



WESTERN  
ILLINOIS  
UNIVERSITY



**Who** am I?

# Discover You!

## The Roadmap: A Helpful Guide to Your Four Years at Western Illinois University

- Self-Assessment
- Career Exploration
- Gaining Experience
- The Career Search

University Advising and Academic Support Center  
248 Olson Hall \* 298-1846





# Who am I?

# Freshman Year



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**Self-Assessment: Start identifying your interests, abilities, and values to help you determine your major and career focus.**

## Academics & Advising

- Assess your interests, abilities, personality, and values through the different interest inventories offered through the Counseling Center. (298-2453)
- Investigate the Career Services Office, a free resource for career exploration. It is a great place to start your exploration and discovery about careers and majors. To access the website go to <http://www.student.services.wiu.edu/careers/>
- Identify possible majors and career fields. Talk to your advisor and other students at Western about classes they have taken to help you learn about majors that interest you most.
- Take a variety of classes in areas that interest you to explore majors.
- Consult with your academic advisor to plan your course of study. Be on time for your advising appointments. Notify your advisor if you need to change or cancel the appointment. Be courteous!
- Advising for Advanced Registration:
  - ◆ Advising begins in early November for Spring registration and early April for Summer and Fall registration. Make your advising appointment a few weeks before the main advising period begins and make it early—don't delay. You will most likely need to see your advisor several times during the semester.
  - ◆ Check your WARD Report on STARS for any transferred credit and required classes.
  - ◆ Check STARS for any holds that will prevent you from registering. You cannot enroll if holds are not removed by the appropriate offices. Examples include financial, immunization, housing, registrar, and advising.
  - ◆ Look at the course offerings on STARS and make some choices based on your GEN ED requirements and possible major choices. Be sure to list at least three options in case classes don't fit in your schedule or are full. Become acquainted with the student degree plan for majors of interest to you.
  - ◆ Prepare for your advising appointment by bringing a list of the courses you'd like to take as well as any other materials suggested by your advisor such as the General Education handbook.
- Establish a strong GPA at the beginning. Good standing is a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above. Several majors, such as business, law enforcement and education require higher cumulative GPAs.
- Complete your FAFSA early in the spring if you need federal financial aid. Check into scholarships offered through the university at <http://www.wiu.edu/scholarships>
- Students who wish to change their major or declare a major should see the Advisor for that major.

## Campus & Volunteer Activities

- Gain as much experience as you can in the field you are interested in through campus activities, part-time jobs and volunteer work.
- Find career-related part-time work or a summer job.
- Get involved on the Western campus to meet others, explore your interests and have fun!
- Take advantage of all FYE (First Year Experience) opportunities through guest lectures and activities outside of class. This is a great opportunity to develop relationships with other freshmen in your classes.

## Career

- Explore many fields; consider your strengths as you begin your career search.
- Spend a day with an alum to find out about career opportunities.
- Begin to work on your resume and focus on activities that will provide the experience to add to the resume and make it stand out.



# Sophomore Year



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## What major & career path is right for me?

**Career Exploration: Narrow your choices of majors and select the ones that match your interests and abilities.**

### **Academics & Advising**

- Ask yourself what you like most about your classes, what activities outside of class you enjoy the most, and what types of things are important for you to learn about. This information can be used to help make decisions about majors and internships you might like to explore.
- Once you know your major choice, follow prerequisites and strategically plan out your classes and start working toward requirements.
- By the first or second semester of your sophomore year, be prepared to declare your major by meeting with the advisor for the major and completing the change of major form. This form must be signed by your new advisor, your previous advisor and you. You must declare a major by the time you reach 46 semester hours which is usually by the first semester of your sophomore year.
- Meet with your advisor to further identify your goals and discuss any issues you may have.
- If you find yourself in academic difficulty, consult your advisor, look into tutoring and take advantage of the resources on campus, such as math help centers, the university writing center and counseling center.
- Don't forget to complete your FAFSA early in the spring if you need federal financial aid.
- Find a mentor who can offer support and guidance.
- Start cultivating relationships with your professors – be engaged in class and talk to them during office hours. Professors can act as mentors, be a reference for graduate school, and of course help you succeed in class.

### **Campus & Volunteer Activities**

- Join a campus organization related to your major or your career goals.
- Continue to be involved in volunteer work through student committees or the community. Get involved in extracurricular activities and work on projects for clubs or organizations. These help build skills that future employers or graduate admissions committees find valuable when considering applications.
- Keep up with Western events and get involved with athletics, art, music or theatre. Attend university wide events hosted by the Office of Student Activities, Bureau of Cultural Affairs or other departments.
- Join a multicultural organization to learn about cultural diversity.

### **Career**

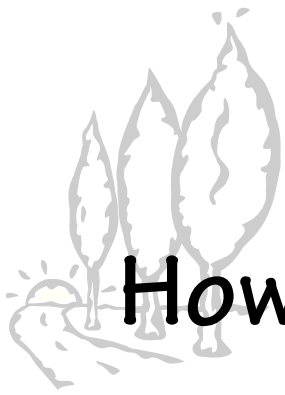
- Use the Internet to search for career information by typing in "careers in ..." or "what can I do with a major/career in..."
- Continue to use the Career Services website for help in researching and exploring a major and career.
- Continue to develop your resume and cover letter once you've chosen a major and career field. Look for opportunities to add to your resume through class projects, volunteer work, membership in professional organizations, internships and jobs.
- Interview and/or shadow a professional to explore career fields. Spend a day on the job
- Attend career fairs so you can expand your network and find out about career possibilities. They also offer great practice interviews!
- Practice introducing yourself, what degree you'll have, and your career interest to others until it becomes natural. Feel comfortable with your choices.
- Make short term goals about your career aspirations.



