

## COLLEGE BASICS

Before you make any decisions about furthering your education -- whether you think it's not for you or think you know absolutely what you want -- you should check out the information provided through the menu on the left. They will help you decide

- whether college is for you
- what schools are worthy of your time and money
- which type of school to sign up with
- what type of degree you wish to pursue

You should also set up an appointment to talk with your ESO about your long-term education and career goals. Even if you've done your homework and know what school you want to attend, your ESO may have some insights -- for example, about which degrees can help you in military and civilian career fields -- you haven't considered.

## College Career Workbook

This is an [on-line version of a hard-copy workbook](#) for anyone who wants to pursue college studies and hasn't taken college courses before. It provides a number of exercises which will help to understand what you must do, and assure that you have taken the necessary steps for your college degree.

## Do I Need a Degree to Get the Job I Want?

Many Coast Guard personnel are more interested in working with their hands (for example, carpentry, gunsmithing, plumbing, locksmithing, electrical work) than they are in sitting in class for five hours a day to get a degree. Still, everyone tells them they need to get a degree to succeed in the civilian labor market so they feel they have to do so.

But before you jump into a degree program, think about your ultimate employment goal and work backwards from it. When planning a car trip, you don't just start driving and hope to end up somewhere you wanted to go. You have a destination in mind and figure out the best route to get there. This should be the way you also plan your career, both in the Coast Guard and in the civilian world.

Let's say you want to work as a video game designer. Assuming you want to work for a company that does nothing but design and market video games, call a half dozen of them and talk with someone who makes hiring decisions in the HR department or the like. Ask what kind of training and/or education they're looking for in new hires. Ask specifically if the people they hire need a degree, a certificate of some kind, or if demonstrated ability (e.g., via a portfolio or other samples of your work) is good enough.

Remember: a college degree requires you to take many courses totally unrelated to your field of interest. Roughly half the courses you take to earn a degree fall into this category. If you're more interested in acquiring the knowledge necessary to start working in the field that interests you, a degree may not be for you.

There are a number of paths you can take once you know whether most likely employers require a degree. You can

- work with someone who has the knowledge you want to acquire (a mentor-protégé or apprenticeship relationship, formal or informal);
- learn it on your own via [resources available for free \(often on the Internet\)](#);
- take college courses just in your area of interest and, perhaps, earn an [academic certificate](#) in the process; or
- take non-credit courses that you have to pay for, for example [Excelsior College's Professional Development courses](#), the [Graduate School's](#) courses, or continuing education courses at a local college or university, which GI Bill education benefits will likely cover.

First find out if a degree is something you need or want. If you don't need a degree, but you want one and/or what you learn will be useful, by all means work toward one. The point is, don't jump into a degree program just because everyone else is doing so.

## Choosing the Right Degree and Major

(thanks to Military.com)

Picking a degree and a major is a decision that can directly affect your future career opportunities and your success in whichever field you choose to go into. When making this choice, there are a number of factors you should consider, including: your current career path, future job markets, timeline, and flexibility.

### Degree Level

It's important to select the level of the degree you want to pursue, but it's not critical. Bear in mind that you don't have to have an associate's (lower level) degree before you go after your bachelor's.

However, it's probably a good idea to earn an associate's degree before you start working on a bachelor's degree. This is because life is uncertain and if, for some reason, you have to leave the Coast Guard earlier than you'd planned, it'll be helpful if you can mark the "College Graduate" box on civilian job applications. In today's job market, this is very important.

Also, if you plan carefully, you'll likely be able to use all credits earned for your associate's degree toward your bachelor's degree.

Another option you should consider – especially if you're not sure which field you want to major in – is an undergraduate certificate program. The benefit of a certificate is that it let's you get your feet wet by taking courses in a field you think

you're interested in (without having to take all the general education courses). Undergrad certificates usually require you to take about four or five courses. The downside, of course, is that you can't say you're a college graduate after completing a certificate program.

Still, if you decide to get your degree in the field you got the certificate in, you'll be able to transfer the certificate courses to your associate's or bachelor's program and will have less far to go to complete either degree.

## Major

Some people want to major in a subject that relates directly to the field they want to work in. Others are more interested in flexibility, how fast they can complete their degree, or both. Some lucky few can find a major that's both related to their future career field and can be attained relatively quickly. You'll need to do some research and soul-searching to find the best fit for you.

## Thinking of a Degree In . . .

[Business?](#)

[Law?](#)

## What Can I Do With a Major In . . .

Have you ever wondered just what academic major would help you earn more money or do better in a specific career field? Or are you interested in a specific career field and wondering what academic major you should pursue? The [University of North Carolina at Wilmington](#) (not far from a number of Coast Guard units) has put together a really excellent web site that shows the relationships between academic majors, career fields, and job titles.

## CollegePrep-101

Taking the first steps toward any college education requires an understanding of the academic world. Sometimes it can be confusing and a little scary. Oklahoma State University has a great web site to help you understand college terminology, things you need, and steps you can take before you sign up for your first class.

A lot of what's on the [CollegePrep-101](#) site is aimed at students who'll be enrolling in a resident program (go to college full-time in physical classrooms with face-to-face instructors). Still, there's quite a bit there that applies to part-time students in distance-learning courses. And until the Coast Guard Institute's 15-minute College 101 video is complete, this is a useful site to visit.