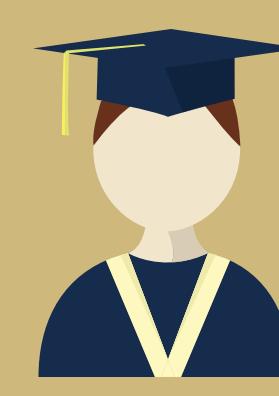


# Educational Planning & Academic Decision Making

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## What the Research Shows

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Studies of student decisions about a college major show that:

- **Less than 10% of new college students feel they know a great deal about the fields in which they intend to major in**
- **As students proceed through the first year of college, they grow more uncertain about the majors they choose when they began college**
- **More than 2/3 of new students change their minds about their majors during the first year of college**
- **Only 1 in 3 college seniors eventually major in the same field that they choose during their first-year of college**

What these findings show is that the vast majority of students entering college are not certain about the major they're going to declare. Many students don't reach their final decision about a major before starting their college experience; instead, they make that decision during their college experience. So, being uncertain or undecided about a major is nothing to be embarrassed about, it is very common.

## When Should Students Reach a Firm Decision about a College Major?

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It's okay to start off college without knowing exactly what major you want to declare. This is a process that can take time. You can take courses that will help you explore majors as well as count towards eventual majors and stay on track for graduation, even if you're undecided. If you've entered college with a major in mind, or feel "certain" about a particular major, just know that you're not locked into your first-choice major and that you too have the choice of changing and still graduating on time.

However, some food for thought is that there can be a drawback for staying perpetually undecided or changing your major late in the game. Late major-changing can lengthen the time of your college graduation, and increase the cost of your college education. This is because you will most likely need to take additional courses towards your new major, especially if this new major is in a different college than your previous major. The key to preventing this scenario from happening late in your college experience is to engage in long-range educational planning early in your college experience.

## Factors to Consider When Choosing a Major

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Self-awareness is the critical first step in making decisions about a college major, or any important decision. You must know yourself before you can know what choice is best for you. When choosing a major, you should be aware of the following:

- **Your interests, what you like doing**
- **Your abilities, what you're good at doing**
- **Your values, what you feel good about doing**

Something to keep in mind: research indicates that students are more likely to continue in college and graduate when they choose majors that reflect their personal interests and talents. You may consider taking a self-assessment test such as **Myers-Briggs** or UCCS' Career Center's **FOCUS 2**, to help you determine your interests, abilities and values that may align with your future major.



# Myths about the Relationship between Majors & Careers

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Good decisions about a college major are built on accurate or valid information about the relationship between majors and careers. Unfortunately, numerous misconceptions exist about the relationship between majors and careers that often lead students to make uninformed or unrealistic choices of a college major. The following information pertain to four common myths about the major-career relationship:

**1. When you choose a major, you're choosing your career.** While some majors lead directly to a particular career, most do not. The vast majority of college majors don't channel you straight to one particular career, instead, they leave you with a variety of career options. For example, all physics majors don't become physicists, all philosophy majors don't become philosophers, etc. Someone who majors in English may go into careers that involve editing, journalism, publishing, all careers involving the use of the written language.

So, don't assume that your major is your career, or that your major automatically turns into your career field. It's this belief that can result in some students procrastinating about choosing major; they think they're making a lifelong decision and fear if they make the "wrong" choice, they'll be stuck doing something they hate for the rest of their lives. Research on college graduates indicates that they change careers numerous times, and the further they continue along their career paths, the more likely they are to work in fields unrelated to their college majors. Although it is important to think about the relationship between your choice of major and your initial career choice, for most college students, these are choices made at different times.

**2. If you want to continue your education after a bachelor's degree, you must continue in the same field as your college major.** After graduating from college, you have two main options or alternative pathways available to you which include entering a career immediately, or continuing your education in grad school or a professional school. If you end up wanting to pursue your education further after you graduate with your bachelor's degree, it is very much possible for you to pursue your education in a field that is not directly related to your bachelor's degree.

For example, let's say your bachelor's degree is in English, you can still go to graduate school in a subject other than English, or go to law school, or get a master's degree in business administration. In fact, it's common to find the majority of graduate students in master's of business administration programs were not business majors in college.

**3. You should major in business because most college graduates work in business settings.** Studies show that college graduates with a variety of majors end up working in business settings. For instance, engineering majors are likely to work in accounting, production, and finance. Liberal arts majors are likely to move onto positions in business setting that involve marketing, human resources, or public affairs. So, try not to restrict your choices of majors assuming that one must major in business to work in business post-graduation. Research shows that in the long run, the career mobility and career advancement of non-business majors in the business world are equal to those attained by business majors.

**4. If you major in a liberal arts field, the only career available to you is teaching.** Liberal arts majors are not restricted to just teaching careers and many college graduates majoring in a liberal arts major have proceeded to, and succeeded in, careers other than teaching. In fact, studies show that college graduates with liberal arts majors are just as likely to advance to the highest levels of corporate leadership as graduates majoring in pre-professional fields, such as business and engineering.