

College Course Planning

How to plan your college career to maximize the impact
and minimize waste



Cross Trained Mind
ALWAYS THINKING, ALWAYS LEARNING

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After choosing your majors and minors, it's best to take the time to plan out your courses for your entire degree. While many would see this as overkill, I disagree. Would you want to get to the end of your senior year and find that you were missing a single course to graduate? This happens more often than you would expect.

Now, this is pointless for the degrees where the university largely plans out everything for you. But if you have any choice in the manner, make sure to take the time to plan. You'll be able to double and even triple count courses more easily, take some of the fun courses that your university offers, and possibly reduce the time to graduate, as we'll discuss.

I'd like to make clear that the below example is from my own alma mater, Central Michigan University, as I know their system best of all. While I'll talk about various opportunities offered by my state, I'm not trying to build it up. I'm simply pointing out that there are options that you may not realize you have. Please take the time to look up similar programs. All options listed are for the 2021-2022 school year.

Setting Up

To do this correctly, you need to prepare a few things in advance. First and foremost are your program requirements. You should be locked into the requirements listed for the semester you start. Your university should offer the required courses throughout your college career, up to a certain time limit, such as seven years. Your requirements should be available online or possibly in print form. I prefer to have both.

Next, you will want to be able to put everything into a spreadsheet. If Excel is not available, Google Sheets works well enough for this process. You will want to set up the headers before you begin and leave room on the right to add extra columns. This is a great way to plan out your major and minor electives or your graduate school courses as well. You can use extra tabs to break up and build your spreadsheet for more advanced tasks, which I'll discuss at the end of this guide.

Headers you will want to include are in a useful order:

- Department (usually the abbreviation)
- Course Number
- Course Designation (concatenated Department and Course Number, useful for sorting and finding specific courses)
- Title
- Credits
- Requirement (major, minor, elective, or even multiple of these when double counting)
- Course Description (optional but useful, copied from the university website)
- Prerequisites (to make sure you take things in the right order and not too late in your college career)

You will also want a block of time, possibly multiple. It takes time and effort to work through this, but it's very much worth it. Try to be able to spend at least an hour each time you work toward this goal. It's enough time to get some major work done while still being easy enough to schedule if you're busy.

Case Study

Throughout this workbook, we will constantly look at a single case study. It will cover a student looking at entering the interdisciplinary field of artificial intelligence. This is not a common undergraduate major, so our student will have to get creative with majors, minors, and electives to get the most out of their education. This is also a bit of a continuation from my other guidebook on selecting majors and minors for a career in artificial intelligence but can be applied to any career plans.

Here are the headers we'll use for the case study, a subset of those listed above to make it easier to read:

Dept	Number	Course Designation	Title	Credits	Requirement	Prerequisites
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I am showing the most important ones in order to help you get the most out of this guide without overwhelming you or making it over 50 pages long. We'll look at the courses added at each step as well as see the entire list at the end of every section. A total of 120 credits is required.

Majors

At this point, you may have your majors and minors chosen. As a single major is the minimum requirement for a degree and the most common pathway students take, the major is the primary focus. You will want to look through the course requirements for your major and add them to the list first. Many majors have core classes followed by smaller groups of choices to make.

One example is in chemistry. There are 28 credits for the foundational courses followed immediately by a choice of how to learn biochemistry. A total of 61-68 credits is required, most of them from required courses and some electives. Some courses come from the mathematics and physics departments, making these some of the few options for double-counting.

Another example is interior design. There are 57 credits for the entire major and all are required. They are all from the same department, making double-counting nearly impossible. While it's fewer courses than chemistry, it's extremely rigid and cannot be customized.

A final example is the law and economics major. While 21 credits are required, there are only a further 12 credits needed for electives (six from economics and six from business law) for a total of 33 credits. All courses are from two departments, split very evenly, making it easy to add an economic minor for only a few extra courses.

