

EDUCATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL **2**

Choosing a College Major

The **BIG** Idea

- What is a college major and how do I choose one?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

- I. Warm Up: Thinking About College (5 minutes)
- II. What Classes Will You Take in College? (10 minutes)
- III. Choosing a Major (10 minutes)
- IV. Which Major is Right for You? (15 minutes)
- V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

PORTFOLIO PAGES:

- Portfolio page 1, Interest Profiler and Basic Skills Survey Results

STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:

- Student Handbook page 124, Thinking Ahead
- Student Handbook page 125, CFWV.com and College Board Directions
- Student Handbook page 126, Sample College Requirements
- Student Handbook page 127, What's a Major?
- Student Handbook page 128, Possible Majors and Schools

Overhead projector and/or LCD projector

Chart paper and markers

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Understand that colleges have course requirements that often offer more choice and flexibility than high school courses.
- Understand the connection between career aspirations and a choice of college major.
- Make a tentative choice of a college major.

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students begin by reflecting on their expectations for college. Then they discuss college requirements and identify courses they would choose to fulfill those requirements. Next, they discuss college majors and review a list of common questions about college majors. Using CFWV.com, they identify recommended majors for a career of interest and find schools in their states that offer each major. Finally, they explore one of the majors they identified and list some of the typical courses within that major.

PREPARATION

- Make arrangements for the class to use the computer lab, and make sure CFWV.com, or a similar website, is accessible from students' computers. (Note: Both www.petersons.com and www.collegeboard.com have college selector tools that include "college major" among their search criteria.)
- List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- Write the day's vocabulary word and definition on the board.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
 - **Student Handbook page 126, Sample College Requirements**
 - **Student Handbook page 128, Possible Majors and Schools**
 - **Portfolio page 1, Interest Profiler and Basic Skills Survey Results**
- Write the following web addresses on the board, chart paper or overhead projector:
 - www.arc.wvu.edu/courses/GEC.html
 - www.cfwv.com (be sure that students have access to their own username and password)
 - www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors_careers/profiles/

VOCABULARY

Major: your field of specialization in college.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

In the **Warm Up**, you may prefer to introduce the topic, then present **Student Handbook page 124, Thinking Ahead**.

Activity II, What Classes Will You Take in College?: If time is limited, you may choose to complete this activity as a class.

If computer access is limited, you may wish to print out the website listing the WVU course offerings to fulfill the school's general education curriculum requirements (http://registrar.wvu.edu/current_students/general_education_curriculum). Students could choose directly from this list rather than going online themselves. [This option may also be helpful if you think you will run short on time.]

If you are not in West Virginia, you may prefer to find an example from a college near you. If computer access is limited, you may also wish to print out the web pages visited in this lesson.

Activity IV, Which Major Is Right for You? You may wish to choose a different major to explore required courses.

ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up: Thinking About College (5 minutes)

1. [To begin this lesson, refer students to **Student Handbook page 124, Thinking Ahead**. Give students about three minutes to record their responses.]
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Welcome, everybody. This week, we're going to continue our unit on Education After High School. In today's lesson, we're going to look at the classes you take in college, what a major is, and how you choose a major.

II. What Classes Will You Take in College? (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Just like in high school, most colleges have certain requirements that you must fulfill in order to graduate. You might be thinking that's a drag—after all, isn't college for taking the classes you want to take? Well, before you jump to any conclusions, there are three things to remember about these requirements:
 - First, four-year colleges have these requirements so that their graduates are well-rounded. They want their graduates to enter the world equipped with important skills and knowledge to help them succeed as adults.
 - Second, taking a wide range of courses means you'll be exposed to classes you might not take otherwise—and you might just discover a passion for something completely new.
 - Third, even though you'll still have to take courses in different subjects, there are many, many more courses to choose from to meet each requirement.
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Let's take a look at an example of what a college might require for graduation. Please turn to **Student Handbook page 126, Sample College Requirements**. This chart shows the requirements for West Virginia University, a typical, large four-year state university. These are the courses that must be fulfilled in order to graduate.

