DECLARING A MAJOR OR CONCENTRATION

Major Declaration

From anthropology to astronomy, from economics to ethnicity and race studies, Columbia offers over eighty majors across foundational disciplines in the liberal arts. We encourage you to explore the many fields of study in the Arts and Sciences. Whichever department you choose as your academic home, you will have the opportunity to develop your critical thinking, refine your research skills, challenge your intellectual presuppositions, and expand your cultural horizons.

Beginning the Major Declaration Process

Before declaring a major, students should read the information on majors and concentrations on the Degree Fulfillment (http://bulletin.columbia.edu/general-studies/undergraduates/degree-fulfillment/major) page in order to understand the choices and policies relevant to these academic programs. Students who matriculate with at least 45 transfer credits may declare a major after completing 45 points toward the degree. Students who wish to pursue two programs must declare both programs prior to completing 80 points toward the degree. Students who wish to declare two programs must have a minimum GPA of 3.2.

Double Majors

Students should have a strong academic record, and excellent academic reasons for choosing to declare two programs (whether a concentration or second major). Students who wish to pursue two programs must declare both programs prior to completing 80 points toward the degree. Students who wish to declare two programs must have a minimum GPA of 3.2.

Students cannot declare two programs owned by the same offering unit (department, institute, or center). For example, a student may not declare programs in Russian Language and Culture and in Slavic Studies, both of which are owned by the Department of Slavic Languages; similarly, a student may not declare programs in Mathematics and in Applied Mathematics, both of which are owned by the Department of Mathematics. All joint majors (e.g., Economics-Political Science) will be considered as owned by both offering units, so that a student may not, for example, pursue programs in both Political Science and Economics-Political Science.

Double Counting

If a student chooses to declare two programs of study, the student can, in certain situations, apply a single course to both programs (“double-counting”). There are three conditions under which students may apply a single course to two programs, and depending on the two programs declared, some or all of these conditions may apply.

• If two programs both require the same coursework to teach fundamental skills needed for the field, those courses may be applied to both programs; specifically: (1) elementary and intermediate foreign language courses, (2) the calculus sequence (I through IV, or Honors A and B), (3) introductory courses in Statistics (STAT UN1101 or 1201), and (4) the introductory course in computer programming (COMS W1004).

• Students may also apply a maximum of two courses to both programs, if each course has been approved toward the fulfillment of the student’s two declared programs. Offering departments, institutes, or centers may choose to restrict the double-counting of particular courses.

• As with students with one declared program, the maximum number of courses students with two declared programs may overlap to the Core is two. Students may not overlap Core courses with both of their programs (triple-counting).

Criteria for Declaring a Major

In order to declare a major students must meet the following criteria:

• Enrollment in at least one semester at GS with a minimum of 12 points completed or in progress
• Completion of at least 45 points toward the bachelor’s degree (including transfer credit)
• Regular and satisfactory progress toward fulfilling the GS core requirements

Students who have completed 90 or more cumulative points without a major on record will be placed on registration hold and may receive an Academic Warning. Additionally, students who wish to make any changes to their declared major and/or concentration must see their academic advisor.

Policies Governing Major Declaration

Before using the online major declaration system to declare an academic program, GS students should review the following academic policies, if applicable:

Major/Concentration Degree Requirements

All students must complete at least one major to fulfill the degree requirements, and may select a second major, concentration, or special concentration in addition to this first selection. Selecting only a concentration will not fulfill the requirements for the bachelor’s degree.

Beginning the Major Declaration Process

GS students may declare a major or concentration online (https://majordec.college.columbia.edu/gs) during the following designated periods. Please refer to the GS Academic Calendar (https://gs.columbia.edu/academic-calendar) for specific dates.

• October for the fall term
• February 15 to March 15 for the spring term

GS students must fulfill the requirements for a major to receive a bachelor’s degree from Columbia, and must formally declare a major program before completing 90 points towards the degree; concentrations must be declared prior to completing 80 points. Ideally students should declare a major after completing 45 points of coursework toward the degree. Students who matriculate with at least 45 transfer credits may declare their respective majors in their first term at GS as long as they have 12 points in progress.

Before declaring a major, students should read the information on majors and concentrations on the Degree Fulfillment (http://bulletin.columbia.edu/general-studies/undergraduates/degree-fulfillment/major) page in order to understand the choices and policies relevant to these academic programs. Students may also wish to consult with GS academic advisors, faculty members, department websites, and the department descriptions (http://bulletin.columbia.edu/general-studies/undergraduates/majors-concentrations) on the GS website when deciding on a major.

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• As with students with one declared program, the maximum number of courses students with two declared programs may overlap to the Core is two. Students may not overlap Core courses with both of their programs (triple-counting).
Declaring a Major or Concentration

Using the Online Major Declaration System

The online major declaration system (https://majordec.college.columbia.edu/gs) will be available on the first day of each major declaration period.

Students who use the system must declare at least one major and are limited to a maximum of two program selections (the second choice of program may be either a major or a concentration).

Students will receive an email confirming their academic program and providing information about their department’s practice for advising new majors.

Students with questions about declaring a major, or who experience any technical difficulties with the online major declaration system, should email gsmajordeclaration@columbia.edu.

Majors Requiring Departmental Approval

While most majors can be officially declared using the online system, the departments listed below require written departmental approval.

Students selecting a major from any of the departments listed below must print and fill out the GS Major Declaration Form (also available from the GS Dean of Students Office) and take it to the appropriate department (addresses listed below). Once departmental approval has been obtained, students should bring the form to 403 Lewisohn to finalize the major declaration process.

