College of Arts & Sciences

The College of Arts & Sciences is the largest undergraduate program at Washington University, offering students the most diverse range of courses in more than 50 different fields, ranging from anthropology and biochemistry to mathematics and performing arts.

The college draws on the rich and varied resources that this distinguished university has to offer: a creative and internationally recognized faculty, a diverse and able student body, a superior library, and excellent opportunities for advanced study and mentored research. As the center of intellectual life on the campus, the College of Arts & Sciences benefits from and contributes to the studies of architecture, art, business, engineering, law, medicine and social work.

Of central importance to the life of the college is the quality of teaching. Undergraduate students have the opportunity to learn from and work beside stimulating teacher-scholars who are leaders in their fields. Our nationally recognized faculty, which numbers more than 600, is made up of artists, biologists, chemists, economists, historians, philosophers and poets, all of whom bring the excitement and diversity of new ideas into the classroom.

Governance

The College of Arts & Sciences is bound by the charter of the university and ultimately responsible to the University Board of Trustees, which delegates the administration of the university to the chancellor. In turn, the chancellor delegates the responsibility for the college’s internal governance to the deans and faculty of the College of Arts & Sciences.

Because the college is continually reassessing its objectives and policies, faculty and students alike may take the initiative in proposing changes in curriculum and policies. New programs or proposed modifications are reviewed by committees with members who represent the diverse points of view of the academic community.

By action of the faculty of Arts & Sciences in January 1969 (revised in May 1971), the ArtSci Council, a student committee, shares joint responsibility with the faculty for college-wide degree requirements, the grading system, and those policies that directly affect the lives of students. The ArtSci Council appoints student representatives to various standing and ad hoc college committees.

The Curriculum

The College of Arts & Sciences fosters the quintessential qualities of a liberal arts education in its students: a heightened spirit of inquiry, an ability to organize and synthesize information, skills in written and oral expression, and a familiarity with the ways in which thoughtful people discover those commitments and values that make life worthwhile. By incorporating the college’s manifold intellectual resources — people, libraries, laboratories and studios — Arts & Sciences students "learn how to learn," developing both the flexibility and the habits of thought necessary to the ever-evolving worlds of work and global citizenship.

The college’s academic program has two principal objectives. First, it provides students with an understanding of the range of human knowledge and attainment by developing an appreciation of the characteristic problems, achievements and limitations of the various fields of human endeavor. The curriculum works to ensure this understanding by requiring a minimum amount of study (9 units/three courses) in each of three broad areas of study — the Humanities; Natural Sciences & Mathematics; and Social & Behavioral Sciences — and three to four courses (9-12 units) in a fourth area, Language & Cultural Diversity. Collectively, these area requirements make up approximately one-third of the units needed to graduate.

Second, the college’s academic program gives students the opportunity to study a subject or area in a sustained, intensive way. After a period of initial investigation (typically two to three semesters) during which students explore the richness inherent in the various fields of study, a student declares an area of concentration: the major. The college offers more than 30 traditional subject majors — such as chemistry, English and music — and more than 20 interdisciplinary majors — such as American culture studies, global studies, and women, gender, and sexuality studies. Students also may develop an individualized special major.

In all departments, students are encouraged to proceed as their strengths and interests lead them. Placement examinations are used in many departments to enroll undergraduates in courses at the levels their previous training warrants; in other departments, proficiency examinations are available (visit the Proficiency and Placement Examinations (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/admissions/) section of this Bulletin or the college’s placement webpages (https://artsci.wustl.edu/resources/policies-procedures/#anchor-group-2874) under Credit for Test Scores and College Coursework Prior to WashU).

The degree requirements and policies in the 2023-24 Bulletin apply to students entering Washington University during the 2023-24 academic year. To consult catalogs from prior years, refer to our Prior Bulletins (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/about/prior/).

Academic Advising

To assist students with their undergraduate planning, the college provides a closely coordinated academic advising program. Matriculating students have a specially selected four-year academic advisor with whom they meet regularly during the first year to help with the transition into the university and to help select courses for the fall and spring semesters. After the first year, students meet with their four-year academic advisors prior to registration each semester to discuss interests, goals and academic course work. Students are encouraged to consult with their four-year academic advisors any time they need assistance throughout the school year.