As you see, these don't look like your typical high school requirements, do they? Rather than requiring a certain number of courses in different subject areas, their requirements are organized by objectives—in other words, the skills they feel are important for their students.

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now, you're probably wondering what kinds of classes will fulfill these objectives. Well, let's find out!

[Have students work in small groups or pairs to go online and view a list of courses that fulfill the WVU requirements: <http://www.arc.wvu.edu/courses/GEC.html>. (See **Implementation Options** for suggestions.)]

4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Let's take a quick look at the first objective, "Communication." How many courses are students required to take to fulfill this objective? (*two*) For the first class, students must take one of the basic composition or writing classes listed here. Why do you think this is required for all students? [Discuss importance of writing in all college classes.]

For the second course, students must take one "writing" course—preferably in their major—that requires a substantial writing component. At WVU, there are many writing courses in a variety of subjects—from chemical engineering to psychology—that fit this category. This requirement assures that students learn to write in their major.

5. Let's move on to the next objective, "Basic Mathematical Skills and Scientific Inquiry." How many classes are required for this objective? [Point out that four courses are required — one from Group A (math courses), two from Group B (science courses, including one with a lab), and one from Group A, B, or C (which includes more science courses).]

[With the students' help, model how to choose a course from each group. As you do this, they may want to write their own choices on their charts.]

6. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Great, now you're going to select four objectives that interest you and choose one course requirement for each. Look at the related lists and choose the courses you would take to fulfill each requirement. Note that some courses are found under more than one objective, but you can't count the same course twice. If you use a course to satisfy one objective, you have to pick a different course for another objective.
7. [Give students time to choose one course for each of the objectives they've chosen, and write their choices on their charts.]

III. Choosing a Major (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Chances are, someone's already asked you what you think you'll study in college. Some of you may already know, some of you may still be figuring this out, and many of you have no idea. Today we're going to answer some basic

questions about a college major. Please turn to **Student Handbook page 127, What's a Major?** As we discuss each of these questions, you can use this page to take notes.

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** First of all, **what is a major?** A major is an academic subject or field that college students select to focus their studies. Depending on your major, somewhere between a quarter to a half of your courses will be in the major you choose. Just as you'll have some general graduation requirements, there will also be requirements within your major. (However, many of these requirements will overlap.)
 - **When do you choose a major?** Most colleges don't require you to declare a major until the end of your sophomore year. Students often take general courses in their first year or two of college, and focus on a major in their later years. In fact, unless you're absolutely sure about a major, it's probably wise not to rush into this decision. Instead, narrow down your choices of majors, and take classes in each one before you decide.
 - **Why do I have to think about this now?** You'll want to choose a school that offers the subjects (and majors) you want to study, or one that has a particularly strong program in that major.
 - **How do you choose a major?** Well, if you know what you want to do, you choose a major that will prepare you for that career. You can also choose a major that fits your talents, interests, and goals. We'll talk more about this in a few minutes.
 - **What if I have no idea?** That's okay. More than half of all college freshman start without knowing their major.
 - **What if I change my mind?** You can definitely change your major. But the sooner you do, the better, because if you wait too long, you may have to spend more time (and money) in school to fulfill all the requirements.
 - **What if I can't decide between two majors?** Since you'll be taking classes outside your major, you may find a passion for another subject. This doesn't mean you have to change your major—some schools offer “minors,” which require fewer courses, but still show that you have a concentration in that subject. Some students choose to double-major, majoring in two different subjects. This is a great option if you have career plans that combine more than one subject. For example, say you want to be a scientific illustrator. You could get a double major in art and biology.

IV. Which Major is Right for You? (15 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** So which major is right for you? Fortunately, you'll have many, many to choose from—from agriculture to zoology. The major you choose should reflect your interests, talents, and career plans. After all, your major can put you on the path to your future goals—and some careers may require or recommend certain

majors. So if you know now what you want to do, you'll want to choose a major that puts you on the right path.