The selection of majors and minors is the most careful decision you make. While you can and should change your major if it's not working out, doing so may require an extra year or two to be able to graduate. Your choices should always reflect what you want to do after you graduate and nothing else. That said, I know someone with a major in philosophy and a minor in information science who is the manager of an IT department. Either way, your choices should reflect you!

The options given to you by a major can be tricky. Do you take the harder courses to learn more or the easier ones to focus your education elsewhere? This is why I highly recommend adding the course descriptions to your sheet. This process is meant to help you both stay on track as well as determine your track in the first place.

Note: Never automatically take the easier option. When you graduate, you will be starting your career. You will be competing against others with your major. Who would you hire: the person who gets by or the one who challenges themselves to be better? Learning is the key differentiator throughout your life. If you're unwilling to learn at the time of your life when you should be focusing on it, will you be willing to learn when it's not your focus? When you stop learning, your career starts wasting away.

If you have more than one major, make sure to get them both on the document. One major may take priority over the other, so focus on that one first. Double count when and where you can. Other options for double-counting will appear when we work on electives later.

Case Study

Our student is looking at some difficult choices. As there is not set major or even concentration in artificial intelligence, what majors should she take? There are some options, though the path forward isn't clear. She wants to work on the technical side, but also maybe become a researcher. With this in mind, she will major in computer science for sure. There is no longer a cognitive science option, so she will go with the single major.

After filling in the spreadsheet with the data for the major, she starts with this:

Dept	Number	Course Designation	Title	Credits	Requirement	Prerequisites
CPS	180	CPS 180	Principles of Computer Programming	3	Major	Co: MTH 132
CPS	181	CPS 181	Introduction to Data Structures	3	Major	CPS 180
CPS	210	CPS 210	Computer Organization and Communications	3	Major	Co: CPS 181
CPS	240	CPS 240	Object-Oriented Programming, Analysis and Design	3	Major	CPS 181 (C)
CPS	270	CPS 270	Computational Analysis and Simulation	3	Major	CPS 181; MTH 132
CPS	301	CPS 301	Social Issues of Computing and Professional Practice	1	Major	26 credits earned
CPS	340	CPS 340	Advanced Data Structures and Algorithms	3	Major	CPS 181 or CPS 210; Co: MTH 223
CPS	360	CPS 360	Computer Design and Architecture	3	Major	CPS 210
CPS	410	CPS 410	Software Engineering	3	Major	CPS 340
CPS	450	CPS 450	Programming Language Concepts	3	Major	CPS 240; CPS 340
CPS	470	CPS 470	Introduction to Operating Systems	3	Major	CPS 340; CPS 360
CPS	498	CPS 498	Senior Design I	3	Major	All 300 level major courses
ITC	341	ITC 341	Introduction to Databases and Applications	3	Major	CPS 181
MTH	132	MTH 132	Calculus I	4	Major	
MTH	175	MTH 175	Discrete Mathematics	3	Major	MTH 132
MTH	223	MTH 223	Linear Algebra and Matrix Theory	3	Major	MTH 132
STA	382QR	STA 382QR	Elementary Statistical Analysis	3	Major	
BIO	101	BIO 101	General Biology	3	Major	
BIO	111	BIO 111	Foundations of Evolution and Diversity	4	Major	
CPS	585	CPS 585	Applied Data Engineering	3	Major	CPS 181; CPS 240
CPS	480	CPS 480	Introduction to Artificial Intelligence	3	Major	CPS 340

Her choices at this point were which science courses to take and her two electives. Both were centered around her career goal. We are now at a total of 63 credits of the required 124, all from a single major.

Minors

Minors help you stand out from others. Have a biology major? So do a LOT of recent graduates. Combine it with psychology and sociology minors? That opens you up to unique opportunities. There will almost certainly be minors that work for you.

Some minors have a strict sequence of courses to take while others have no requirements except for a certain number of courses from one department. The more flexibility you have, the more you can tailor your college career toward your professional career and interests.