Upon declaring a major, students are also assigned a major advisor in the department of their principal area of study. The extent of the advisor’s assistance depends on a student’s individual needs and wishes. Consultation with a major advisor, in addition to the four-year academic advisor, is required each time a student prepares to register for courses.
Students with problems or questions related to academic issues are invited to visit the College Office at any time. One of the deans is available, on a walk-in basis every day, to answer questions or to provide references to an appropriate source of help. Individual faculty members with particular specialties are among these sources of help and may be able to answer students’ questions. In addition, the Career Center, the Hafif Health and Wellness Center, the Learning Center, and the Writing Center provide a wide range of services, including individual and group instruction, interest tests and advice, individual sessions with trained counselors about educational and personal challenges, and information about the improvement of learning skills.

Pre-Matriculation Credit

Students may earn pre-matriculation credit for college-level courses completed before enrollment at Washington University as a first-year student. Sources for pre-matriculation credit include Advanced Placement (AP) examinations, British Advanced (A) Levels, the International Baccalaureate (IB), course credit earned by proficiency (e.g., back credit), and college credit earned after the sophomore year of high school that was not applied to high school graduation. Although all accepted pre-matriculation work is noted on the transcript so that the student may go directly into advanced courses, the maximum number of pre-matriculation units of credit awarded is 15. Pre-matriculation course work does not fulfill distribution requirements but may fulfill requirements for majors and minors. If a student enrolls in and completes a course equivalent to that for which pre-matriculation credit has been granted, the pre-matriculation units for the course in question will be removed from the student's record. For more information, please refer to the Pre-Matriculation Credit Units (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/admissions/#prematriculation) section on the Admissions Procedures page of this Bulletin.

First-Year Academic Programs

First-year students may choose one of the following programs that provides a basic structure for their course selection. Each option provides an effective means of discovering personal and intellectual interests.

Ampersand Programs

Ampersand Programs (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/artsci/ampersand/) are multisemester programs of linked seminars designed to bring students with similar intellectual interests into a close mentoring relationship with members of the faculty. Ampersand Programs provide a coherent, group-oriented learning experience while still allowing time for other electives. Although Ampersand Programs are encouraged, they are not required.

Other First-Year Programs

Students who have already made a firm commitment to a particular discipline in the humanities, natural sciences or social sciences or who are uncertain about what they would like to pursue also have a rich array of academic choices to be made throughout their college careers. The course schedule can be either widely exploratory or oriented toward a particular objective, such as pre-health studies. Students who are still exploring their options are strongly encouraged to consider enrolling in a First-Year Seminar or another first-year opportunity when selecting courses in consultation with their four-year academic advisors. First-Year Seminars are single-semester, small-group courses that enable entering students to work closely with peers and faculty around an exciting topic of inquiry. First-year opportunities are single-semester, 1- or 2-unit courses designed to highlight interesting research while complementing other elective course work.

Major Fields of Study

A major consists of both introductory course work and a minimum of 18 advanced (300-level and greater) units, all letter-graded and completed with at least a C-. Individual departments may specify additional units or stricter minimum-grade requirements. Students should refer to the department program pages in this Bulletin for program-specific requirements.

A student graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (AB) may receive no more than a total of two majors and a minor or one major and two minors.

Major declaration is initiated online through WebSTAC (https://acadinfo.wustl.edu/WebSTAC.asp). The relevant department or interdisciplinary committee will receive notification of the student’s request to declare the major. The declaration of major will not be processed until the student completes any action(s) required by the department as indicated in the WebSTAC application. When the declaration of major is complete, the new major will appear in the Current Programs section of the student’s Major Programs page in WebSTAC, and an advisor for the new major will be assigned by the department.

Second Majors

Students may complete more than one major, including a second major in the College of Art through the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts, in the McKelvey School of Engineering, or in the Olin Business School. A second major is not required to earn a degree.

If a student has two majors, only introductory (100- and 200-level) courses may be counted, when relevant, toward the requirements of both majors. All advanced (300- and 400-level) courses must be unique to each major. In other words, no advanced course may “double-count” for the course work needed to fulfill the minimal requirements for either major. Should both major programs require the same course, a departmentally sanctioned elective must be chosen to replace the course in one of the programs.

Students in architecture, art, business or engineering may choose to pursue a second major in the College of Arts & Sciences. These students will receive one degree, a BS or BFA, with two majors: one in the professional school and one in the College of Arts & Sciences.

Minor Fields of Study

Students who develop a significant interest in one or more fields of study beyond the major may choose to pursue a minor in those fields. A minor is not required to earn a degree. Minors may be fulfilled in an area closely related to the major or, to add more breadth to the...
student’s educational program, in a very different area of study. A minor typically comprises 15 to 21 units of credit, all letter-graded and completed with a grade of C- or better. At least 9 of these units of credit must be at the 300 level or above, and at least half of the courses must be completed in residence at Washington University. Specific course requirements for a minor are determined by each department or program and are detailed in the department program pages in this Bulletin.