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Choosing a major may seem like a scary decision. After all, you might think that choosing a major is really deciding on a career, right? Well, don't worry. Choosing a major is not picking a career. There are some majors that prepare you for a specific career, but most majors prepare you for many careers. Also, keep in mind that there are two main kinds of majors:
 - Career-oriented majors, like nursing, engineering, technicians, accounting. These majors put you directly on a path for that career.
 - Liberal arts majors, like English, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. You will gain many important skills from these majors, which can be used in a variety of careers. With these majors, you create your own career path.
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** How do you know which major will put you on the right path? One place to start is CFWV.com, which you used earlier in the year to find careers that matched your skills, interests, and goals. Let's turn back to your **Portfolio page 1, Interest Profiler and Basic Skills Survey Results**.

[Display a copy of this page on the overhead projector to remind them what this form looked like.]

4. [Have students choose their top career choice from the **Portfolio page 1, Interest Profiler and Basic Skills Survey Results** page. Then have students turn to **Student Handbook page 128, Possible Majors and Schools** and write that career at the top of the page. Explain that in Part A, they'll be exploring that career using CFWV.com. On the CFWV.com site, they'll find related majors and schools in your state that offer programs that will prepare them for their top career interest.]
5. [Model how to use CFWV.com to find recommended majors for specific careers and colleges that offer those majors. For example:
 - Use your name and password to sign on to CFWV.com
 - Click **Career Planning** and then click **Explore Careers**
 - Enter "Police Detective" into the search bar
 - Click **Police Detective** for details about that career
 - Click **What to Learn** and scroll down to "Beyond High School"; point out that many similar majors may have different names at different colleges, such as "Forensic Science and Technology", "Criminal Justice/Police Science", and "Criminalistics and

Criminal Science”. Therefore, they should click on each one when they’re searching for programs.

- Click **Criminal Justice/Police Science**, then click **Schools Offering This Program** on the left side of the screen. Choose “Bachelor’s Degree” and then click **Go** for a list of schools in the state that offer that program.

6. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now you’re probably wondering what these majors are all about—and what kinds of classes you might take. For Part B, you’ll choose one major you identified in Part A and use another website to explore more details about that major.

[Model how to use the College Board “Major Profiles” site (http://www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors_careers/profiles/) to find out more about a major, such as “Special Education.” Show students how to click the + sign to expand categories. Then point out the information available, specifically the “Typical Major Courses” listed in the right-hand column.]

7. [Give students about 10 minutes to complete **Student Handbook page 128, Possible Majors and Schools.**]

V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. Ask students to share what they found in their research and how they’re feeling about choosing and pursuing a major. Possible discussion questions include:
 - What were some of the majors recommended for your career?
 - When you identified typical classes for your major, which ones sounded interesting?
 - When you think about choosing and pursuing your major, what are you most excited about?
 - What makes you nervous?
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** If you’re feeling nervous or overwhelmed, remember that you don’t have to go it alone—you’ll have lots of help figuring this stuff out. College students are assigned academic advisors, who help you make course selections and approve your choices. They’ll also keep an eye on your schedules to make sure you’re on track to fulfill your requirements. Colleges also have Career Centers, where staff can help you figure out the best direction for you to take.
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Today, we’ve been focusing on four-year colleges. Next week, we’ll continue our unit on Education After High School, but look at other options for higher education, such as community colleges, technical and trade schools, and apprenticeships.

THINKING AHEAD

Today we're going to talk about choosing classes and majors in college. Take a few minutes to reflect on what classes and majors you might want to pursue.

1. What career are you most interested in?

2. What college major do you think would help you pursue that career?

3. What is one question you have about selecting a college major?

CFWV.com and College Board Directions

CFWV.com

1. Connecting to CFWV.com

- Type the web address into the dialog box (www.cfwv.com).
- When the CFWV.com home page appears, type your username and password into the dialog boxes provided and click **Sign In**.

