How to Choose Courses for a Guided Studies Major:

Building a Best-Bet Schedule in 17 Steps

*Building your schedule for your semester is never easy with all those moving parts: course requirements, different locations, different modalities (f2f, hybrid, etc.), different days and times, and courses filling up. Then you have to add in work, family, other obligations, and transportation. And if you are a Guided Studies major, you are also trying to coordinate your choices with more focused majors you might choose at Bucks or a 4-year transfer institution.*

*It’s a complex process, and the text below breaks down the logical puzzle to help you find your best bet for a semester that helps you progress in majors you might switch to, while ALSO moving towards making that choice AND progressing in the Guided Studies major. The process won’t be easy, because no one can make your decisions for you. However, these instructions should demystify the process a little.*

*Remember that you’re not alone! You do have your faculty advisor (your GUID101 instructor, if you’re taking that course this semester), advisors in Bucks programs you’re thinking of, and transfer advisors to help you. The idea is to rough out your plan in Self Service to discuss with your advisor.*

**Making decisions just for your Bucks career (see below for guidance on choosing courses for Bucks AND possible transfer)**

1. **If you are ready to declare an academic major other than Guided Studies, a non-credit program, or a certificate (credit or non-credit), stop this process** and proceed with an advisor for that program. (If you want, you can prepare for a meeting with an academic advisor using the “How to Choose Courses for Bucks AND Beyond”). If you’re going to remain aa Guided Studies major next semester, continue.
2. **Confirm your two Guided Studies Concentrations** (if you need to change them, change them by making a note under the Self Service Notes tab). If you don’t know what your concentrations are, talk to your GUID101 instructor or Guided Studies advisor before going further.
3. **Open the Guided Studies Concentration Map** (an Excel file) to see all the concentrations, the majors/certificates they relate to, and the Concentration electives.
4. **Simplify the Concentration Map by customizing it.** Delete all the rows EXCEPT the 2 rows that show your 2 concentrations, then save the file with your name in the file name.
5. **Look at the Concentration Map and highlight the programs (credit and non-credit, major and certificate) that interest you.** If you like several, highlight the most interesting ones in a special color, and concentrate on those in the following steps.
6. **Open the pages for the Guided Studies major and the pages for your favorite programs.** Go to <https://www.bucks.edu/academics/courses/majors/>, which shows the list of all Bucks majors and for-credit certificates. Right-click on the programs you’re interested in to open them in a new tab or window, so that you can see the requirements and recommended semester sequences. Better yet, **print out the programs**, so that you can easily see the spreadsheet and the programs at the same time.
7. **Look at the Concentration Map and the suggested sequences for the majors, and highlight the courses that are listed as Guided Studies Gateway Courses or Concentration Electives AND as a requirement in one or more of the majors that interest you.** On a piece of scrap paper, start a list going of the most promising courses.

EXAMPLE: Jay is a Guided Studies major with Concentrations in Humanities and in Aesthetics and Creativity, and he is interested in the Art and Art History, Liberal Arts, Journalism, and English majors. He notices that all 4 majors require COMP111, and other courses that show up in more than one major as requirements and options are VAFA191, VAFA192, VAFA193, HIST111, HIST112, HIST151, HIST152, as well as literature (LITR) courses. Three of the majors require 2 world language courses. Journalism requires JOUR175, which would help him see if he likes that field, and English lists it as a program elective. All of these courses count towards the Aesthetics and Creativity Concentration, the Humanities Concentration, or both.

1. **Take note of whether any of the programs you like are considered “Highly Structured Programs.”** They are marked with a \* on the Concentration Map These programs have tend to have lots of requirements and restrictions on what you can take and when you can take it.

EXAMPLES OF HIGHLY STRUCTURED PROGRAMS: Students can start the Chef Apprenticeship program only in the Fall and if they miss that, they can take General Education courses, but will have to wait until the next Fall to start the major program. Students can take LAWS100 to try out the paralegals’ field, but they cannot take any more paralegal courses until they declare that major. Photography, Music, and Engineering majors don’t have any electives available at all (only some choices within the major or General Education Programs), so if they take courses to try out other fields, those courses won’t count towards their degree.

