful career options. Start by understanding that selecting a major is a nonlinear process. In other words, there isn't just one right set of steps to follow. The star design on the opposite page illustrates the components involved; each point is independent, yet it intersects with the others. For example, one student's internship experience made her realize that a career in accounting was very different from what she expected; so she reevaluated her options and selected a major in marketing instead. As another example, a professor inspired a student to conduct biomedical research and discover a passion for finding treatments for Alzheimer's disease, all of which led the student to choose a major in biochemistry.

Like writing an essay, the process of selecting a major requires thinking, organizing, and rethinking. At times you may feel like you've taken a step backward, only to realize that your starting point (thesis statement) needs to be rewritten.

Major connections

Although the choice of a major is a significant part of your college experience, understand that you are not choosing your life. A major may not have a direct connection to a career, and in most cases, a major won't qualify you for, or disqualify you from, a job. Instead, know that most majors will prepare you for a variety of jobs. Explore the website *What Can I Do With a Major In*, listed on the back of this publication, to see what careers are possible for a given major. Of course, if you wish to enter a specialized field such as accounting, engineering, or nursing, you will need to major in that area. You may also need to complete certain courses to position yourself for graduate school or a profession. Also, guard against picking a major because you

think it will land you a high-paying job. Projections about the job market can steer you in the right direction, but know that careers are constantly changing and that the jobs in demand now may be obsolete tomorrow. Tomorrow's hot fields may not have even been invented yet.

The major you choose will comprise about a third of your college coursework, so it likely won't define your academic experience; rather, it will give you a chance to study one area in depth. Timing is important; if you are considering a major that has many prerequisites, like a math or science discipline, you may be well-advised to start the major as early as possible. Other majors—those that are less technical, for example—can often be declared in the student's sophomore year. Whatever field of study you choose, we require you to declare your major by 60 credits.

Putting it all together

In addition to your major, you will need to take general education courses and electives, which you should choose wisely. UMass Boston offers a strong core curriculum in the liberal arts. Push yourself to reach your full academic potential in these courses, especially in the areas of critical analysis and writing. Seek academic opportunities and experiences that will challenge you and help you to develop marketable skills that appeal to a future employer, such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, data analysis, persuasion, and organization.

Exploring majors is never a straightforward process; it's filled with bumps, detours, and zigzags that may lead you to known and unknown destinations. Experiment with some interesting courses, and know that every course you take will shape your worldview and refine your academic and professional interests, often in surprising ways. As important as academic and career planning is, sometimes it's the experiences we don't anticipate that affect us the most. Be open to these new opportunities, such as unplanned events, chance encounters, a fill-in job, or a newly discovered hobby—all of which can lead to an unexpected but purposeful life direction.

You're not alone on this journey—academic advisors, career specialists, and faculty members from whatever major you are considering will be with you every step of the way. Reach out to them today.



YOUR MAJOR

Self-Assessment

What are your hopes and dreams for the future? Reflect for a moment to imagine a life well-lived. Where do you see yourself in five, fifteen, or even fifty years? Do you know your strengths and what areas need improvement? What about your interests, values, skills, and personality characteristics? An honest self-appraisal of the things you enjoy doing, of what is important to you, of your talents and what energizes you, will help you determine the kinds of jobs that are your best match. Meet with a career specialist and take Focus 2, an online career-assessment inventory.

Academic Programs

UMass Boston offers close to 100 different options for majors, minors, and programs. To learn which one is right for you, start by visiting the university's website, then read the requirements and course descriptions for any major that interests you. Talk with professors and upper-division students in the major. Take a look at scholarly journals in that field. View the Healey Library's streaming videos of academic disciplines. Preview a course by reviewing its textbooks in the bookstore or by reading its syllabus. Make sure you genuinely enjoy the subject matter before deciding to major in it. And remember that your GPA matters: Will you do well in this discipline? Experimenting with both introductory courses and upper-level courses in a possible major will help you to confirm a decision or inspire you to rethink your choice.

Career Options

There are thousands of jobs out there. Yes, literally thousands. How will you know which ones are right for you? Ask a career specialist for assistance so you can learn about your options. Then you'll need to narrow down your choices by doing some aggressive research. Gather information from printed and online resources, as well as from people, like family, employers, and professors. Ask questions and dig deep. The more work you put into exploring career options that match your self-assessment, the more likely you are to find a profession that meets your wants and needs. Conversely, pursuing a career path without any forethought, or one that is not in line with what you learned from your self-assessment, may lead to disappointment and regret. Join a professional association, and look for opportunities to network with professionals. Once you have selected a professional direction, a career specialist and an academic advisor can help you identify which majors will give you the best preparation for entering that field.

Experiential Learning

Like trying on a new pair of shoes before you buy them, experimenting with a major or career before making a decision will ensure the right fit. Internships, volunteering, academic research, study abroad, job shadowing, auditing a class for a day, and part-time jobs are all valuable opportunities to gain a realistic preview of a profession and a field of study.