2. Possible Majors and Schools

- Click on the **Career Planning** tab and then on the **Explore Careers** section.
- Type in the name of the career you want to search for in the **Search Careers** box and click **Go**. (As an example, type in Police Detective, and click **Go**.)
- When the link appears, click it. (As an example, click on **Police Detective**.)
- Click on the blue **What to Learn** button on the left-hand side of the page and scroll down to the section called Beyond High School. Majors have different names at different colleges, so you can pick any of them when you're searching for programs.
- Click on whichever program you're interested in. (As an example, click on **Criminal Justice/Police Science**.) This will take you to a program description. To view a list of schools in West Virginia that offer this program, click **Schools Offering This Program** on the left side of the page.

College Board

3. Connecting to College Board and Finding Majors

- Type the web address into the dialog box (www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors_careers/profiles/).
- Click on the **+ sign** next to the field of study you're interested in. (As an example, click on **History**.)
- Then click on one of the subcategories to find out more. (As an example, click on **U.S. History**.)
- Scroll down, and on the right-hand side of the page, you should see a section titled **Typical Major Courses**.
- List the three major courses you're most interested in, in Part II of **Student Handbook page 128, Possible Majors and Schools**.

SAMPLE COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS

The following chart shows the requirements of the West Virginia University General Education Curriculum (GEC) — the courses that must be fulfilled to graduate. Which classes would you choose if you went to WVU?

1. Go to the WVU General Education Curriculum for a list of courses that fulfill these requirements: http://registrar.wvu.edu/current_students/general_education_curriculum
2. On the chart below, circle the four Curriculum Objectives that interest you the most (other than Communication).
3. For each of four selected categories, choose the courses you would take to fulfill the requirement. (Some courses are found under more than one objective, but you can't count the same course twice. If you use a course to satisfy one objective, you have to pick a different course for another objective.)

Curriculum Objective	Requirements (# of classes)	Your Course Selection
Communication: <i>Communicate effectively in English.</i>	2	ENGL 101—Composition & Rhetoric, ENGL 102—Composition & Rhetoric, OR ENGL 103—Accelerated Academic Writing One “writing” course, preferably in major.
Basic Mathematical Skills and Scientific Inquiry: <i>Use quantitative and scientific knowledge effectively.</i>	4	1 Math/Group A: 2 Science/Group B: 1 Other (Group A, B, or C):
The Past and Its Traditions: <i>Apply knowledge, methods and principles of inquiry to understanding the past.</i>	1	
Issues of Contemporary Society: <i>Apply knowledge, methods, and principles of inquiry to contemporary problems, ideas, and/or values.</i>	1	
Artistic Expression: <i>Apply methods and principles of critical inquiry to the analysis of literary or artistic expression.</i>	1	
The Individual in Society: <i>Develop an awareness of human experience, including both personal and social dimensions.</i>	1	
American Culture: <i>Develop knowledge critical to understand the issues that shape the culture of the United States.</i>	1	
Western Culture: <i>Analyze historical, cultural, and/or political issues of a Western nation in an international context.</i>	1	
Non-Western Culture: <i>Analyze historical, cultural, and/or political issues of a non-Western area or nation.</i>	1	

WHAT'S A MAJOR?

What will you major in? First, let's review some important information about majors. Take notes below as we discuss each question.

1. What is a major?

2. When do you choose a major?

3. Why do I have to think about this now?

4. How do you choose a major?

5. What if I have no idea?

6. What if I change my mind?

7. What if I can't decide between two majors?

Other questions about majors:

POSSIBLE MAJORS AND SCHOOLS

Part I. Use CFWV.com to search for a career you identified in your Interest Inventory. Then look under “What to Learn” to identify related programs. Finally, search for at least one school in your state that offers each program.

Career _____

Related College & University Programs	Schools with this Program

Part II. Next, find one of the majors you identified above from the list of majors on the College Board site: http://www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors_careers/profiles/. (Click the + signs to expand the categories further to find individual majors.) Read details about that major, then list three “Typical Major Courses” (from the right-hand column) below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____