**IMPORTANT**: **If you are very interested in a “Highly Structured Program,” consider the risk involved in *when* you switch to that major**. You might never be completely sure of your choice, so are you better off declaring that major now OR putting off the decision until you’re more sure? In other words, is it more likely you will lose time and money if you commit to a highly structured major now and it’s the wrong major, OR more likely that you will lose time and money if you don’t commit to it now and it was the right major? **If it’s time to commit, stop this process** and go meet with an advisor for that highly structured program.

1. **Take note of course sequences** (courses that are prerequisites for other courses):
   * Notice sequences in reading, writing, and/or math, as well as in other subjects (e.g. world languages, sciences). If your placement tests place you in developmental reading, writing, and/or math courses, then you have a sequence to complete in that area, even if your major only requires one college-level writing or math course.
   * Notice sequences (prerequisites) within the major, so that you can progress to the upper levels in a timely manner. Some of the prerequisite courses will not be requirements of the program you are interested in or of a Guided Studies Concentration, but you will need to take them anyway so that you can get to the higher level courses that are in the program.

EXAMPLES:

* Jay (see #7 above) has noticed that three of his favorite majors (English, Liberal Arts, and Art and Art History) require 2 world language courses, and it would be good for him to use electives to go further with a language in order to develop proficiency. All 4 require two COMP courses in sequence (COMP110 and COMP111), and these courses will help him in his other courses. Also, Jay earned a 1 on his math placement test and didn’t take any math his first semester, so he will have to take 2-4 math courses to get through one college-level math course (it depends on which college-level math course he aims for and whether he would benefit from MATH089 Fast Track Mathematics).
* Nina is in the Science, Nature, and Health Concentration and the Helping Professions Concentration, because she is interested in studying either Neuroscience, Biology, Science, or Psychology, or possibly something in the health sciences. The sciences usually have prerequisites, which are sometimes other science courses and sometimes math courses or special placement tests. She will need to pay special attention to these sequences.

1. **Notice if any of the courses are marked as “fork courses”** on the Concentration Map. “Fork courses” are courses that are similar to other courses, but some programs want one course and some want its parallel. If you pick the fork course for one program and then decide on the other program later, you might need to ask the dean for a substitution or you might need to backtrack and take the similar course you decided against, causing a delay and costing money. However, if you choose the fork course that keeps your options open, or think hard about which program is more likely the one for you, you can make a better decision.

EXAMPLE: Nina (see #9 above) must decide whether to take BIOL101 or BIOL121 (fork courses similar to each other). Neuroscience, Biology, and Science require BIOL121, but Psychology, which she’s leaning more and more towards, lists BIOL101 as the requirement. She decides to take BIOL121, because it gives her more options, and if she majors in Psychology at Bucks or at a transfer school, she will likely be able to substitute the more advanced course (BIOL121) for the less advanced one (BIOL101). BIOL121 is the better gamble.

1. **Consider whether a particular course will help you choose a more focused major** (rule out a possible major or find out it’s the right one for you).

EXAMPLE: Jay (see #7 above) can take HIST151 or HIST152 and apply it to all four majors, but he really needs to take JOUR175 to see if he is really interested in Journalism, and needs to take VAFA191, VAFA192, or VAFA193 to see if he is really interested in the Art and Art History major. These could be

1. Once you have a pool of promising courses, **narrow the pool by highlighting** the courses you need for a sequence, will help you decide on a particular major, will help you progress in a couple of majors at the same time, or you are really excited about. ALSO: if you failed (or earned a D) in any course one semester, strongly consider retaking it immediately to progress in a sequence and/or improve your GPA.

EXAMPLE: Jay has starred the following for his short list:

* FREN110, because it’s one of the 3 languages recommended for Art and Art History and he has a long sequence ahead of him
* JOUR175, because it will help him decide about Journalism and be useful if he ever has to write a newsletter for a non-profit organization
* MATH089, in hopes that he can go more quickly through the math sequence and get it over with
* HIST151, because it meets requirements in several majors and sounds more interesting to him than HIST152
* COMP111, because it’s required by all majors
* VAFA192, because it may help him decide about Art an Art History and it sounds really interesting
* A LITR course, because it’ll help him decide about English and several programs require one
* A HUMN course, because it is part of Liberal Arts and includes several related fields (e.g. art history and literature)

1. **Compare your list to the relevant Recommended Semester Sequences**: 1) the *ADVISORY* Recommended Semester Sequence for Guided Studies majors (HYPERLINK) (please note: this is *not* the recommended sequence on the Program of Study page) AND 2) the recommended semester sequences for your other majors. This may help you prioritize some courses over others, so that when you choose a major more focused than Guided Studies, you will be more in step with your classmates.