If a student has a major and a minor or has two minors, only introductory (100- and 200-level) courses may be counted, when relevant, toward the requirements of both programs. All advanced (300- and 400-level) courses must be unique to each program. In other words, no advanced course may “double-count” for the course work needed to fulfill either program’s minimal requirements. Should a student’s major and minor programs require the same course, a departmentally sanctioned elective must be chosen to replace the course in one of the programs.

In addition to pursuing the broad array of minor programs offered through the college, students may undertake minors in architectural studies, art, business, computer science, electrical engineering and systems engineering.

Minor declaration is initiated online through WebSTAC (https://acadinfo.wustl.edu/WebSTAC.asp). The relevant department or interdisciplinary committee will receive notification of the student’s request to declare the minor. The declaration of minor will not be processed until the student completes any action(s) required by the department as indicated in the WebSTAC application. When the declaration of minor is complete, the new minor will appear in the Current Programs section of the student’s Major Programs page in WebSTAC.

The Special Major and Special Minor

On some occasions, a student’s interests may fall in the intersection of two or more formally organized major programs, in which case a student may propose a special major that brings the related course work together. Students who propose a special major should be prepared to undertake honors-level work as all special majors must complete a capstone project of 3 to 6 units during the senior year.

Students interested in creating a special major or minor must confer with the dean charged with coordinating this program. After consultation, students must submit a formal proposal to the appropriate dean. The proposal must include the following: (1) a description of the program of study, including an explanation of the program’s integrating idea; (2) a list of courses to be taken; (3) a letter of support from the proposed academic advisor; and (4) a letter of support from a faculty member in a second, related department who has approved the proposal.

A proposal for a special major or minor must be submitted no later than the fifth semester of undergraduate enrollment. The Committee on the Special Major and Minor is responsible for final action on these proposals.

Special Academic Options

Overseas Study Programs

The guiding principle of international study through the College of Arts & Sciences is to encourage students to acquire the broad cultural knowledge, languages and practical skills to enable them to participate fully in a global society.

For information about the 100-plus study abroad programs offered in more than 50 countries, visit the Overseas Programs website (http://overseas.wustl.edu) or the webpages of specific departments and programs.

Individual and Group Performance

Opportunities for individual and group performance include participation in various musical organizations sponsored by the Department of Music (e.g., mixed choir, symphony orchestra, wind ensemble) and in courses offered in physical education. To encourage students to pursue such creative, physical, and social activities, the college allows up to 12 units of credit toward the bachelor’s degree for the successful completion of enrollment in individual and group performance. Exceptions to the minimums may be made for students majoring in departments that require a large number of performance courses, such as dance, drama and music.

Internships

Students participating in internships that contribute to their academic or professional development may earn credit for those internships. Registration in an internship for credit is conditional upon the satisfactory completion of the Internship Learning Agreement form provided by the College Office and the approval of this completed form by the College Office, the faculty sponsor and the internship sponsor.

Credit awarded for an internship corresponds to the time spent in work activities. The student is expected to work 45 hours of internship experience over a period of six to eight weeks for each unit of credit. Registration for 1 to 3 units of credit is possible.

Students may complete the work for an internship over the summer and receive credit during the subsequent semester. Any internship completed this way must satisfy all requirements stated here. The learning agreement must be submitted and approved prior to the student beginning work at the internship site. Therefore, credit cannot be awarded retroactively.

Internship courses are offered for credit/no credit grades only and, therefore, count toward the maximum of 24 credit/no credit units that may be applied toward graduation requirements. Internships do not count toward the advanced unit requirement and may count toward the major only with departmental approval. Students may not receive more than 3 units of internship credit in any semester and may count...
no more than 6 units of internship credit toward the 120 units required for graduation. (These regulations, along with all others governing the AB degree, are detailed on the Arts & Sciences Academic Regulations page (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/artsci/policies/).)

Part-Time Study: Nontraditional Students

The university recognizes that, for certain students with high educational goals, full-time study may not be feasible or appropriate. Employment in demanding positions, extensive family responsibilities or other obligations may prevent an otherwise serious and competent student from completing the bachelor’s degree at a rate of 15 units a semester. With their varied experiences outside the university, such students make valuable contributions to the classroom environment as they pursue programs of study suitable to their special circumstances. Please contact the School of Continuing & Professional Studies at 314-935-6700 for more information about part-time study.