Note: Don't go overboard with minors. You can add several, as I almost did once, and end up staying a full-time student for a few extra years for little benefit. Find minors that add value to you, that better invest in you, for the smallest cost possible. We'll see an example of this in the case study below.

Case Study

Now our student wants to add a minor or two to her course portfolio. The first minor is very easy. For the cost of one more course, she can add a mathematics minor. Here is the entry for it:

Dept	Number	Course Designation	Title	Credits	Requirement	Prerequisites
MTH	133	MTH 133	Calculus II	4	Minor	MTH 132

The entry shows that it's required for the minor. Other entries, such as Calculus I and the statistics course, were updated with "Major; Minor", showing that it fulfills two requirements. We'll add more as we continue.

She also wants to add a psychology minor to her spreadsheet. This is a VERY flexible minor with only the introductory course being required. All she needs to do is add six more courses to complete the requirements. This allows her to completely customize them toward her goals.

While it adds yet another 21 credits to her growing list, this isn't as bad as it sounds. We'll see this as we continue. For now, here are her new courses:

Dept	Number	Course Designation	Title	Credits	Requirement	Prerequisites
PSY	100	PSY 100	Introduction to Psychology	3	Minor	
PSY	220	PSY 220	Developmental Psychology	3	Minor	PSY 100
PSY	225	PSY 225	Foundations of Cognitive Science	3	Minor	

PSY	382	PSY 382	Perception	3	Minor	PSY 100
PSY	584	PSY 584	Cognitive Neuroscience	3	Minor	PSY 387
PSY	387	PSY 387	Behavioral Neuroscience	3	Minor	PSY 100 or BIO 101
PSY	211QR	PSY 211QR	Introduction to Psychological Statistics	3	Minor	PSY 100

Each and everyone one of these courses helps her build toward her dream of working with artificial intelligence, except for the psychological statistics course. That one was added in case she wants to pursue a more psychological perspective at the graduate level.

Here is the entire course list so far:

Dept	Number	Course Designation	Title	Credits	Requirement	Prerequisites
CPS	180	CPS 180	Principles of Computer Programming	3	Major; Minor	Co: MTH 132
CPS	181	CPS 181	Introduction to Data Structures	3	Major	CPS 180
CPS	210	CPS 210	Computer Organization and Communications	3	Major	Co: CPS 181
CPS	240	CPS 240	Object-Oriented Programming, Analysis and Design	3	Major	CPS 181 (C)
CPS	270	CPS 270	Computational Analysis and Simulation	3	Major	CPS 181; MTH 132
CPS	301	CPS 301	Social Issues of Computing and Professional Practice	1	Major	26 credits earned
CPS	340	CPS 340	Advanced Data Structures and Algorithms	3	Major	CPS 181 or CPS 210; Co: MTH 223
CPS	360	CPS 360	Computer Design and Architecture	3	Major	CPS 210
CPS	410	CPS 410	Software Engineering	3	Major	CPS 340
CPS	450	CPS 450	Programming Language Concepts	3	Major	CPS 240; CPS 340
CPS	470	CPS 470	Introduction to Operating Systems	3	Major	CPS 340; CPS 360
CPS	498	CPS 498	Senior Design I	3	Major	All 300 level major courses
ITC	341	ITC 341	Introduction to Databases and Applications	3	Major	CPS 181
MTH	132	MTH 132	Calculus I	4	Major; Minor	
MTH	175	MTH 175	Discrete Mathematics	3	Major; Minor	MTH 132
MTH	223	MTH 223	Linear Algebra and Matrix Theory	3	Major; Minor	MTH 132
STA	382QR	STA 382QR	Elementary Statistical Analysis	3	Major; Minor	
BIO	101	BIO 101	General Biology	3	Major	
BIO	111	BIO 111	Foundations of Evolution and Diversity	4	Major	
CPS	585	CPS 585	Applied Data Engineering	3	Major	CPS 181; CPS 240
CPS	480	CPS 480	Introduction to Artificial Intelligence	3	Major	CPS 340
MTH	133	MTH 133	Calculus II	4	Minor	MTH 132
PSY	100	PSY 100	Introduction to Psychology	3	Minor	
PSY	220	PSY 220	Developmental Psychology	3	Minor	PSY 100
PSY	225	PSY 225	Foundations of Cognitive Science	3	Minor	
PSY	382	PSY 382	Perception	3	Minor	PSY 100
PSY	584	PSY 584	Cognitive Neuroscience	3	Minor	PSY 387

