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Factors Influencing Student Major Selection at a Community College

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This research is a product of the graduate program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University.
Find out more about the program.

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Factors Influencing Student Major Selection at a Community College

(TITLE)

BY
Kellie Jean Keck

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2016

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

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In the Graduate School, Eastern Illinois University

Charleston, IL

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Committee Members:

Dr. Dena Kniess
Dr. Tina Stovall
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FACTORS INFLUENCING MAJOR SELECTION

ABSTRACT

College students are influenced by many different things the moment they arrive on campus. This study was an exploratory study that examined what factors influenced student major selection at a rural Midwestern community college. Qualitative interviews were conducted with \( N = 6 \) sophomore level participants that were previously undecided but had since declared a major. Participants were asked a series of questions about their major selection process including their experiences as an undecided student, who, and what may have influenced their major selection, what role monetary returns played in their major selection, and how comfortable they are with their current major.

The results suggested that the majority of participants felt pressure to declare a major, and that interest in major was the most influential factor. Students were also influenced by many different people including faculty members, friends, and family members. Overall the participants had done some type of research before selecting their major and they were not largely influenced by monetary returns.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Choosing the right academic major may be vital to a student’s success at a community college and beyond. Tuition rates have increased 28% in the last ten years in the state of Illinois (Collegeboard, 2014). This alone is incentive enough to get the academic major decision right the first time, saving students time and money. Relationships, and the student’s perceived academic abilities are just a few of the several different factors that may influence a student’s decision to declare a major. This is not a decision a student takes lightly. E. St. John (2000) said, “There is, perhaps, no college decision that is more thought-provoking, gut wrenching and rest-of-your-life oriented—or disoriented—than the choice of a major” (p. 22). This decision may be complicated by the constant expanding academic programs colleges are offering. The New York Times (2012) reported that, “Colleges and universities reported nearly 1,500 academic programs to the Department of Education in 2010; 355 were added to the list over the previous 10 years....” (para. 2) Multiple options, and multiple influences may lead a student to feel pressured to declare an academic major, regardless of if it is the right fit for them potentially leading to academic and financial stress.

These undergraduate students are not always making this major decision alone. Walmsley, Wilson, and Morgan (2010), found that personal relationships, including parental relationships had a significant influence on a student’s major selection. In addition to personal relationships there are several other factors thought to contribute to academic major selection. Arcidiacono, Hotz, and Kang (2012) discovered that when surveying students about their major decision, and an alternative major decision, 7.5% of students surveyed would have changed their major based on the amount of money they
assumed the alternative major earned. Exposure to the major selection process may begin for some when they step foot on a college campus, but for others the process begins much earlier.

Students are visited by admissions representatives, attend career fairs, and are asked about their interest in majors starting in high school, urging the sometimes dreaded major selection process along (ACT, 2012). A middle school in Clover, South Carolina starts the discussion about a career path in the eighth grade. The hope is that this will give students some time to job shadow, and sign up for courses in the field that they are interested in at the time. The students meet with a career counselor and set up a career plan that they follow to graduation. (Cook, 2014). Similarly, an article by Winnie Hu of The New York Times discusses a school in New Jersey that has also implemented “majors” for their high school students and explains that it is an attempt to stay ahead of other schools. The students are required to write an essay on their top majors and are assigned their first or second pick. Hu states, “Ninth graders often have trouble selecting what clothes to wear to school each morning or what to have for lunch (Hu, 2007 para. 1). If students are asked to start thinking about careers this early, what happens when that student changes their mind?

There is a “stigma” attached to an undecided major (Vernon, 2014). Research suggests that lower career decision-making self-efficacy, and negative career thinking were a significant result of undecided majors (Bullock-Yowell, McConnell, & Schedin 2014). Undecided majors are also considered to be “at risk” when compared to decided students (Tampke & Durodoye, 2013). Previous research has shown that academic advisors and counselors do not play a major role in a student’s college major selection.
Students reported feeling like they experienced a lack of information when trying to make a major decision (Beggs, Banham, & Taylor 2008; Downey, McGaughey, & Roach 2011; Walmsley, Wilson, & Morgan 2010). One study surveyed students and asked what influenced their major decision. Only 6% reported feeling like they were influenced by counselor recommendations (Beggs et al., 2008).

