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I Changed My Mind

Jodi Curtis and Adam Saito

Some might say that college is a time for people to find out what they want to do with the rest of their lives. Students select fields based on their interest, to study and further turn into a career. Some students become unsatisfied with their choice, or even find interest in another field. This leads to students making the decision to change their major and pursue another major. In this paper, it is hypothesized that due to exposure to different, required, general education classes of different fields, students change their majors. Data was collected from students enrolled in capstone classes, through their participation in filling out a questionnaire, and those who were asked to do a follow up interview to obtain further information. Results, though limited, showed that the hypothesis of the experiment was found to be true. Although there has been little investigation as to why students do chose to change their major previously, this paper, through experiment, explores the underlying factors that help influence a change in major after entering into college.

Some might say that college is a time for people to find out what they want to do with the rest of their lives. College students select a field of study to focus on which will in turn become their career. What happens when a college student decides that their choice of study is not what they want to do for a career? Most students would then change their major to something else, but what aids in the decision of making this change. Why do some college students change their major?

There is little research that has been conducted on the influences of students who change their majors. One study that gives some insight about the subject was done by Charles Malgwi, Martha Howe, and Priscilla Burnaby. In their research they were focused on why business majors chose that major, and while doing the research they came up with another question of why students change their majors. Malgwi, Howe and Burnaby (2005) predicted switching of majors to come from two possible reasons. One would be the fact that they were dissatisfied with their current one, the other one being that they have a high expectation for the new one. Also through this experiment it was identified that the three most common factors in being interest in the field, opportunities with a career, and compensation of that career. The main point is that positive factors are more important than negative ones.

The motive for finding the reasons students change their majors is beneficial to institutions everywhere. This will help universities assist students with discovering a passion that they enjoy and would like to have a career in. Not only will this help out the student population but the universities will be better in the sense that they have a dedication to helping students succeed.

The hypothesis of our research is that at Lindenwood University, the reason students change the major is because of the exposure to numerous different general education classes that are required. Influences from these various general education classes help to give students more insight into different fields. From these different fields of studies, students form better ideas about which career pathway they would like to take. There may be other influences as to why students change their major but, we predict that the choice is mainly based upon exposure to introductory (general education) courses.

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in two capstone classes from different fields of study here at Lindenwood University. There were 40 undergraduate students involved in the study. Fourteen of these participants were males, whilst twenty-six were females. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 43 years old, with a mean of 23 years old. The age that had that highest frequency was 21, with 35% of the participants. Out of the participants, 60% (24) of the participants replied that they were scheduled to graduate in May of 2008. The experiment was conducted by both a male and female researcher. Nineteen of the participants stated that they changed their major since entering college, and 21 answered that they did not change their major while enrolled in college. Out of the males, 8 reported that they had not changed their major, and 6 reported that they had. Out of the females, 13 answered that they had not changed their major and the remaining 13 had made a change to their major.

Materials

A survey was made for the use of obtaining data from the participants. The survey asks questions pertaining to their major and whether or not they have switched majors at any point during the duration of college. It also asks just a few personal questions, such as age and sex. Informed consent forms and feedback letters were also used and dispersed to every participant.

Procedure

We had to go to the classrooms of the capstone classes. We only went to the ones that the teacher had agreed to allow us to conduct our survey in their class. The survey

was handed out to every student in the class. A section of the survey asks if they would be willing to meet for a follow up interview, if they had indeed changed their major. The participants that had agreed were later contacted and scheduled to do an interview. Due to time restraints, we were unable to do face-to-face interviews with the participants. To fix this problem, we sent out our interview questions in an e-mail to those who had agreed to meet in person for the interview. In the interview e-mail, participants were asked questions as to the reasons why they changed their mind and the influences that helped in making their decision to change. Participants were also asked if they enjoyed their new area of study, if they regretted the change in majors, and if their choice was supported by their family or social network. There also was no compensation given from the researchers or teacher for participating in the survey or interview.

Results

Out of the 40 participants, only one replied in response to the further detailed interview. The participant that responded reported that initially they entered into college with an undecided major, but then discovered an interest in psychology, and later emphasized in developmental psychology due to an interest in working with children. The participant was influenced by both their advisor, who was a psychology professor and the introductory course into psychology. As for enjoyment in the area of study, the participant answered that they have always enjoyed it. The participant also noted that their decision to emphasize in developmental psychology was not supported by their mother, due to the mother's opinion that children are very difficult to work with, but the participant did note that they (the participant) had wished their emphasis was not in developmental but in clinical psychology.