PSY	387	PSY 387	Behavioral Neuroscience	3	Minor	PSY 100 or BIO 101
PSY	211QR	PSY 211QR	Introduction to Psychological Statistics	3	Minor	PSY 100

General Electives

Most universities will have one or more general elective requirements. For our example, we have a few: basic competencies, general electives, and degree electives. Many people don't see the point of taking these courses and regard them as just a way to make money. What they don't realize is that they are there to broaden your view of the world to prevent having tunnel vision in your field.

Competencies generally include mathematics, writing, and speaking. There are absolute requirements and are fairly easy to obtain. The mathematics course will usually be any course at or above college algebra. Writing will be the two major English courses that all students have to take. Speaking can be a little more variable. Some universities just require a public speaking course while others offer a selection of speaking or even theater courses.

General electives are a wide-ranging selection of courses over the humanities, natural sciences, social science, and culture and diversity. These are where much of your double-counting will be found and where you can get different perspectives that will help you in the business or academic worlds. Watch for requirements like needing to take a certain number of these at a certain level or from a certain number of departments.

Degree electives, such as for a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science, require a range of courses from that area. For example, if you earn a Bachelor of Science, you will need to take a wider range of science courses, which could be natural or social science.

Case Study

Now we come to some interesting choices for our student. She will want to focus the most on courses that apply to her field of artificial intelligence. As it's an interdisciplinary field, that shouldn't be too difficult.

Looking over the Competencies, the mathematics one is already complete. She adds the general English courses to her list and looks over the speaking courses. The Voice and Diction course sounds interesting and possibly applicable to natural language process, part of

Dept	Number	Course Designation	Title	Credits	Requirement	Prerequisites
ENG	101	ENG 101	Freshman Composition	3	Comp	
ENG	201	ENG 201	Intermediate Composition	3	Comp	ENG 101 (C)
TAI	302	TAI 302	Voice and Diction	3	Comp	

The General Education (GE) requirements are a lot more interesting and can really be fun, provided that you find at least one course that sounds interesting. For our student, there are

four groups of GE requirements with 2-3 subgroups. She must choose one course from each of the nine total groups. These can double count with her major and minor courses, but not her competency courses.

The first group is for the humanities. Subgroup A is about human events and ideas. Courses include British Literature, Moral Problems, and Religion in America. She sees Philosophy of Mind, a course that expands her knowledge in her field.

Subgroup B is about the arts and includes courses like Literary Analysis, History of Rock and Roll, and Jazz. Working with technology, and games being very important for much AI research, she selects History of Game Design.

The second group is for the natural sciences. Her computer science, mathematics, and biology courses take care of these requirements. She updates her spreadsheet so she knows that the requirements have been met.

The third group is for the social sciences. Her psychology minor takes care of the first subgroup in the behavioral sciences. The second subgroup contains courses from the social sciences, which does not apply to her current list. However, she spots The Nature of Language, which is another course that can help with natural language processing.

The fourth group is the more difficult to select from, as many of those courses don't double count and really apply directly to her field. The first subgroup focuses on discrimination and she selects Women in STEM Fields. The second subgroup looks at non-Western cultures and she finds Modern East Asia, where she will learn about the cultures of people she is likely to work with. The final group is about discrimination within the United States. Nothing really applies to her field, but there is a lot going on in the United States these days, so she takes The Civil Rights Movement to try to get a better sense of it.