When dealing with undecided students it is important to give them adequate encouragement and resources regarding their major exploration. While research involving student major selection is typically done at the university level, this study was directed toward community college students at a rural two year community college. Community colleges generally offer open enrollment and allow students the opportunity to save money, explore career options, create flexible schedules, and prepare to transfer to a four year college (Why Community College, n.d.). As of 2013, 12.8 million students attended community college in the United States either full time or part time (“2014 Fact Sheet”). According to the American Association of Community Colleges, nearly half of all undergraduate students in the United States attend community colleges. The average age of the community college student is 29 years old, and two thirds of community college students attend only part-time. The college where the study took place had approximately 224 students with a major of undeclared as of fall 2013 (Annual Fall Enrollment Report Presented by Division and Program).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate what intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence a student’s major selection at a rural community college. The findings of this study can help academic advisors, career services professionals, and other institutions
implement new programs for major exploration, and create new resources for students struggling with their major selection.

Walmsley et al. (2010), indicated that student experiences such as internships and study abroad were an important factor when selecting an academic major. Walmsley et al.'s findings could suggest the benefits of allowing students to gain experience with different majors or participate in job shadowing before deciding on a specific major. A report by ACT (2013) revealed that “among students who were undecided on a college major, the number indicating that they needed assistance rose to more than seven out of ten” (para. 8). It is important that student affairs professionals, faculty members, and high school counselors work together to help students match their careers with their interests.

Research Questions

The researcher hoped to gain an understanding of what factors, motivate a community college student to select a major. Several questions were asked to determine where the student receives specific information in regards to his or her major selection, and what role academic advisors play in this process. The following research questions were created for this study:

1. What factors influence a student’s decision in choosing major?
2. What role did monetary returns play in major selection?
3. How comfortable is the student in their declared major?
4. Who influences a student’s major decision?
Significance of the Study

According to a study by the American College Test (2013), of the sample high school class of 2013 that declared a major when they registered for the test, “36% selected a planned major that is a good fit with their interests, and 32% selected a major that is a poor fit with their interests” (para. 8). With 32% of students selecting a major that is a poor fit, it is important that academic professionals are able to intervene early and assist students in exploring other options when, and if they come to the realization that their major is not a good fit for them.

According to American Association of Community Colleges in 2012, 58% of students attending community colleges were receiving federal aid (“2014 Fact Sheet”). In order for students to continue receiving financial aid it is imperative that they do not change their major too many times and exceed the number of credit hours allowed to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress. SAP policies are unique to each school and states that students must continue to make good enough grades, move toward their graduation goal, and complete that goal in an acceptable time period (“Federal Student Aid”). Changing a major too many times could be detrimental to a student’s SAP status resulting in a loss of their financial aid. This scenario and can be avoided by understanding what motivates the student’s decision. Where a student may be receiving information about their major, whether it be motivation by relationships, staff and faculty members, or campus resources, is important to understand so we can assist undecided students during his or her time of deliberation.
Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, only six students were invited to participate in the semi-structured, standardized open-ended interview, making results less transferable to other types of colleges. Additionally, all six students were White making the results less transferable to other students. Next, the location of the study was limited to a single community college campus in a rural area. Additionally, of the students selected to participate, each had a different faculty advisor, meaning that their experience regarding major exploration may differ. One student’s interpretation of faculty contact may have been different than another’s.

In order to assure that students have adequate time to explore the college’s resources, and meet with their faculty advisors, the researcher only selected students that have completed two semesters as of fall semester 2015 and have changed their major from undecided within the last year which consists of fall semester 2014 and spring semester 2015.

Another potential limitation, is that the students being interviewed may not have understood the difference between an academic counselor and an academic advisor. Students first meet with an academic counselor during orientation, and then are reassigned to a member of faculty in their specified major. It is important that students are aware of this difference in order to assess the impact that counseling services and faculty members as two separate influencers have on their major selection. Lastly, because the researcher is employed with the college the students may not be comfortable disclosing their true feelings about the services they have received on camps.
Definition of terms

**Declared student**- a student that has successfully declared an academic major

**Self-efficacy**- the belief concerning one's ability to successfully complete a task or behavior (Bandura, 1982).

**Sophomore status**- any student that has completed at least two semesters

**Career Cruising**- an assessment tool available through the Career Services website designed to help students relate their skills and interests to a potential career.

**SAP**- Satisfactory Academic Progress; a policy unique to each school that states that students must continue to make good enough grades, move toward their graduation goal, and complete that goal in an acceptable time period (“Federal Student Aid”).

**Intrinsic Motivation**- Ryan and Deci (2000) defined intrinsic motivation as, “the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence.

**Extrinsic Motivation**- Ryan and Deci (2000) stated that extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (pg. 55)

**Snowball Sampling**- Atkinson and Flint (2004), define snowball sampling as “a technique for gathering research subjects through the identification of an initial subject who is used to provide the names of other actors.” (pg. 1044-1045).