EXAMPLE: Jay thinks he will prioritize MATH089, FREN110, and JOUR175 because they are in sequences.

1. **Notice what courses will help you succeed in other courses** and prioritize those.

EXAMPLE: Jay prioritizes COMP111, because it will help with all his reading, writing, and research assignments. He also considers taking CISC100 or CISC110, which will benefit every course he takes (and meet a requirement in Guided Studies and English).

1. **Consider balance**:
   * Do you have at least one course in there that interests you?
   * Are you balancing similar kinds of work? Spread out some of the heavy reading, writing, math, and lab science courses, so they don’t all end up in this or some other semester.
   * If you’re lacking balance, think about fulfilling a General Education requirement for variety.

EXAMPLE: Jay notices that LITR, COMP, VAFA, JOUR, and HIST are heavy in reading and/or writing. He thinks he will try to hold off on the LITR and the HIST, because COMP will help him with those later, he might get some LITR in in COMP, JOUR and COMP are different kinds of writing, and JOUR and VAFA will help him make decisions about his major. He will consider taking SOCI or PSYC course to fulfill his Social Science Gen Ed requirement, or take CISC100 or CISC110.

1. **Finally, look at the schedule and start to eliminate some of the choices or switch in Plan B choices**. Look first at the courses that have the fewest sections and start building your schedule around them. Fit the courses with many sections available around them. When you see impossible conflicts, see how the lower priority courses fit in. Remember that possibility and progress are more important than convenience (life is not convenient), and you will need free blocks of time in your schedule to meet with professors or tutors, take care of business on campus, meet with other students, etc.

EXAMPLE:

* Jay will start building his schedule around JOUR175, VAFA192, and FREN110.
* He’ll then try to fit in the MATH (089 or 090) and COMP111. This will be 13 credits.
* For his 5th course, he will
  + see how SOCI110 or PSYC110 fit in, since they meet the Social Science and Diversity requirements for all 4 majors and will provide some balance
  + OR take CISC100 or CISC110 to progress in Guided Studies and English and support his academic and professional life (an elective for the other majors),
  + OR go back to the one of the courses he counted as a lesser priority. These options will also help him form a plan B in case any of the courses he wants fills up.

1. **Record your plan to prepare for advising and registration.**
   * Fill out your Course Plan in the Self-Service module to be ready for your advising appointment.
   * Add sequenced courses to other semesters.
   * Update your Guided Studies Worksheet, to see how you are progressing in that major. HINT: use pencil.

EXAMPLE: Jay puts FREN courses through the next 3 semesters, in hopes that he might be ready for a semester abroad in Paris once he transfers to a 4-year program. Other than that, he doesn’t add anything to other semesters, because his MATH sequence is unpredictable (he doesn’t know how far he’ll go with MATH089) and he plans to decide on a more focused major during the next semester, which will impact all choices going forward.

**Making course decisions for Bucks *and* transfer**

If you are considering transferring to a 4-year program—either before or after graduating from Bucks—you should **meet with a transfer advisor as early as possible.** Meeting with a transfer advisor can make the whole process easier, faster, and less expensive.

Also, follow the process listed above, but with these adaptations, starting at Step 6:

1. When you get to Step 6, also open the web pages of transfer schools, find the requirements for 4-year majors that interest you, and print them out.
2. For Step 7, see how the Concentrations, Bucks programs, and 4-year majors match up.

* See if Bucks has transfer agreements or plans with any schools for any majors you’re interested in. Click here: <https://www.bucks.edu/catalog/info/transfer/agreements/>
* If you’re really interested in a particular major at a 4-year school, knowing that major might make it obvious which major you should declare at Bucks. If so, declare it now and meet with an advisor in that program.

EXAMPLE: Nina sees Bucks’s transfer agreement with Rider, Neuroscience to Behavioral Neuroscience, has the combination of biology and psychology she wants. She checks and sees that Bucks’s Neuroscience degree also has a transfer guide for Temple’s Neuroscience: Systems, Behavior, and Plasticity degree. She decides to switch her major to Neuroscience and meets with that professor.