Here are the courses she's adding to her list:

Dept	Number	Course Designation	Title	Credits	Requirement	Prerequisites
PHL	325	PHL 325	Philosophy of Mind	3	GE 1A	
ENG	160	ENG 160	History of Game Design	3	GE 1B	
ENG	175	ENG 175	The Nature of Language	3	GE 3B	
WGS	104	WGS 104	Women in STEM Fields	3	GE 4A	
HST	168	HST 168	Modern East Asia	3	GE 4B	
PSC	325	PSC 325	The Civil Rights Movement	3	GE 4C	

The other courses have been updated, and here is the entire list with 115 credits:

Dept	Number	Course	Title	Credits	Requirement	Prerequisites
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		Designation				
CPS	180	CPS 180	Principles of Computer Programming	3	Major; Minor; GE 2B	Co: MTH 132
CPS	181	CPS 181	Introduction to Data Structures	3	Major	CPS 180
CPS	210	CPS 210	Computer Organization and Communications	3	Major	Co: CPS 181
CPS	240	CPS 240	Object-Oriented Programming, Analysis and Design	3	Major	CPS 181 (C)
CPS	270	CPS 270	Computational Analysis and Simulation	3	Major	CPS 181; MTH 132
CPS	301	CPS 301	Social Issues of Computing and Professional Practice	1	Major	26 credits earned
CPS	340	CPS 340	Advanced Data Structures and Algorithms	3	Major	CPS 181 or CPS 210; Co: MTH 223
CPS	360	CPS 360	Computer Design and Architecture	3	Major	CPS 210
CPS	410	CPS 410	Software Engineering	3	Major	CPS 340
CPS	450	CPS 450	Programming Language Concepts	3	Major	CPS 240; CPS 340
CPS	470	CPS 470	Introduction to Operating Systems	3	Major	CPS 340; CPS 360
CPS	498	CPS 498	Senior Design I	3	Major	All 300 level major courses
ITC	341	ITC 341	Introduction to Databases and Applications	3	Major	CPS 181
MTH	132	MTH 132	Calculus I	4	Major; Minor; Comp	
MTH	175	MTH 175	Discrete Mathematics	3	Major; Minor	MTH 132
MTH	223	MTH 223	Linear Algebra and Matrix Theory	3	Major; Minor	MTH 132
STA	382QR	STA 382QR	Elementary Statistical Analysis	3	Major; Minor	
BIO	101	BIO 101	General Biology	3	Major; GE 2A	
BIO	111	BIO 111	Foundations of Evolution and Diversity	4	Major	
CPS	585	CPS 585	Applied Data Engineering	3	Major	CPS 181; CPS 240
CPS	480	CPS 480	Introduction to Artificial Intelligence	3	Major	CPS 340
MTH	133	MTH 133	Calculus II	4	Minor	MTH 132
PSY	100	PSY 100	Introduction to Psychology	3	Minor; GE 3A	
PSY	220	PSY 220	Developmental Psychology	3	Minor	PSY 100
PSY	225	PSY 225	Foundations of Cognitive Science	3	Minor	
PSY	382	PSY 382	Perception	3	Minor	PSY 100
PSY	584	PSY 584	Cognitive Neuroscience	3	Minor	PSY 387
PSY	387	PSY 387	Behavioral Neuroscience	3	Minor	PSY 100 or BIO 101
PSY	211QR	PSY 211QR	Introduction to Psychological Statistics	3	Minor	PSY 100
ENG	101	ENG 101	Freshman Composition	3	Comp	
ENG	201	ENG 201	Intermediate Composition	3	Comp	ENG 101 (C)
TAI	302	TAI 302	Voice and Diction	3	Comp	
PHL	325	PHL 325	Philosophy of Mind	3	GE 1A	
ENG	160	ENG 160	History of Game Design	3	GE 1B	
ENG	175	ENG 175	The Nature of Language	3	GE 3B	
WGS	104	WGS 104	Women in STEM Fields	3	GE 4A	