**Summary**

Chapter I contained an introduction, and the purpose of the study which is to explore what factors influence a student's major selection at a rural community college.
Next, four research questions were posed, the significance of the study was presented, and limitations were addressed. Lastly, a definition of terms were provided. Chapter II will present a review of the literature surrounding undecided students, student motivators, the influence of relationships, and the type of research conducted by students prior to choosing a major.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Although the topic of major selection has been covered in depth, past research has typically been conducted at the four-year university level. The researcher attempted to gain a better understanding of what specific factors influence students at a community college to change their major from undecided to declared, and what types of resources aided in that decision. This chapter presents a detailed review of the literature surrounding undecided students, student motivators, influence of relationships on major selection, and the type of research that was conducted about their major. Lastly, the researcher will provide a look at the theoretical framework surrounding the topic.

Undecided Students

When a student decides what college to attend the next question they may be asked is what they plan to study. There are several different factors that could influence this answer. Students may feel pressure to make sure they have a major declared, even if it is not what they are passionate about. A study by DeMarie and Aloise-Young (2003) surveyed 144 education majors, and 151 business majors at a small liberal arts college to assess their level of interest in their major. They surveyed the students on their level of interest, whether that interest was higher than interest in the other major, and how willing they would be to learn vocabulary words pertaining to their major. They found that the students surveyed had interest in their own major, and were willing to learn vocabulary words pertaining to their own major. This study suggests that interest in major may be significant when an undecided student is choosing a major. A study Eun, Sohn, and Lee (2013) surveyed 247 undergraduate students regarding majors at a university in Korea,
104 men and 134 women. Their results suggested that students who were self-regulators in decision-making contexts were more likely to choose a major that fit with their interests and also choose careers that were relative to their college majors. It is important to understand how an undecided student is influenced when making this decision so that we can provide support for the student if needed.

At the community college level, students are coming from diverse academic households, may have different socioeconomic backgrounds, and are made up of several different demographics, all of which may influence the way a student selects a major (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2013). At least half of all first-year college students were undecided. Past literature has indicated it may be difficult to paint a clear picture of what an undecided student may look like in comparison to their decided counterparts (Van Wie, 2011).

A study by Anderson, Creamer, and Cross (1989) compared undecided students to decided students to determine their levels of academic preparedness. They surveyed 1,384 freshman at a medium sized public university and they found that there was no difference in the demographics that included race and gender between decided and undecided students. They also examined academic performance between undecided and decided students and found there was no difference between the two groups. The results indicated that although a student may be undecided it does not necessarily mean that they are less academically prepared than decided students. Similarly, a study by, Bullock-Yowell, McConnell, and Schedin (2014) explored differences between 226 decided and undecided college students and found that there was no difference between undecided and decided majors in readiness to make a decision concerning careers. These results
indicate that although undecided majors may face more difficulties when making a career decision they are not necessarily less ready to do so. These studies may present a need for a shift in how we examine undecided students. Cueso (2005) stated, “It may now be time to engage in research on the process of how students go about deciding on a major (or deciding to remain “undecided”) …” (pg. 4).

**Student Motivators**

There are several different things that may motivate a student to declare a major. Deci and Ryan (2000) stated, hen intrinsically motivated, “a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external products, pressures or reward” (pg. 56). A study by Beggs, Banham, and Taylor (2008), examined what factors were most important when a student was selecting a major. The team surveyed 852 undergraduate students, freshman through seniors, who had declared a major at a large public university in the Midwest. The results suggested that a student’s interest in the specific major was the most important factor that influenced their selection. This would be an example of students motivated by intrinsic factors.

When students remove all pressures from major selection they may focus more on the intrinsic motivators rather than extrinsic. Deci and Ryan (2000) discussed that individuals whose motivation was internal to self rather than externally controlled normally experienced more positive feelings, which in turn, increased performance and creativity. A study by Zafar (2013) attempted to answer the question, “How are college majors chosen by males and females?” He surveyed sophomores at Northwestern University, 92 female and 69 male, from November of 2006 to February of 2007 to explore the gender gap in college major selection. He found that enjoyment of the job,
and the coursework in the major were considered important to both males and females, but males cared more about monetary outcomes compared to females. These findings support Deci and Ryan’s (2000) study, the student’s motivation was internal to themselves which lead to them placing a high value on interest in the coursework and enjoyment of the job regardless of their gender.