Discussion

Although the initial proposal of this study was to find out the reasons and factors as to why most college students changed their major after entering into college, a few changes had to be made due to numerous factors. Participants of this experiment were all from capstone classes of designated fields of study; therefore one would assume that all participants are seniors. This being the seniors last year in college may have presented a problem with their ability to commit to doing a follow up interview, which would have further allowed us to properly conduct our experiment. Out of the 40 participants, only ten participants (who, on the questionnaire, answered that yes they had changed their major) said they were willing to participate in a follow up interview. Out of the ten participants that were willing to further participate, and were then contacted (via email, due to time constraints), only one participant responded. This left a definite dilemma. Because of the time in which the experiment was done (November) more towards the end of the semester, maybe the seniors were too busy to do a follow up interview. Those who answered yes and were willing to participate in a follow up interview, we believe, initially were willing to help out with the experiment, but later lost interest.

Although we could not obtain the data that we had hoped for, we both at one point had wanted to change our major (with one actually succeeding in doing so). For one researcher, Jodi Curtis, she entered as a bio-chemistry major. But after the stress of classes, and taking an introductory class of psychology, she made the change to psychology. Her choice was mainly influenced due to the fact that she was always interested in psychology, and the introductory class further sparked that interest. She did

receive support from her social networks also, and that helped to make the transition and choice much easier.

For researcher Adam Saito, although he remained with his initial major, psychology, after an introductory class in sociology, he wanted to change his major. Because he was already a junior in college, he did not make the decision to change, and still wishes that he had.

If the experiment were or should be conducted again, a few things would need to be implemented in hopes of obtaining better results. For better participation, which was the major problem of the experiment, introducing a reward (compensation) for participation in the study may persuade more participants to actually respond and further participate. Also, a longer time period to conduct the experiment might be better (a few months compared to a few weeks), and would yield more time to acquire more participants to obtain data.

Through the little data obtained, it can be concluded that yes many college students change their majors, and it can be attributed to their enrollment in various introductory classes that further help them to gain interest in certain fields of interest. If time had permitted for further investigation, results may have been different.

References

- Malgwi, C.A., Howe, M.A. and Burnaby, P.A. (2005). Influences on students choice of college major. *Journal of Education for Business*, 80, 5, 275-282.

Author Note

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Thanks to all professors who allowed us to conduct our experiments with in their designated classes rooms, during their class time. All research was overseen by Dr. Nohara-LeClair. All initial reviews were done by members of PSY404 (research methods). For additional information on or about the study please contact:

Jodi Curtis at yeahproject2@hotmail.com and or Adam Saito at saito037@hotmail.com, or Dr. Nohara-LeClair at mnoharaleclair@lindenwood.edu.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

SUBJECT ID NUMBER: _____ (Assigned by Researcher)

1) Are you: Male Female

2) What is your age?

3) When do you plan on graduating? _____

4) Since entering college have you changed your major?

YES (If you select yes, go to 5a)

NO (If you select no, go to 5b)

5a) If you answered **YES** to number 4, please state all the majors you have elected in the order you declared them.

5b) If you answered **NO** to question number 4, state your major.

6) Would you be willing to participate in a 15 minute interview about why you changed or did not change your major? YES _____

NO _____

MAYBE _____

If you checked off YES or MAYBE, please leave your contact information below.

Name:

Phone:

E-mail:

If you agree to meet for an interview your survey answers will be associated with your interview responses and therefore you will not remain anonymous. Please sign below if you consent to be identifiable only to the researchers for the purpose of matching your survey answers with interview responses.

Participant Signature

Date

Appendix B

Interview Questions

- 1.) Why did you decide to (or not to) change your major?
- 2) What was your choice influenced by? (e.g. After taking a specific class?)
- 3) Do you enjoy your area of study now more than you did before?
- 4) Was your choice supported by your family and social network?
- 5) Do you regret the change (or not making a change)? Why or why not?

Appendix C

Male or Female

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid male	14	35.0	35.0	35.0
female	26	65.0	65.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Age of Participants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 20.00	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
21.00	14	35.0	35.0	37.5
22.00	12	30.0	30.0	67.5
23.00	4	10.0	10.0	77.5
24.00	2	5.0	5.0	82.5
25.00	3	7.5	7.5	90.0
26.00	2	5.0	5.0	95.0
30.00	1	2.5	2.5	97.5
43.00	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Whether there was a change in major or not

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	19	47.5	47.5	47.5
no	21	52.5	52.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Date of graduation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid December 2007	6	15.0	15.0	15.0
December 2008	3	7.5	7.5	22.5
December 2009	1	2.5	2.5	25.0
May 2007	1	2.5	2.5	27.5
May 2008	24	60.0	60.0	87.5
May 2009	5	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	