

DECLARE YOUR MAJOR



THE 10 BIGGEST MISTAKES PARENTS MAKE



while helping their son or daughter
choose a college and a major!

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If you are the parent of a college or high school student having difficulty deciding on a career path and choosing a college major, you are not alone. Students today are more confused than ever by this monumental decision. The job market has changed significantly in the last 10 years and the general population has not kept up with these changes.

Most juniors/seniors in high school and freshmen/sophomores in college are asked to make one of the most important decisions of their lifetime, “What am I going to do for a living?” This is their first major career decision and it begins with choosing a college major. Most of these students have no idea what they want to do and there are very few reliable resources available to guide a student through this very important phase of life. In addition, most parents are not familiar with current industry trends or the new majors that are in demand.

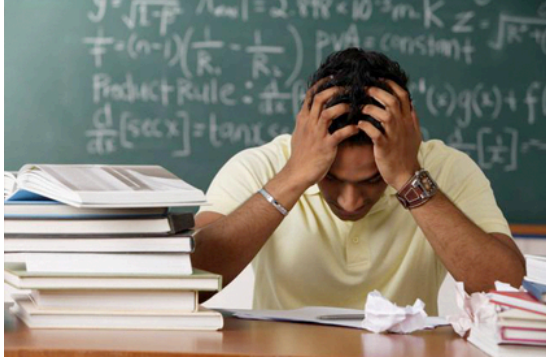
What is amazing is that many parents spend significant amounts of money helping their son or daughter obtain a competitive advantage in the college admissions process without giving serious consideration to what the he or she should even be going to school for!

Parents invest in SAT/ACT prep courses, tutors, and/or sports related camps and training. They spend money to have people help with the college application process—even help them write the college essay! But ask them if they have any idea what their graduate-to-be is considering as a major and as a career, and you will get the standard answer: “Oh she doesn’t really know yet.”

Very few parents actually take college major and career planning seriously enough to seek professional advice. Why?

Those who have received professional help know how important it has been to the student’s academic success in high school and college. Those who have not, in most cases, have learned the hard way. These are the parents who now sit back and complain that their recent college graduate cannot find a “good” job, or that their twenty-three year-old is still living at home because he can’t afford to be out on his own. **These parents are quick to blame the economy, society, politics, or even blame their child. However, when it comes to this matter, they seldom accept responsibility when it is the parent, not the student, who should be taking full control of this process.**

Make no mistake—there are those parents who took college major planning very seriously while their teenagers were in high school and many of these graduates are now working for excellent companies, with good paying jobs and benefits. Many of these young professionals no longer live at home and have become “adults” with productive careers.



Goals: How will they achieve them...
if they don't have any?

So why the big difference in outcomes? Why did some parents achieve such positive results with their kids while others are watching their teenager wander down the road to nowhere, hoping for somewhere?

Many parents answer this by saying, “Well it depends on the person; they are all different.” This is true. There are students who know, at an early age, the career path they want to take. There are those who get an idea in their heads based on family influences or something they experienced that made a major and lasting impression on them, thereby triggering a strong desire to be “someone or something.” But this is more the exception than the rule. As a matter of fact, most kids in the later high school years have no idea what they want to do with their future. Many college freshmen and sophomores are in the same boat. So, yes—people are all different. However, is that a good enough reason to allow this young man who is uncertain about his future to move forward with no goals and no objective in sight, hoping that he will “eventually” find himself? Oh yes, he may find himself—that is find himself with a degree he can’t use, unemployed, or wanting to go back to school for the degree he “should have pursued.”

Unfortunately, our school system does not provide high-quality, customized, career consultation for each child. While our schools try to give students the counseling and guidance they need, it is nearly impossible to devote to each individual student the time and resources required to make a well-informed decision. **I think the picture gets worse when you consider that guidance counselors are typically not in touch with today’s job market realities and demands.** How could they be? Career paths, position descriptions, and job requirements are changing so quickly. One must be “in the job market” actively to be able to offer sound advice. That is why our consulting program utilizes our team of executive recruiters who are in touch with companies and hiring managers on a daily basis. In addition, we have career coaches who are certified to administer assessments for personality and career matching. You need both sides of this equation to make an informed decision.