Tuition Reduction

Students who have completed eight full-time semesters, excluding summer terms, in the College of Arts & Sciences and paid full tuition for eight semesters may seek reduced tuition for a ninth or subsequent semester, provided that they have fewer than 12 units to complete. Students must petition the College Office (https://artsci.wustl.edu/contact-us/), Arts & Sciences, Cupples II Hall, Room 104. Students who successfully petition for tuition adjustment for the ninth or subsequent semester will pay only for the units of credit that they attempt (proportionate to the full-time standard for tuition). Students approved for reduced tuition under this policy will have their term bills adjusted after the semester’s add/drop period has concluded.

Army ROTC and Air Force ROTC

Students have the opportunity to participate in either the Air Force ROTC Military Aerospace Science Studies (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/interdisciplinaryopportunities/rotc/#afrotc) program or the Air Force ROTC Military Science (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/interdisciplinaryopportunities/rotc/#AirForceROTC) program. Scholarship information for both programs can be found in the Scholarship Funds (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/financialsupport/#scholarships) section of this Bulletin. For information about counting ROTC course work toward the degree, refer to the Academic Regulations (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/artsci/policies/) page of this Bulletin.

Combined Undergraduate Degree Opportunities

Students may work toward the Bachelor of Arts (AB) degree in the College of Arts & Sciences while simultaneously earning another undergraduate degree in architecture, art, business or engineering. Students undertaking such a “dual degree” program must earn 150 units, 90 of which must be in the College of Arts & Sciences. They must also fulfill the requirements for a major in each of the two schools and complete the distribution requirements for both schools. Interested students should contact both a dean in the college and the designated dean in the appropriate professional school as early as possible during their undergraduate careers.

Majors Across Schools

Students may earn an AB degree with a first major in the College of Arts & Sciences and a second major in art and design, business, or engineering by fulfilling all the distribution requirements for the AB degree and completing the requirements both for the first major in Arts & Sciences and for the second major in art and design, business, or engineering. With careful planning, meeting these requirements can be accomplished within the 120 units required for the AB degree; students should keep careful count to ensure that they complete at least 90 units of credit in the College of Arts & Sciences. For further information about second majors in art and design, visit the College of Art (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/art/#second-majors-art-design) Bulletin page; for further information about second majors in business, visit the Olin Business School website (http://olin.wustl.edu); and for further information about second majors in engineering, visit the McKelvey School of Engineering website (http://engineering.wustl.edu).

The Accelerated AB/Master’s Program

Exceptional students who bring to the university a definite commitment to a field of study in the College of Arts & Sciences and a demonstrated capacity for intensive work may be able to complete a master’s degree in a one-year accelerated program after completing the AB degree. This accelerated program, which begins each year in the fall semester, is open exclusively to students who graduated during the immediately preceding December, May or August. The application deadline is March 15; applications may be submitted at any time during the senior year up to the deadline. Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores are not required. The program is available only to students currently in their senior year and only for continuous enrollment the next year. There is no option for deferred admission. The application for admission must be made to the department, which forwards the application and recommendation for admission to the Office of Graduate Studies, Arts & Sciences. Application forms are available on the website of the Office of Graduate Studies, Arts & Sciences (https://gradstudies.artsci.wustl.edu/node/15141/#faq-13216).

Some departments may not participate in this program, and some departments that do not otherwise offer a master’s degree may provide this opportunity to Washington University undergraduates. Contact the relevant department for more specific information about its admission policies and requirements. Students admitted to the program will be regular, full-time graduate students enrolled in the College of Arts & Sciences at Washington University.

Most master’s degrees in Arts & Sciences require 36 credits. The accelerated program allows Washington University undergraduates to complete a master’s degree in one academic year by applying up to five 3-credit courses or four 4-credit courses (a maximum of 16 units), taken as an undergraduate at the 400/4000 level or above, toward the master’s degree requirements. For master’s programs
Students in 3-2 programs will pay the standard full-time undergraduate tuition rate for the fourth year, except for those enrolled in the MBA program, which charges a premium above the undergraduate tuition rate. Students will receive financial aid for the fourth year based upon their eligibility for undergraduate financial aid awards, including Pell Grants.

There is no commitment for undergraduate financial aid beyond the fourth year of study. Students in 3-2 programs may apply to the professional programs (MBA, Social Work) for graduate student financial aid for study in the professional program beyond the fourth year.

This policy applies to all Arts & Sciences undergraduates who have completed less than the equivalent of eight semesters of academic work toward their bachelor’s degree. If these students enroll in any Washington University graduate or post-baccalaureate degree program to begin course work toward a graduate degree during their fourth year before they have been awarded a Washington University bachelor’s degree or completed the equivalent of eight semesters of undergraduate enrollment, they are covered by this policy.