- Architecture (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/archprogram) (500 Diana Center, Barnard College)
- Astronomy (http://www.astro.columbia.edu) (1328 Pupin Hall)
- Astrophysics (http://www.astro.columbia.edu) (1328 Pupin Hall)
- Biological Sciences (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/biology) (Last Name A-L: 744 Fairchild Extension; Last Name M-Z: 716 Fairchild Extension)
- Chemistry (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/chemistry) (340 Havemeyer Hall)
- Comparative Literature and Society (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/icls) (Heyman Center)
- Creative Writing (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/writing) (617 Kent Hall)
- Dance (http://www.barnard.edu/dance) (204 Barnard Annex, Barnard College)
- Earth and Environmental Sciences (http://eesc.columbia.edu) (557 Schermerhorn Extension)
- East Asian Languages and Cultures (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ ealac) (Contact John Phan, jp3720@columbia.edu  (pja1@columbia.edu))
- Film Studies (http://arts.columbia.edu) (513 Dodge Hall)
- Italian (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/italian) (502 Hamilton Hall)
- Latin American and Iberian Cultures (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ spanish) (101 Casa Hispánica)
- Mathematics (http://www.math.columbia.edu) (410 Mathematics Hall)
- Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/mesaas) (401 Knox Hall, Union Theological Seminary)
- Physics (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/physics) (704 Pupin Hall)
- Religion (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/religion) (80 Claremont Avenue, Room 103)
- Sociology (http://www.sociology.columbia.edu) (501 Knox Hall, Union Theological Seminary)
- Sustainable Development (http://sdev.ei.columbia.edu) (The Earth Institute)
- Drama and Theatre Arts (http://arts.columbia.edu/undergraduate-theatre-program) (507 Milbank)
- Urban Studies (http://barnard.edu/urban) (236 Milbank Hall, Barnard College)
- Visual Arts (http://arts.columbia.edu/undergraduate-visual-arts-program) (310 Dodge Hall)

Before visiting the departmental advisor, students should create a plan of study based upon the major’s prerequisites, requirements, and course offerings, and bring this plan to the meeting with the departmental advisor.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I take courses that may count toward my major prior to declaring the major?

In sampling courses across the curriculum, many students end up taking courses that will count toward their major prior to actually declaring the major. This is a good way to receive an introduction to a major and to get an early start on some of the major requirements prior to declaring. However, students should be aware of the following:

1. Most departments do not allow a student to count toward the major or concentration courses in which the final grade earned is a “D” or a “P”. (Exceptions are noted in departmental guidelines for the major.)
2. Some Columbia departments have restrictions on the number or kind of Barnard courses that will count toward the Columbia major or concentration.
3. Some departments, like Economics, will not count courses taken out of sequence.
4. When in doubt, check the department website.

What if I cannot decide among several different options?

Students are urged to schedule an advising appointment with their GS advisor to discuss their interests and options. A student’s advisor can help in thinking about the important questions to consider when choosing a major. Students are also encouraged to visit departments, attend Major Open Houses, review their undergraduate handbook (several departments have these), meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies or another faculty member in the department, and review the departmental websites. Many departments and programs host open houses for potential majors during February and March; watch for announcements in the GS email news digests, or contact a department directly to find out if/when an open house is scheduled.

What if I am interested in a concentration?

All GS students must complete a major in order to graduate from GS. Concentrations are optional but, if pursued, should be declared. Students who want to declare a concentration must do so before completing 80 points of coursework toward the degree. Prior to declaring a concentration, students must declare (or have declared) a major and must have a minimum GPA of 3.2. In some cases, students who have
attempted a double major choose, later in the process, to change the second major to a concentration.

What if I want to pursue a double major?
Students interested in double-majoring should discuss the viability of this with their respective GS advisors. Students may also consider doing a concentration in one area and a major in the other. Students who are interested in double-majoring must declare both majors before completing 80 points toward the degree; exceptions to this rule may be made if the student has already made significant progress toward major completion prior to the formal declaration.

What happens if I do not declare a major?
Students who do not declare a major by the time they have earned 90 points toward the degree will be placed on registration hold.

What if I want to change my major or concentration after one or both have been declared?
Students should schedule an appointment with their GS advisor to discuss why they want to change their major as well as the new major they are considering. The student and advisor will then complete the necessary paperwork for deleting the old major and declaring a new one, as this cannot be done online. Students normally are not permitted to declare a new major after earning more than 90 points toward the degree, but for compelling reasons exceptions can be made. Students should follow a similar process for changing or dropping a concentration.

Can any of my transfer credits count toward my major?
1. Each department has the discretion to count up to 12 credits in transfer toward the major; some departments have a different limit and may accept a different number of credits. Approval by GS of transfer credit toward the degree does not mean that this credit will automatically count toward the major.
2. At least 18 points toward the major must be taken at Columbia.
3. Students should consult with the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) about which transfer courses may count toward the major and satisfy existing departmental requirements.
4. Directors of Undergraduate Studies usually require transcripts and syllabi to make decisions about whether transfer credits will count toward the major.

Can courses taken as part of study abroad count toward the major?
Students who are approved for study abroad by GS must receive approval from their major department with respect to any courses taken abroad that may be counted toward the major.

Can summer term courses count toward the major?
Students must make sure that summer term courses at Columbia will count toward the major. This permission comes from the department, not the student’s GS advisor.

Any other exemptions to the above rules are clearly articulated on the GS website or on departmental websites.