So why have parents not taken more control of this matter? Why haven’t parents become more involved in this very important decision?

The following pages discuss the 10 biggest mistakes parents make while helping their son or daughter choose a college and a major.

MISTAKE #1: Choosing a college before choosing a major ...

I am often asked the following question by well-intentioned and caring parents, “Hey Joe, my daughter was just accepted to colleges A, B and C. Which of these schools do you think is the best?” My response is always the same, “Well, what is her career objective and corresponding college major? What does she want to do for a living? What does she want to be?”

More often than not, the parent responds, “Well, she doesn’t really know that yet. She just applied to a few schools that she liked.”

That a parent would let his or her high school senior blindly select schools without having some idea of a potential career path is remarkable!

What are your selection criteria? Is it the food? Or maybe they have a pretty campus! No? It must be the new athletic arena then!

Hey parents, ARE YOU SERIOUS?



There is a reason why schools are RANKED in specific degrees and majors. There is a reason why specific schools are known for producing graduates with excellent skills in specific areas and why companies in specific industry sectors go to certain schools to recruit their graduates. The reason is because certain schools are known to be good for specific majors. One school might be well recognized for producing excellent graduates in engineering and

computer science while it may not be as highly regarded for producing graduates in business or economics. A college that has put a huge emphasis on its nursing program may not put the same emphasis on its accounting program. A college that has a good reputation in graphics design and web development may not have the same reputation in architecture or industrial design.

Suffice it to say, choosing a college before choosing a major is unwise and, in most cases, leads to mediocre academic performance and career direction that is later questioned or regretted completely.

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MISTAKE #2: Not giving your son or daughter the necessary time, attention, and resources to find his or her ideal career path and college major ...

Wouldn't it make sense for you and your son or daughter to invest just a few hours answering the following questions?

- Who am I and what would I really like to do for a living?
- What specific careers would match well with my personality?
- Is there an assessment test that could tell me which careers other people, like me (with the same interests, likes, and dislikes), are enjoying and excelling in?
- Are some career personality matching tests better than others? Are they effective? Which assessments are the best and which might lead me down the wrong path? What about the free career tests online?
- How can I find advice and research on industry trends, forecasted areas of job growth, demand for specific educational backgrounds, and compensation / pay-scale data? Can I find these things easily—without spending hours, days and weeks doing research?
- Is there a source I can trust to give me advice—someone who specializes in the job market and career consulting?

The good news is that there is help for all of these things. We, at Declare Your Major, offer you answers to all of these questions.



CLICK HERE TO RECEIVE A FREE OUTLINE THAT SHOWS YOU HOW OUR PROGRAM CAN HELP YOU THROUGH THIS PROCESS

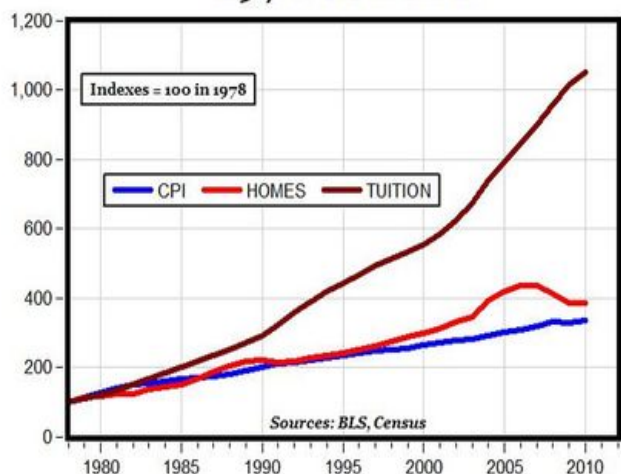


In a recent Georgetown University study, authors Anthony P. Carnevale, Ban Cheah, and Jeff Strohl produced an excellent report on college majors, unemployment, and earnings. This report, *Not All College Degrees Are Created Equal*, is summarized by the following:

“High school students who can go on to college should do so—with one caveat. They should do their homework before picking a major because when it comes to employment prospects and compensation, not all college degrees are created equal.”

MISTAKE #3: Not having a plan and a path for your son or daughter may cost you both a significant amount in wasted money and time ...

College Tuition CPI vs. U.S. Home Prices vs. CPI 1978 to 2010



The “undeclared” approach has not proven to be beneficial for many students, their parents, or their wallets! Of course the colleges like “undeclared.” They get a paying customer for five or six years instead of four. Though the typical college timeline is plotted along a four-year course, on average more than half of enrolled students take longer to graduate, according to U.S. News data. In addition, many of the students who do choose a major have done so with minimal research, guidance, and self-exploration. As a result, it is estimated that more than 50 percent of those who do declare a major, change majors—with many doing so two and three times during their college years. Can you say CH-CHING? Make no mistake—the colleges have no problem with it because they are profiting

from it! “Sure—go undeclared, or change majors a few times—it’s no problem!” Yeah, no problem for them! You are paying the bill! Let’s look at a few facts. College is more expensive than at any time in our history (even after being adjusted for inflation).

Can you or your son or daughter really afford to pay for an extra year (or two)? People are borrowing money at a staggering rate to pay for college educations. Today, the average fulltime undergraduate student is borrowing 63 percent more than those students a decade earlier, even after adjusting for inflation. Student loans outstanding have skyrocketed. **The total amount of outstanding student loans this year will, for the first time, exceed \$1 trillion.**

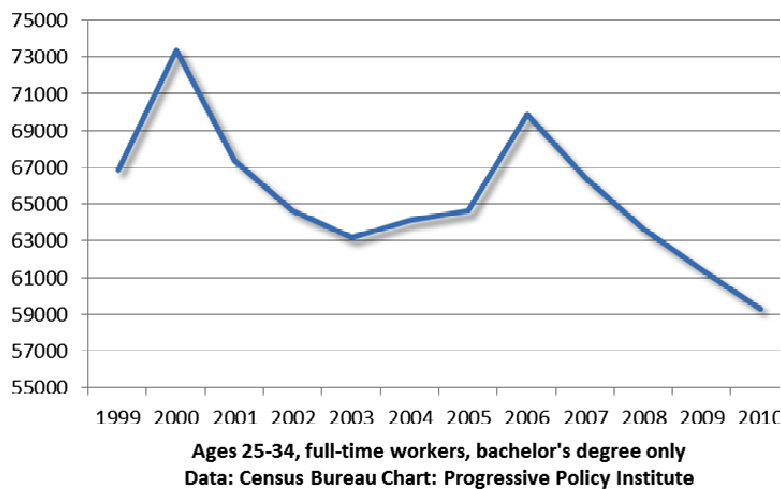
A conservative estimate of the unemployment rate for graduates with new bachelor degrees is at 8.9 percent. Many of these unemployed graduates are deferring their loans and, in many cases, refusing to pay them at all. Generally speaking, these are graduates who did not take the career planning and college major decision process very seriously. They just rolled the dice and now they are in trouble. Who will pay off these loans? They can’t be written off in bankruptcy. The co-signers—that’s who. Yes. The parents!

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MISTAKE #4: Parents are not insisting that their college-bound kids tackle the more challenging degrees and majors that lead to excellent jobs and ample opportunity ...

The high unemployment rate for recent graduates isn't the entire problem. The larger problem is related to the jobs that these recent graduates ARE finding.

**Young Male College Grads
(real earnings, 2010 dollars)**



These are not the higher paying professional jobs that students thought they would be offered. More and more American students are graduating with degrees that are simply not marketable and do not prepare them for the real world. Colleges offer them because they are profitable for the schools. On the other side of the equation, corporations are complaining that they cannot find the skills and knowledge needed for their entry-level positions. Talk about a disconnect!

**Young Female College Grads
(real earnings, 2010 dollars)**



In 2011, the US immigration department issued a record number of H-1B work visas for Indian citizens, a 24% increase over the number issued in 2010. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant work visa that allows US employers to hire foreign workers with highly specialized skills, and a bachelor degree or higher, to work in the US in very specific occupations such as education, finance, IT, and medicine. The visa is valid for up to three years from issuance and visa holders can reapply for another three years for a total of six years.

In 2010, the Associated Press reported that scores from the **2009 Program for International Student Assessment** show 15-year-old students in the US perform about average in reading and science, and below average in math. Out of 34 countries, the US ranked 14th in reading, 17th in science, and 25th in math.