HST	168	HST 168	Modern East Asia	3	GE 4B	
PSC	325	PSC 325	The Civil Rights Movement	3	GE 4C	

Other Program Requirements

There may be other requirements that you need to fulfill in order to graduate. Be sure to stay on top of this to avoid problems at the last minute. One easy thing to watch for are the required number of credits needed to graduate. Others may include foreign language requirements, an official audit (which should be easy with your list), forms to fill out, a minimum GPA, a specific number of courses above a certain level, and such. Your university should make audits available any time if you are uncertain if you're missing anything.

Case Study

Our student has 115 credits worth of courses selected, which is five fewer than required to graduate. She looks through her course list to find the philosophy course Theory of Knowledge to add, but it has a requirement that she is missing. She can either take both courses or drop this one and choose two others. After looking through the rest of the course descriptions, top to bottom, she decides to take both courses.

Dept	Number	Course Designation	Title	Credits	Requirement	Prerequisites
PHL	320	PHL 320	Philosophy of Knowledge	3		PHL 140
PHL	140	PHL 140	Introduction to Symbolic Logic	3		

And here is her entire list, finalized and sorted:

Dept	Number	Course Designation	Title	Credits	Requirement	Prerequisites
BIO	101	BIO 101	General Biology	3	Major; GE 2A	
BIO	111	BIO 111	Foundations of Evolution and Diversity	4	Major	
CPS	180	CPS 180	Principles of Computer Programming	3	Major; Minor; GE 2B	Co: MTH 132
CPS	181	CPS 181	Introduction to Data Structures	3	Major	CPS 180
CPS	210	CPS 210	Computer Organization and Communications	3	Major	Co: CPS 181
CPS	240	CPS 240	Object-Oriented Programming, Analysis and Design	3	Major	CPS 181 (C)
CPS	270	CPS 270	Computational Analysis and Simulation	3	Major	CPS 181; MTH 132
CPS	301	CPS 301	Social Issues of Computing and Professional Practice	1	Major	26 credits earned
CPS	340	CPS 340	Advanced Data Structures and Algorithms	3	Major	CPS 181 or CPS 210; Co: MTH 223
CPS	360	CPS 360	Computer Design and Architecture	3	Major	CPS 210
CPS	410	CPS 410	Software Engineering	3	Major	CPS 340
CPS	450	CPS 450	Programming Language Concepts	3	Major	CPS 240; CPS 340
CPS	470	CPS 470	Introduction to Operating Systems	3	Major	CPS 340; CPS 360
CPS	480	CPS 480	Introduction to Artificial Intelligence	3	Major	CPS 340
CPS	498	CPS 498	Senior Design I	3	Major	All 300 level major courses