# Junior Year



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## How can I get experience in my major?

*Gaining Experience: Relate interests, skills, and values to possible career choices and gain experience through work experiences, internships, campus activities, and volunteering.*

### **Academics & Advising**

- If you have not already done so, it is vital to declare your major by completing the change of major form and meeting with the advisor for your major. Remember a major must be declared by the time you reach 46 semester hours.
- Continue to meet with your advisor to talk about your major, career and internship options, and the progress you are making toward graduation.
- File for graduation in the Office of the Registrar by the deadline stated in the Undergraduate catalog. Ideally this is done in the second semester of your junior year.
- Check your number of upper-level hours (courses numbered 300 and above). All Western undergraduate degrees require a minimum of 40 hours of upper-level credit.
- Remember to complete your FAFSA early in the spring if you need federal financial aid.
- Take mock GRE/MCAT or LSAT exams if you are planning on attending graduate school, law school or medical school.

### **Campus & Volunteer Activities**

- Continue your involvement with professional or student organizations; if you are not involved get involved!
- Take leadership positions in clubs and organizations to gain experience and remember to add it to your resume.
- Explore study abroad programs. This can be a great multicultural experience.

### **Career**

- Continue to add to your resume with work, leadership and volunteer experience.
- Have your resume critiqued by your advisor or Career Services.
- Attend career workshops, fairs, seminars, presentations, and networking events.
- Internships, internships, internships – do as many as you possibly can to explore career choices, gain experience, and establish contacts. Many employers make permanent offers to their interns so this is a great opportunity for you to get your foot in the door.
- Schedule a mock interview through Career Services in order to practice your interviewing skills – it takes practice to be successful.
- Join professional student organizations in your major - these offer great networking opportunities and a chance to build leadership skills.
- Begin to establish your personal network by connecting with professionals in your field of interest using your personal contacts, contacts through the Alumni Office, and others you meet at events. Check with your professors as well, they might have industry contacts.
- Begin the job search process at least one year prior to graduation by building your network—you can never start too early to plan your career! It can take 4-6 months to get the right offer for you.
- If you are interested in graduate school, start researching schools to find out about different programs, the admission requirements, and how to apply. Be aware that applications for medical and dental schools are customarily submitted during the summer following the junior year.

# Senior Year



## How can I be prepared for life beyond Western?

### The Career Search:

Identify and apply for careers or decide on graduate work.

#### Academics & Advising

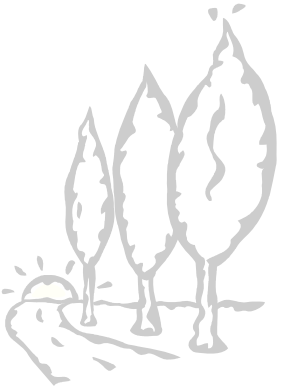
- Make an appointment with your advisor in your major to review your WARD report to clarify remaining requirements such as courses, or proficiencies, including General Education Curriculum requirements. Students must graduate with at least 120 hours, 40 of which must be upper-level hours, and fulfill the requirements for each major.
- You should have filed for graduation in the Office of the Registrar. If not, do so immediately. Ideally this is completed in the second semester of your junior year.
- If you are considering graduate school, take required entrance exams, complete applications, and request letters of recommendation. This is a good time to utilize those relationships with your professors that you have been cultivating.
- Clear all financial and administrative obligations to the University as you will not receive proof of your degree until that is completed.
- You must have a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0. You must also have a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0 or better in your major and minor courses (this will depend on your individual college requirements.)

#### Campus & Volunteer Activities

- Stay active in the community and on campus as well as in professional organizations.
- There is still time to volunteer or get involved if you haven't had the opportunity to do so.

#### Career

- Develop a budget for after graduation or graduate school. You will need to determine how much money you need to make after graduation to make your student loan payments. There are many financial planning calculators available on the internet to help you determine this, such as [FinAid.org](http://FinAid.org).
- Network—let people in your network know you are looking for career information; use your network to find opportunities; build your network by attending events, talking to people, and following up.
- Attend professional organizational events, luncheons, and meetings in your career field.
- Refine your resume and cover letter to target the career position you are seeking.
- Use career placement services (such as on-campus interviewing, job search strategies, resume writing) in Career Services.
- Begin interviewing as early as possible your senior year. Make it your goal to find your new job as early as possible your senior year.
- Learn how to evaluate job offers and negotiate salary before you receive a job offer so that you can effectively negotiate the best possible package of salary and benefits.
- Attend career and recruiting days that relate to your major to meet with prospective employers.
- Schedule a mock interview through Career Services in order to practice your interviewing skills – it takes practice to be successful.
- Apply to graduate schools.
- Accept a career position or attend graduate school and begin your life as a Western alum!



# Acknowledgements

Information adapted from:

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