Satisfaction with a major is important to ensure students can finish their degree in a timely manner. Leach and Patall’s research (2013), suggested that if a student participates in counterfactual thinking which may involve comparing their selected majors to an alternative major they may experience less satisfaction with their own major. In order to experience satisfaction with a major a student also needs to experience high levels of self-efficacy in that major. Schunk (1991) defined self-efficacy as, “an individual's judgments of his or her capabilities to perform given actions” (pg. 207). If a student has low self-efficacy regarding their major it may be essential that an advisor step in to help the student explore other options, or help them feel secure with their decision. Self-efficacy is an important factor regarding the education behavior of students considering technical fields, especially women. An article by Shapiro and Sax (2011), discussed the various reasons women may not be attracted to the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math or STEM fields. The authors stated that women may not be preparing for the STEM field while they were in high school which could in turn effect a women’s confidence when it comes time to select a major. They also suggested that the competitive nature of the field may turn women away along with the lack of student faculty relationships. Women faculty members in the STEM field are few, so it may be difficult for women studying STEM to find a role model or mentor (Schapiro & Sax,
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Chen (2009) reported that about 50 percent of students who enter college as a STEM major switch majors, or are not retained.

Self-efficacy may also be related to multiple major changes and academic achievement and persistence. In 1984, Lent, Brown, and Larkin found that students who had higher beliefs about their abilities in a math or science field were more likely to persist. “Students reporting relatively strong self-efficacy generally achieved higher grades and were much more likely to persist in technical or scientific majors over a 1-year period than were those with low self-efficacy” (para. 4). In a follow up study the researcher’s suggested that advisors should consider assessing a student’s self-efficacy regarding their major selection when helping them with career choices. The student’s self-efficacy levels may determine what types of careers they are more likely to consider (Lent, Brown, & Larkin 1986).

Extrinsic motivation can be considered actions performed in order to gain an outcome outside one’s self. Students who study a specific major because they know it is of value to their chosen career, or because their parents told them they must do so, would be extrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students may also select a major based on extrinsic motivators like monetary returns after graduation, or good grades in their courses. In a study by Malgwi, Howe, and Burnaby (2005), 788 undergraduate business students at a business college were surveyed about the factors that influenced them to select a business major. Of the students surveyed 60 percent were female, and 92 percent were between 18 to 24 years old. Students who were originally undecided and later declared a major ranked a high level of compensation as the third most influential factor when deciding on a new major. The fact that these students were basing their decision
partially on compensation could mean that some type of information was gathered to
determine earnings for each major they were considering. Arcidiacono, Hotz, and Kang
(2012) studied the expectations of students future earnings associated with different
majors at Duke University and found that upperclassman have a better understanding of
how much certain majors were expected to earn in comparison to underclassman. They
also found that students who took their survey were more likely to choose a career that
they assumed made more than the average Duke graduate. If students are basing their
decisions off of extrinsic motivators such as monetary returns it is important they are
receiving accurate information, and doing their research before deciding on a major
specifically because of compensation after graduation.

Influence of Relationships

Studies have been conducted exploring the relationships that influence a student
and their college major selection (Kim & Sax 2010; Fass & Taubman, 2002).
Relationships with faculty members, parents, siblings, and peers were strong influences
when choosing a college major (Downey, McGaughey, & Roach 2011; Walmsley et al.
2010). Since this research will be conducted at a community college, and community
colleges generally have a lower student to faculty ratio, the students involved in this
study could find faculty members play a more critical role in their major decision.
Students see and interact with faculty members on a daily basis and this relationship may
influence their choice of major. Porter and Umbach (2010) studied three different
cohorts of students from 1993-1995. The students were first time, full-time, degree
seeking students entering a liberal arts college who graduated within six years of entry.
They found that different majors may experience different levels of faculty interaction.
FACTORS INFLUENCING MAJOR SELECTION

Their research suggested that faculty members in fields like social sciences or art are more likely to interact with their students in comparison to other academic departments.

Parents may also play a part in influencing a student’s major choice. Moakler and Kim (2013) found that, if a student’s parents worked in a STEM field, they were more likely to choose a STEM major. These results may indicate that students were influenced by their parents and may have been expected to follow in their footsteps. Beggs et al. (2008) determined that most of the students in their sample relied on information from people they knew, such as high school teachers, peers, and family members. The researchers suggested getting the parents involved in the decision making process by educating them about helping their student choose the right major for them, not just for the parents. Kimweli, and Richards (1999), encouraged the use of parents as role models in the decision making process. Parental and instructor encouragement, can help increase a student’s willingness to pursue a specific major.

