

What factors should college bound or currently enrolled students consider when selecting an undergraduate major?

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The importance of selecting of students selecting an undergraduate major should probably be considered from at least two perspectives. In selecting an undergraduate major, a college-bound student or currently enrolled student is actually declaring an affinity for an area of interest, passion, and/or possibly already identified talent. At my current institution, we are introducing students to a broad range of meta-majors from onboarding (through the Freshman Seminar) through actually choosing a major and minor, or a major and various certificates. Additionally, we are working hard to link majors with internships prior to graduation and professional job attainment. Thus, we have introduced the concept of meta-majors to expose students to a collection of academic programs that have some common or related content or direction to help students identify majors, minors, and certificates that would furnish a broad range of knowledge in related disciplines. We believe that the exposure to meta-majors helps students to see connections, link several areas of interest, and to be prepared for an evolving range of jobs that combine content from several majors. We also believe that exposure to meta-majors will help students develop critical thinking skills and better prepare them for a lifetime of continuing learning.

Another perspective is that students who identify undergraduate academic majors early are more inclined to employ their time efficiently when selecting courses and working with academic advisors. When consulting for a major university, I questioned students in focus groups about why it took them around six years to graduate. Many of the students who responded to the inquiry stated that they had either 1) changed their majors, 2) missed opportunities to take courses for specific majors, and/or 3) been unable to decide on one specific major. When students are able to identify a major or a least a meta-major area, faculty and advisors can then help to develop an intentionally guided career pathway for the student that helps to establish linkages between academic disciplines,

So, from both perspectives, the sooner a student begins to identify interest in meta-major areas, the sooner the faculty and student support staff can effectively develop learning activities (internships, etc.) and interventions to assure that the student persists through graduation and moves towards a professional career.