

Undeclared and Loving It

Students find that perfect fit through exploration

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HOOD HOUSE IS THE HUB OF ACADEMIC ADVISING FOR UNDECLARED STUDENTS.

When you think about it, how many 18-year-olds really know what they want to study when they sign up to attend a university? Some do seem to know, but quite a few others do not. "Starting off your college career as undeclared can be nerve-wracking for some students," says Nate Talbot, the director of the [University Advising Center](#). "But there's absolutely no grounds for worry. The truth is that more than a quarter of all UNH students enter the university with undeclared majors. And not only that, nearly a third change their major at least once before graduating."

Talbot understands the journey of the undeclared. Talbot, who provides services that include helping undeclared students chart their ideal pathway through UNH, was once, himself, a client, which is to say he was undeclared. Not only did he graduate from UNH with flying colors, he majored in both English and psychology.



NATE TALBOT, DIRECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY ADVISING CENTER, AND CENTER STAFF HOLD ONE-ON-ONE ADVISING SESSIONS WITH UNDECLARED STUDENTS DAILY.

Talbot thinks the process of intellectual exploration is much the same whether or not you have declared a major. “My feeling is that most students are aware of broad categories such as English, business, history, nursing, biology and so on,” he says. It’s when they arrive at a place like UNH that things become interesting as they realize UNH has more than 100 majors and thousands of courses. Once on campus, they begin to experiment with different areas of study and meet professors and other students who introduce them to new interests. Gradually, undeclared students find a way to customize their educations to a much finer point than they could have imagined before.

“Sometimes,” concluded Talbot, “broad categories such as business, biology and English can turn into majors that students may not have known about, such as recreation management, community environmental planning, or women’s and gender studies.”

Resources for undeclared students

As an [undeclared](#) student, you'll have faculty who want to talk to you about your interests and professional advisors who will work with you one on one.

- [COLA 401](#) is a one-credit advising seminar for undeclared students to help them explore majors and build thoughtful class schedules. The course also introduces students to academic resources and opportunities outside of the classroom.
- [COLA 402](#) is a 2-credit course that explores the range of research that takes place across the College, designed to help students get the full picture of our different disciplines.
- The [University Advising Center](#) offers online resources that help students explore majors.
- COLA's [Career and Professional Success](#) office offers interest assessments, job shadow opportunities, career field trips, alumni events and bootcamp courses that will help you see how your skills and interests can translate into a fulfilling career. That can often help you decide on what major makes the most sense.
- [AcCOLAdes](#) is a community of COLA undeclared first-year students living and learning together in Alexander Hall.

Makenna Comeau '21 of Merrimac, Mass., entered COLA eager to “test the waters and make the best decision” concerning her future by exploring a variety of fields that included anthropology, psychology and the humanities. That future got a serious academic boost when Comeau enrolled in Joseph Terry’s Introduction to Media Studies class. Comeau says that while she was interested in mass media and broadcasting in high school, discovering that UNH had a major in communication enabled her interests to blossom into a “passion” for the subject.

“My plan worked,” said Comeau. As for her future, she hopes to pursue a career in marketing and public relations.

While Comeau is a finished product, Jim Kertis '23, is a sophomore from North Haverhill, N.H. who was admitted to the University Honors Program as an undeclared student. He used his undeclared status to explore the liberal arts, including journalism with Tom Haines, Shakespeare with Dennis Britton, Greek mythology with Paul Robertson and many other subjects. Kertis is a deep thinker who allowed himself the chance to get into the groove of doing university-level work before choosing a major.

“It’s so different than high school,” he says. “For example, in high school Shakespeare we read the most famous texts such as Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and King Lear and focused on the big themes like fate, love, death and so on. At UNH, we are reading works like Othello and Measure for Measure in the context of contemporary issues such as race, gender and sexuality. Living through the #MeToo movement can make you see the comic plot in Measure for Measure in a whole new light — a light Shakespeare, himself, seems to have been well aware of.”

And while most of us attain at least a glancing exposure to Greek mythology by the time we head off to college, Kertis was surprised and inspired by learning about the fluidity of

the God's identities from Greek to Roman times. "For example, the Greek God Dionysus stood for emotional power and depth as well as wine and madness," noted Kertis. "By the time this God makes it over to classical Rome, he has become Bacchus, who is basically a party animal and drunken lout. Over the thousands of years that these myths developed, there were countless iterations based on locality and general culture."

While Kertis chose to major in a single subject, English, other students choose multiple majors. Undeclared sophomore Gabby Hood '23 of Pelham, N.Y. came to UNH with a lot of ideas, which all revolved in one way or another around helping people. She used her freshman and sophomore years to explore multiple courses in health and human services as well as the liberal arts. These included psychology, communication sciences and disorders, recreation management, and health management and policy.

She will enter her junior year as a dual major in psychology and sustainability.

Hundreds of Options

UNH offers a vast array of majors, minors, cognates and courses for students to explore, and new programs are created every year to respond to student interest, contemporary issues and emerging career fields. Examples include:

- [English: Text, Business Writing and Digital Studies Major](#)
- [Philosophy: Business, Innovation and Technology Minor](#) and [Cognate](#)
- [Design Studies Minor](#) and [Cognate](#)
- [Forensics Minor](#)
- Medical Humanities, Society and Ethics Minor - NEW fall 2021
- Arabic Minor - NEW fall 2021
- [Intercultural Communication for the Professional World Cognate](#)

Here, you can browse the full list of [COLA programs](#) and [UNH programs](#).

"I feel like an education shouldn't be a chore or something you do just to line up a job down the road," she says. "I do much better in courses I have a genuine interest in, not necessarily just those that are required by a major. I want that interest to guide my choices."

As she heads into her junior year, Hood plans to apply what she's learning in the classroom in community-based programs such as Girls Inc., a nonprofit which helps girls develop self-esteem, confidence and leadership skills. Closer to her home away from home, she is also looking at Seacoast Eat Local, a local organization that delivers ingredients for making meals to food pantries in the Seacoast area.

UNH's Talbot says that not all undeclared students are necessarily undecided. "Many know exactly what they want to major in but were unable to find space in that program," he explains. "So, while we help some students explore what they want to do, we also help those who know what they want to do get where want to go."

Sometimes their destination is liberal arts, other times it is not. “The University Advising Center has excellent relationships with advising staff in the university’s other colleges,” Talbot said. “We like to see students consider COLA because the college has so much to offer students in terms of education and career prospects. But our ultimate goal is help them reach their dreams wherever they may lead.”

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THE COLLEGE LETTER



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