This policy applies to current 3-2 programs involving Washington University bachelor’s and master’s programs and to any future 3-2 programs.
Olin Business School

A five-year program combining an undergraduate degree and a master’s degree is available to a select number of students. More information about the Olin Business School 3+2 Program (http://www.olin.wustl.edu/academicprograms/BSBA/Pages/CombinedStudyOptions.aspx) is available on the Olin website.

Undergraduate Pre-Professional Preparation

Students planning to pursue pre-professional studies should refer to the general recommendations given below. For more specific recommendations, visit the appropriate webpages.

Architecture

Please refer to the College of Architecture (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/architecture/) section in this Bulletin.

Business Administration

Students in the College of Arts & Sciences are welcome to consult with the associate dean for the undergraduate program in the Olin Business School concerning any aspect of preparation for careers in business. For more information, visit the Olin Business School website (http://olin.wustl.edu).

Law

The two most significant factors law schools use in determining who to admit for legal study are the undergraduate GPA (taking into consideration the difficulty of courses attempted and the breadth of study) and the score on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). Admission to law school requires a bachelor’s degree.

There is no required set of courses for pre-law study at the undergraduate level. Many law school applicants have majors in economics, English, history, philosophy and political science, but law schools also seek students with undergraduate majors in business, engineering, science and other disciplines. Whatever areas pre-law students choose to emphasize in their undergraduate studies, they should take courses that require significant amounts of writing, that develop analytic thinking skills, that encourage the application of principles or theories to new situations, and that require the original writing and revision of written work in response to comment and critique. It is also important to learn to read and analyze complex written material and to develop sound research skills.

Economics, history, philosophy and political science courses can help students to develop an understanding of the traditions behind and the development of the U.S. legal system. Accounting, logic, and statistics courses also provide valuable background for legal study and the practice of law.

The pre-law advisors in the College of Arts & Sciences are available to help students plan a course of study and prepare a strategy for applying for admission to law school. For more information, visit the pre-law website (https://artsci.wustl.edu/resources/prelaw-advising/).

Medicine

Pre-medical students in the College of Arts & Sciences of Washington University complete the bachelor’s degree before admission to a medical school. In addition to fulfilling the requirements for the AB, pre-medical students must fulfill the entrance requirements of the medical schools to which they plan to apply. Specific requirements, which may vary, are summarized in the Medical College Admission Requirements online handbook, published annually by the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Pre-medical students must demonstrate high academic achievement and possess the character, responsibility and level of commitment suitable for a career in medicine. Although requirements for specific medical schools are increasingly varied, most schools have traditionally required at least one year each of English, general biology, inorganic chemistry, organic chemistry and physics, with laboratory components traditionally required for all of the core science courses. In addition, students preparing to take the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) should take one semester each of biochemistry, psychology and sociology. Medical schools also encourage applicants to develop a broad intellectual background that includes the humanities, the social and behavioral sciences, and a demonstrated understanding of and appreciation for social and cultural diversity.

Students interested in the health professions may choose a major in any field — the humanities, the social sciences or the natural sciences — as long as they complete the pre-medical requirements. Any student planning to apply to MD/PhD programs is strongly advised to major in one of the natural sciences and to begin gaining bench research experience no later than the beginning of their sophomore year. Research opportunities are available on the Danforth Campus and at the School of Medicine, and they are open to both science and nonscience majors. Health-related volunteer opportunities are also widely available.

Students who enter the university planning to apply to medical school should, with the aid of their advisors, structure their course of study to include the medical school requirements. There is no one right or best sequence of courses, and there are numerous pathways to medical school. Because each student’s pathway is different, students interested in a career in the health professions are encouraged to consult the pre-health deans in the college in addition to their academic advisors. Additional information can be found on the pre-health website (https://prehealth.wustl.edu/).
Other Health Professions

Students interested in pursuing other careers in the health professions — including dentistry, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, physical therapy and veterinary medicine — are invited to visit with a specialist advisor from the pre-health advising team. Interested students will find additional information on the pre-health advising (https://prehealth.wustl.edu/people/) website.

Summer Session

The Summer Session in Arts & Sciences offers courses for current Washington University students and visiting students, including pre-college learners. Visit the Summer Session page (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/artsci/summer/) for more information.

Pre-College Programs

Arts & Sciences Pre-College Programs offer a variety of programs for middle and high school students. Visit the Pre-College Programs page (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/undergrad/artsci/pre-college/) for more information.