MAJORS, MINORS, AND CERTIFICATES

Undergraduate Majors

To receive a bachelor’s degree, a student must complete the requirements for at least one major. Rice offers majors in many fields. Within some majors, students have the choice of a particular area of concentration. Students also may choose to fulfill the requirements for more than one major; such majors do not necessarily need to be in related fields. More detailed information on the departmental majors described below may be found in the Undergraduate Degree chart, in the section “Departments and Interdisciplinary Programs” or by contacting the department. The process for declaring majors appears in the section Declaring Majors and Minors and Area Majors.

School of Architecture

Students admitted to the university as architecture majors must first complete four years of the BA program (architecture major) before applying to the BArch program in their senior year. If admitted, they are assigned a preceptorship with an architectural firm for a one-year period, after which they return to Rice to complete the BArch degree program. The School of Architecture also offers a BA in Architectural Studies, which provides a foundation for graduate level study of architecture and/or pursuit of other fields.

George R. Brown School of Engineering

Rice offers majors in bioengineering, chemical and biomolecular engineering, civil and environmental engineering, computational and applied mathematics, computer science, electrical and computer engineering, materials science and nanoengineering, mechanical engineering, and statistics. These programs lead to either the BA or the BS degree and may qualify students for further graduate study.

School of Humanities

Students may declare majors in art history, classical studies, English, European studies, French studies, German studies, Spanish and Portuguese, history, philosophy, religion, and visual and dramatic arts. Interdisciplinary majors are available in ancient Mediterranean civilizations, Asian studies, Latin American studies, medieval and early modern studies, and the study of women, gender, and sexuality.

Shepherd School of Music

Music students may opt for either a BA or a Bachelor of Music (BMus) degree in performance, composition, music history, and music theory. Students who pass a special qualifying examination may elect an honors program that leads to the simultaneous awarding of the BMus and Master of Music (MMus) degrees after five years of study.

Wiess School of Natural Sciences

All natural sciences departments, including biosciences, chemistry, earth science, kinesiology, mathematics, neuroscience, and physics and astronomy offer programs leading to the BA degree. BS degrees are offered in some departments. Majors include astronomy, astrophysics, biochemistry and cell biology, biological sciences, kinesiology, chemical physics, chemistry, earth science, ecology and evolutionary biology, environmental studies, mathematics, and physics. Students also may elect double majors combining one of the programs in natural sciences with another science, a humanities discipline, or an engineering field.

School of Social Sciences

Rice offers majors in anthropology, economics, linguistics, mathematical economics, political science, psychology, social policy analysis, sociology, and sport management. In addition the cognitive sciences major includes science, engineering, and humanities courses, while the managerial studies major incorporates coursework in the schools of engineering and management.

Declaring Majors, Minors, and Certificates

Students declare a major, minor, or certificate via a Declaration Form. The department chair or designee must sign the form acknowledging the declaration. The department will counsel the student about the requirements that must be met to complete the major and the likelihood the student will be able to meet them. If the department believes a student is not well prepared for success in its major (or minor, or certificate), it may express its reservations on the form and/or propose a specific course of study to help the student improve his or her background. No department or program, except the School of Architecture and Shepherd School of Music, may refuse to admit an undergraduate into its program unless specific curricular conditions for such refusals are included in the relevant description of the program requirements, or in cases of resource limitations. Students may not obtain both a BA and a BS in the same major.

Students are encouraged to declare an official major as soon as they have decided on it so that a major advisor can be assigned. Students may declare a major at any time up to, before, or during the spring semester of their second year at Rice. They will not be permitted to register for the fall semester of their third year without having declared a major. The major declaration deadline is listed in the Academic Calendar each year. (Transfer students should declare within their first year or before reaching junior level status.) Students are always free to change their major by completing the Change of Major form. However, such a change may entail one or more additional semesters at the university. Area majors are an exception to this rule and must be declared by the fourth semester before graduation (see Area Majors below).

Some majors provide students an opportunity to declare a major concentration. Major concentrations are formally recognized subfields of study within a major, and they are represented by a coordinated set of courses emphasizing a subfield in that program. For those majors with approved concentrations, the major concentration is listed on the student’s academic transcript as an element of the official curriculum.

Students may declare a minor only after they have first declared a major. The declaration of minor process is identical to that of majors. Students may not major and minor in the same subject.

Additionally, students may declare their intent to pursue a university certificate only after they have first declared a major. The declaration of intent to pursue a university certificate process is identical to that of majors.

Once a student declares a major, minor, or certificate, the title of the major, minor, or university certificate is noted on the student’s transcript, and a faculty advisor in the appropriate department is assigned. To gain full benefit of departmental or program course offerings, students should meet regularly with faculty advisors.

To assess progress toward degree requirements, students should:

1. monitor their Degree Works degree audits (via ESTHER) to review progress toward degree requirements;
2. Meet regularly with their faculty advisors to review progress toward completion of major, minor, university certificate, and degree requirements.

For instructions on how to declare a major or minor in ESTHER, visit the Major, Minors, and University Certificates page of the Office of the Registrar’s website.

Area Majors

Students with well-defined needs that are not met by established departmental or interdisciplinary majors may propose an area major. Area majors combine courses from more than one department into a cohesive plan of original study that is equivalent in quality and rigor to a traditional major.

Area majors are rare and limited by the available academic resources and must be distinct from other majors at Rice. They differ from double majors, which must conform to the requirements of both departments. An area major constitutes a single major with specific requirements that include courses from two or more departments. No course in an area major may be used to fulfill the requirements of an additional major, minor or a certificate, and students with area majors must still meet all the other university graduation requirements.

Students initiate an area major after first consulting with faculty advisors from each of the departments involved. Once support has been obtained from these faculty advisors, students should consult the Office of Academic Advising (OAA) which serves as a liaison to the Committee on the Undergraduate Curriculum (CUC). Students work closely with each faculty advisor to design a comprehensive and substantial course of study and to decide on an appropriate title. This course of study must be formulated in a written proposal. Each faculty advisor and the OAA must sign off on the plan before submission to the chair of the CUC. The CUC determines final approval. As part of the review process, the CUC consults chairs of the involved departments to confirm that courses necessary for successful and timely completion of the major will be offered. If approved, the OAA officially certifies the area major plan to the Office of the Registrar and goes on to oversee the major on behalf of the faculty advisors. Any change in the area major requirements needs the approval of both the faculty advisors and the CUC.

Students may not propose an area major if they are within three semesters of graduation unless the Committee on Examinations and Standing rules that exceptional circumstances warrant this action. Under no circumstances may students propose an area major in their final semester before graduation.