The decision making process may be different for first generation college students. First generation college students may lack secondhand experiences from their parents to base their major decisions and, this lack of experiences could lead to lower self-efficacy surrounding such a decision. (Wheeler, 2014). Compared to their peers, first generation college students may have a hard time understanding information about academic decisions that they may be faced with during their undergraduate years. If these students are not familiar with the academic major selection process they may not know where to seek help (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Mullen (2012) discussed that first generation college students likely chose a college and degree program that will help them prepare for the workforce versus attending a private
university to study the liberal arts. This may mean that first generation students may take practicality into account when selecting a major.

**Research and Campus Resources**

The amount of information a student receives about his or her selected major, and where that information comes from, has not been closely examined (Beggs et al. 2008). The site where this research will be conducted houses a Counseling Services office and a Career Services office which both assist with major selection. An academic advisor is generally thought of as the person that a student turns to if they need help with major exploration, but Walmsley et al. (2010) noted how little the academic advisor was mentioned in their research. Similarly, Bullock-Yowell, McConnell and Schedin (2014) also found that the students surveyed experienced a lack of information when it came to their career decision making. If students do not have adequate information about their perspective career choices it will be hard for them to make educated decisions.

**Career services and Academic advisors**

Assessing how comfortable a student is asking for help will be important to this research. The Career Services office located on the research site offers several different undecided resources that can be accessed online like Career Cruising, and Undecided 101. The researcher was interested to see if these students are aware of such resources and if the office assisted them with their major selection.

Another source of assistance is the student’s academic advisor. In higher education academic advisors may be full-time staff members, faculty advisors, personal counselors, or career advisors among others. Some institutions only advise during key times during the semesters, while others do not require students to see an advisor at all
before selecting their classes. According to the National Academic Advising Association (2006), academic advising “synthesizes and conceptualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes” (p. 2). Academic advisors may be the first, and only institutional connection that a student makes on campus. Advisors are also teachers, as stated by Drake (2011). “Advisors teach students to negotiate the higher education maze, to make effective and thoughtful decisions about their futures, to adapt their life skills to the new academic world, and to cultivate the academic skills and knowledge needed to succeed” (pg. 11). They can help with the transition process from high school to transfer, and they act as key players when it comes to selecting a major. Academic advisors may be pressed to find a delicate balance of challenge and support when it comes to assisting students with major selection so as to not hinder their development throughout the process.

According to a 2007 National Academic Advisor Association Survey, 74% of the advisors surveyed agreed that helping students make decisions was important in their role as academic advisors (NACADA Career Advising Survey 2007). If these results are true advisors need to be well versed and prepared to help a student that may be struggling with a major decision. Advisors also need to be sure that students are aware of the college’s resources. Bitz (2010), surveyed 113 freshmen at a small, public university in 2009 to find out students’ perceptions of their advising relationship. She found that the students valued advisor concern, advisor contact, and the quality of the advising relationship. These results indicate that students have a positive impression of their relationship with their advisor.
Academic advising and Career Services at the research site

The proposed study will take place on a campus that requires mandatory advisement each semester in order to register for courses. Students work with their advisors before the start of every semester to plan out their course schedules. Each student works with an academic counselor during their first semester at the college, and are then assigned to an advisor in their major.

For example, a new student who is a business major would meet with an academic counselor assigned to business to choose first semester courses, but would then meet with a business faculty member for subsequent semesters. Each participant had completed their second semester at the college so they were familiar with their advisor and have had at least one appointment lasting anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour depending on the students preparation. This enabled the researcher to inquire about their advising experience and what role their advisor played in their major decision during the interview. The participants also have access to a Career Services office. The office offers assistance with career exploration, mock interviews, resumes, portfolios, and networking among other things. Students are not required to visit the office although Career Services participates in classroom visits and some instructors require the Career Cruising assessment for their courses. Because the participants were sophomore level they would have had adequate time to locate the Career Services office and seek assistance if they felt necessary. This allowed the researcher to ask questions about whether or not Career Services assisted during their major selection.
Theoretical Framework

This research was guided by three different student development theories including Chickering and Reisser’s Theory of Identity Development, Holland’s Theory, and Baxter Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship.

**Chickering and Reisser’s Theory of Identity Development.** Chickering and Reisser (1993), proposed that students move through several different developmental stages while in college which they refer to as vectors. Chickering and Reisser did not propose that students move through vectors sequentially, but rather students may find themselves moving back and forth from one vector to another. The seven vectors consisted of, Developing Competence, Managing Emotions, Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, Establishing Identity, