

MYTHS ABOUT CAREERS

This article is adapted from a brochure published jointly by the Career Planning and Placement Center, Counseling Center, and Office of Undergraduate Affairs at UC Berkeley.

What is a MYTH? An ill-founded belief held uncritically, especially by an interested group.

For college students, one of the most difficult educational decisions can be the choice of an undergraduate major and, by extension, the choice of a future career. For many university students that choice is further complicated by the variety and number of undergraduate majors available to them at every campus. This article discusses some of the most common myths that prevail among college students about the relationship of a major to eventual career choices and options.

MYTH: In selecting a college major, you are choosing a career.

FACTS: While it is true that certain majors such as engineering prepare students for fairly specific career fields, a far greater number of majors do not have a direct correlation with given career areas. Liberal arts majors often find that they have a very wide variety of career options because their backgrounds are so broad. Even within the technical or professional majors, where specific job skills are taught, there are many different kinds of jobs from which to choose.

Did you know that a study conducted by the College Placement Council indicates that the majority of college graduates are successfully employed in fields not directed to their academic majors?

MYTH: Job market demand should be the primary determinant of academic and career choices.

FACTS: Selecting a major or pursuing a career just because it's "hot" on the job market can be dangerous. You may enjoy neither the course work nor the job you get later. The careers in demand when you are a freshman or sophomore may not be in demand by the time you graduate. You are on much firmer ground selecting a major or choosing a career goal that genuinely interests you.

Did you know that job market demand moves in cycles? What is "hot" becomes "cold" as supply rushes to meet demand, and what was "cold" becomes "hot" when supply decreases enough to create new demand. Also new career fields and jobs emerge every year as a result of changes in technology, public policy, and economic trends. Factors that influence job market demand are frequently unpredictable.

MYTH: Liberal arts majors are unemployable.

FACTS: Liberal arts graduates develop skills that are highly valued by employers and applicable to a wide range of professional jobs. In a longitudinal study of AT&T employees, humanities and social science majors were found to be stronger than engineering majors and similar to business majors in administrative skills and motivation for advancement. In the area

of interpersonal skills liberal arts majors were the strongest of all groups. If these graduates sometimes take more time finding a niche in the working world, it's usually because they don't know what they can or want to do, or they are not aware of the options open to them.

MYTH: You must pursue certain undergraduate majors to gain admission to postgraduate professions in such fields as business, dentistry, law, or medicine.

FACTS: While some postgraduate professional schools require or recommend the completion of certain academic prerequisites, in most cases no specific major is required. In other instances, only broad skills are sought, e.g. the ability to read and write well and to think critically. In short, you may major in any of a variety of academic fields and go to various types of postgraduate professional schools.

Did you know, for example, that students with academic majors in several of the humanities have higher acceptance rates to medical school than do biology majors?

MYTH: There is little beyond course work in your major that you can do to improve your chances of career success.

FACTS: Supplementary courses and independent study projects can be helpful as well. Important experience can be gained and skills developed through such extracurricular activities as student organizations, athletic teams, social groups, and student government. Internships, summer and part-time jobs, volunteer activities, and study abroad play important roles in developing your understanding of yourself and the world of work. Such experiences are important in establishing professional contacts crucial to successful career growth.

Did you know that employers consistently place a high value on these extracurricular activities, internships part-time jobs, study abroad, and summer work experience?

MYTH: Your first job will determine your career, so you must be completely sure of your choice when making an academic or career decision.

FACTS: In any decision where each possibility has its own advantages and disadvantages, there is rarely 100% certainty. Any choice involves some risk. Don't think that you cannot change your mind. You are almost always free to explore new directions and to make new choices as you learn more about yourself and various careers.

Did you know that the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the average person will change careers several times in the course of a lifetime?