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Decisions, Decisions, Decisions: How Undecided, Second Year Students in the College of Arts and Sciences Engage in the Decision Making Process of Choosing a Major

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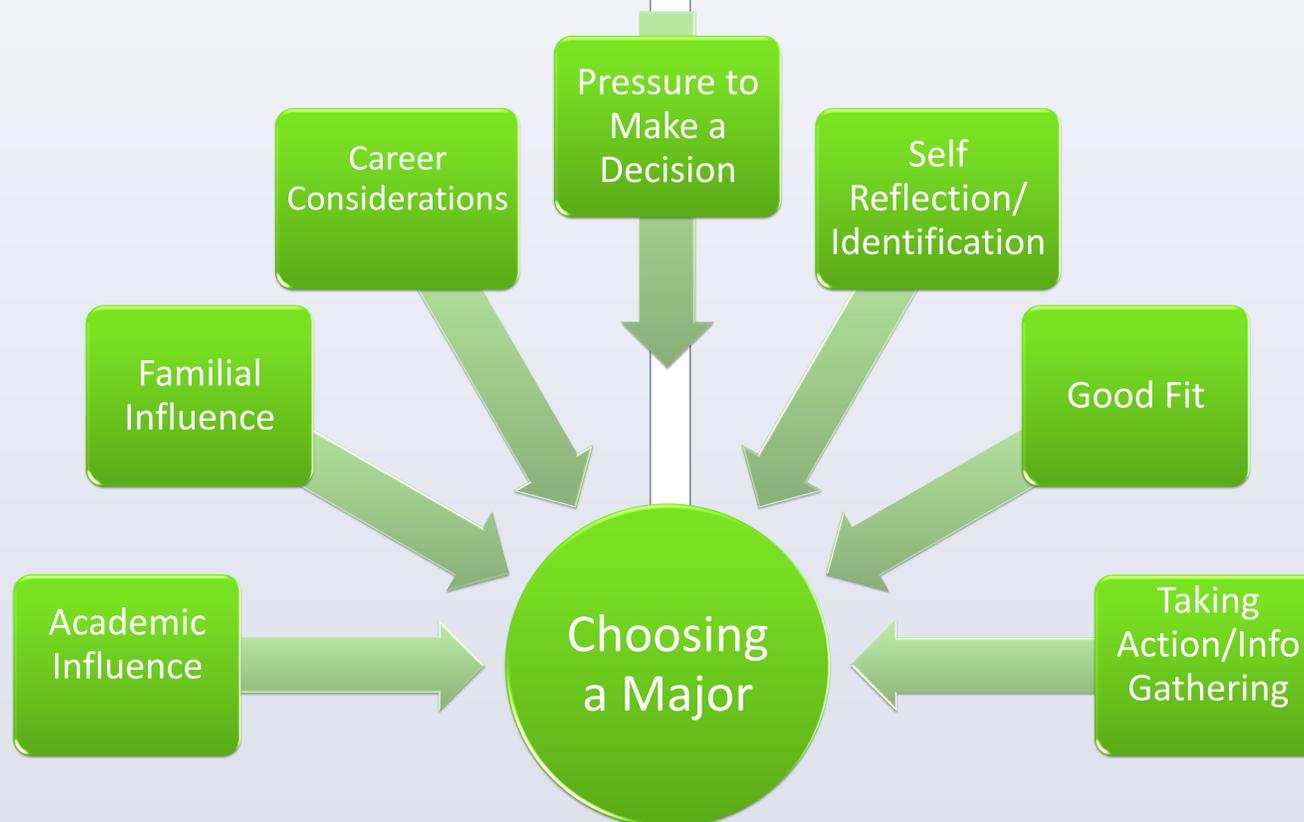
ABSTRACT

Choosing a college major is one of the first big decisions students make when they officially become adults, and many struggle with that choice. This study explored resources used, information gathered and influences consulted when these students go through the process of making that decision. Findings from personal interviews, implications for future research and recommendations for advisors working with undecided students are presented.

RATIONALE & OBJECTIVES

- Purpose: to determine how students in the second year of their undergraduate education in the College of Arts and Sciences make a decision about a college major.
- Why? Second year students are under pressure to choose a major so they can begin courses in that program of study, and many students in the College of Arts and Sciences do not have a clear career path connected to a college major.
- Beggs, Bantham and Taylor (2008): choosing a college major represents a major life decision, and is the most frequently identified life regret for Americans – the major must be chosen carefully and for the right reasons.
- Participants: students who were either currently undecided or had recently chosen a major.
- Gap in previous research: few studies have taken a qualitative approach and focus on a particular group of students in their second year of undergraduate study who have indicated an interest in the Arts and Sciences. This research addresses that gap.

RESULTS



MATERIALS & METHODS

- Qualitative method: increased likelihood of ascertaining more details about the nature of the participants' decision-making process.
- Participants: 8 college-aged students - 6 females and 2 males.
- Personal, face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants: each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.
- 12 questions were asked of each participant, based on an instrument developed by Carduner, Padak and Reynolds (2011).
- Interviews were audio recorded on a cell phone, and then transcribed word for word.

BENEFITS

- Steele (2003): each student is different and unique in both personality and where they are in the decision making process. This research will benefit academic advisors who usually have the most contact with undecided students and have access to the resources to help them.
- Revealed need for collaboration: between academic and career advising, and between families (especially parents) and higher education institutions.
- Benefits for institutions: students' confidence in making decisions, especially those related to major and career, increases the likelihood of persistence to graduation (Sandler, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

- Most participants used a variety of methods to make the decision about a major, but familial influence and career considerations were most frequently cited.
- Professionals working with undecided students should help these students become more self-aware.
- General lack of awareness about options.
- Limitation: only two male perspectives

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