CPS	585	CPS 585	Applied Data Engineering	3	Major	CPS 181; CPS 240
ENG	101	ENG 101	Freshman Composition	3	Comp	
ENG	160	ENG 160	History of Game Design	3	GE 1B	
ENG	175	ENG 175	The Nature of Language	3	GE 3B	
ENG	201	ENG 201	Intermediate Composition	3	Comp	ENG 101 (C)
HST	168	HST 168	Modern East Asia	3	GE 4B	
ITC	341	ITC 341	Introduction to Databases and Applications	3	Major	CPS 181
MTH	132	MTH 132	Calculus I	4	Major; Minor; Comp	
MTH	133	MTH 133	Calculus II	4	Minor	MTH 132
MTH	175	MTH 175	Discrete Mathematics	3	Major; Minor	MTH 132
MTH	223	MTH 223	Linear Algebra and Matrix Theory	3	Major; Minor	MTH 132
PHL	140	PHL 140	Introduction to Symbolic Logic	3		
PHL	320	PHL 320	Philosophy of Knowledge	3		PHL 140
PHL	325	PHL 325	Philosophy of Mind	3	GE 1A	
PSC	325	PSC 325	The Civil Rights Movement	3	GE 4C	
PSY	100	PSY 100	Introduction to Psychology	3	Minor; GE 3A	
PSY	211QR	PSY 211QR	Introduction to Psychological Statistics	3	Minor	PSY 100
PSY	220	PSY 220	Developmental Psychology	3	Minor	PSY 100
PSY	225	PSY 225	Foundations of Cognitive Science	3	Minor	
PSY	382	PSY 382	Perception	3	Minor	PSY 100
PSY	387	PSY 387	Behavioral Neuroscience	3	Minor	PSY 100 or BIO 101
PSY	584	PSY 584	Cognitive Neuroscience	3	Minor	PSY 387
STA	382QR	STA 382QR	Elementary Statistical Analysis	3	Major; Minor	
TAI	302	TAI 302	Voice and Diction	3	Comp	
WGS	104	WGS 104	Women in STEM Fields	3	GE 4A	

Final Tips and Tricks

There are many books that teach you how to become the perfect student. Feel free to ignore those as there is no perfect student. There is just you as a student and how much you are willing to invest in yourself. This guide is just one such method. As a bonus, I'll give you some more recommendations that may help propel you to being ready to jump into your career ahead of your peers.

Extend Your Planner

There is a lot more you can do with your course list. You can extend it to plan out your courses by semester in order to make sure you're not overwhelmed by hard courses at any given time. Or you could record your grades and calculate your GPA for each semester and total. It's completely up to you.

Build Your Portfolio

Your courses will have you create things in various forms. This is the absolute best time to document what you are doing, what you are learning, and how it may help others. Use it to build a portfolio of writings in a blog or your art, programs, or designs on a website.

Keep an Idea Book

Buy a small notebook where you muse about what you're learning, your deeper questions, and how your courses connect. This will help you recall what you're learning in different contexts than just each course individually. If you go onto graduate school, it may give you ideas to research.

Don't Be Afraid to Make Changes

The document you create from this guide is not set in stone. If new electives open up, change to those. If your current major just isn't working out, change it. Is a new minor offered and it's really interesting? Add it. Want to take five years and more courses? Go for it. This is your life. Making the right investments now pay off a thousandfold later.

Take Courses in the Summer

Take a course at a community college and transfer it in. You'll get the same knowledge at a third of the price. Just make sure it transfers in. In my state of Michigan, there is a program where you can take courses at any community college at in-district prices so long as you're

in-district at any other community college. They even list what online courses you can take. By doing this, you can either add courses and still take a full course load or take a reduced course load in later semesters when the courses get more difficult.

Don't Take All of Your General Education at the Beginning

Some universities recommend that you get your general education courses out of the way before starting your major. This is a big mistake, as you might see from the case study. The major our student selected has a chain of courses that require each other as prerequisites. In this example, you can see that she needs to take CPS 180 -> CPS 181 -> CPS 210 -> CPS 360 -> CPS 470. This will take five semesters, provided that they are offered every semester.

Another reason why you should spread out your courses is so that you aren't just taking five high-level courses your final semester while you are also looking for a job, making sure you're going to graduate, and any other personal obligations you have. Spread out your courses and take general education courses throughout from beginning to end.

Start Networking

As a professional, you will want to connect to others to build relationships. This benefits you in many ways. It can lead to paying opportunities, such as jobs. It can also lead to collaborators for research. Or maybe speaking opportunities. Building a network, starting with your peers and professors, opens doors that would not appear otherwise.

Find an Internship if You Can

An internship (or co-op) offers professional experience before you're expected to have experience. Make sure it's a paid opportunity and NEVER pay to have an internship. Is there a company that you want to intern at but they don't hire interns? Write then an email explaining why they should have interns and why one of them should be you.