Our labor force is hungry for talent, knowledge, and skills. They cannot find these qualifications in this country, so they pressure the government to allow them to hire from other countries. Our education system is sinking and that makes it even more difficult for our kids to compete in the real world. It is now crucial that our children have every competitive edge they can access. Having specific career goals based on what the student would naturally excel in, as well as what the demand will be for the specific degree being considered, is more critical than ever.

MISTAKE # 5: Going to college “undeclared” will help your son or daughter understand more about the career options that are available in the real world.

Starting college undeclared does not solve the problem that many parents think it will solve. It simply defers the inevitable—deciding what to do for a living. Here is an important question that must be asked: “What will the student know a year from now about potential career paths that she doesn’t already know?” The problem is that undeclared students don’t know what they don’t know. Will they learn what their ideal career path should be by taking a few courses? What if one of those courses is a prerequisite for what would have been a perfect major for the student’s personality but the student disliked that particular course—or simply had a boring professor? Should a young woman who would have been a great nurse abandon that career goal simply because she disliked, or didn’t do well in, chemistry? Wouldn’t it be better if the student knew, through testing and professional counseling, that she would be a great nurse and that chemistry, regardless of whether the student liked it or not, was a requirement that will enable her to have a career about which she is passionate?

What if the student chooses a major as a result of what his friends are pursuing? Is that the way someone should choose a college major, and subsequent career path, that is the best fit for his own unique personality?

Choosing a major based on “that’s what some of my friends are doing” is not the way to determine career options that fit a specific individual’s unique personality, interests and abilities.

If this is how your graduate-to-be chooses a major, don’t be surprised if they become disenchanted with his/her career choice a few years out of school (assuming the student even finishes school). This is one of the most common reasons recent college graduates go back to school for a degree in “what they really want to do.” Shouldn’t they have thought about that before going for the “wrong degree?” The answer is, “Of course they should have, but they didn’t.” Why didn’t they? The same reason why they need to be told to put on a coat or hat before running out into the cold weather – the same reason why they need to be told to study for that big test—because they lack the maturity to take

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complete and total responsibility for all of their actions and their future. So how do you expect them to get serious about evaluating career options and college majors?

Parents, if you don't take your son or daughter's future seriously, nobody will. You are literally gambling and just playing the odds in hopes that he or she receives adequate guidance from the school in determining a career and college major.

Most students are undeclared because they are confused, unsure, and uninformed about the broad spectrum of careers available in a dynamic job market. Wouldn't it be better to address that directly with professional advice as opposed to leaving it totally to chance? Don't worry; help has arrived!



CLICK HERE TO RECEIVE A FREE OUTLINE THAT SHOWS YOU HOW OUR PROGRAM CAN HELP YOU THROUGH THIS PROCESS



MISTAKE #6: "I think he is too young to force him to make a big decision like that now."

It is much more difficult for students to perform well in school if they have no idea why they are really there or what the real life benefit of studying is. Poorly defined goals result in a lack of passion, which results in lack of drive. It is a fact—a student who has a strong career goal will not only perform better in school but will also do well in courses in which he has no interest. Those courses become merely a means to an end when a strong goal is in sight. Therefore, that student will try harder—even in courses that he dislikes. **What's important is that the student, prior to choosing a college, invest the time and energy considering what job he would enjoy, what careers match naturally with his personality, forecasting the compensation and demand for these skills upon graduation, and evaluating the financial feasibility of his overall plan.**

MISTAKE #7: "She'll figure it out when she gets to college—after all, that's what I did!"

This, of course, is not a very wise position to take and it also puts no value on the way the world has changed in the last 20 years. Twenty years ago, there were fewer college majors to choose from and the job market was not as competitive as it is today. Twenty years ago companies hired "smart" people or "hard working" people or "well rounded" people—and the companies trained them. Training programs were common and just having a bachelor degree exhibited a level of accomplishment, teeing you up for consideration in many job categories. In addition, as a country, the USA stilled "made things" and there were sales, marketing, financial and management jobs in the manufacturing sector. Now the country's manufacturing base has moved to China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, and other places with low-cost labor alternatives. In addition, when you were

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in college or high school, we were not outsourcing a major portion of our technology jobs to other continents and we were not hiring our brainpower from other countries.

It's a different world now. Having a bachelor degree no longer holds the same competitive advantage as it did when you were in college. **If your child does not choose a specific degree that teaches the specific skills and imparts the knowledge that is in demand in this country right now, your child will be in for a rude awakening when it comes time to look for a job. Just saying “she’ll figure it out when she gets there” is simply not enough.**

MISTAKE #8: Letting your son or daughter control this decision and this process without your involvement and approval ...

“He says he knows what he is doing and not to worry—he is taking care of it.”

Young men and women in high school and college do not like to be told what to do. They know it all. They have it under control. We know that! So when you question them on what they plan to “do for a living” you often receive resistance and pushback. They will kick this down the road if you let them and then it will be too late. Yes, they are young men and women, but when it comes to this subject matter and decision, they are kids. They are clueless. They don't know what they don't know. **If you let them take charge of this matter, there is a high probability that both you and your teenager will be negatively impacted by YOUR decision to allow them to control this outcome. This is one of those fights worth fighting and you need to make sure that your son or daughter receives help with this decision.**

MISTAKE #9: Believing that the school guidance department will help your son or daughter identify and explore suitable and viable career options, and corresponding college majors.

Through the years I have asked many parents the following question, “How satisfied were you with the advice of school guidance counselors, at the high school and college level, regarding career options and the selection of a college major for your teenager?” Generally speaking, the responses were the following: One will say, “Very satisfied”; two will say “OK, but not great”; the other seven will just laugh out loud.

Consider these statistics from the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) guide entitled *2011, State of College Admission:*

Student-to-Counselor Ratio: According to data from the US Department of Education, in 2009-2010, the national public school student-to-counselor ratio was 460:1, including K–12 schools. NACAC survey data indicated an average secondary school student-to-counselor ratio, including part-time staff, of 272:1.

Time Spent Counseling for College: On average, public school counselors spent 23 percent of their time on postsecondary counseling in 2010, while their private school counterparts spent 55 percent of their time on college counseling.

College Counseling Staff: In 2010, only 26 percent of public schools reported employing at least one counselor (full- or part-time) whose exclusive responsibility was to provide college counseling, compared to 73 percent of private schools.

It was mentioned earlier but it is worth repeating. Our school system does not provide high-quality, customized, career consultation for each student. While our schools try to provide the counseling and guidance they need, it is nearly impossible to devote to each college-bound individual the time and resources required to explore career paths that would fit their unique personalities, capabilities, and interests. In addition, guidance counselors are typically not in touch with today’s job markets. With career paths, position descriptions, and job requirements changing so quickly, career advice should come from a professional with a strong overall view of the job market and the various roles and career paths that are now in demand. Our team consists of executive recruiters who are in touch with companies and hiring managers on a daily basis. In addition, we have career coaches who are certified to administer assessments for personality and career matching.



The will to succeed is important, but what’s more important is the will to prepare.

-Bobby Knight-

MISTAKE # 10: Not making the career planning process and college major decision a serious priority ...

Leaving the college major decision in the hands of your son or daughter may be a bad idea! College is expensive. Doesn’t it make sense to know what you are investing in?

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Having a career choice gives a student a goal, even if that career path changes later. There are literally thousands of career choices and many are highly specialized. The first step toward success and happiness in one's career is to be able to work at something that fits well with one's personality. There is no greater motivator.

The ultimate responsibility for your teenager's future lies with YOU, the parent.

If your son or daughter is between the school years of a high school sophomore or college sophomore, and if he or she is confused about the future, why not take the first steps? We combine our knowledge of current trends in the job market with our experience in personality and career matching assessments to help students narrow their career options and choose a college major that will serve as a strong foundation for their future. This service has made a real difference in the lives of many people—both students and parents.



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About the Author

With more than two decades of experience in executive search and leadership, Joe Ziccardi brings extensive knowledge and insight to the career coaching and job search advisory process.

[Click Here for Mr. Ziccardi's Complete Bio](#)

Take control of this process and help your son or daughter with this very important decision in life.

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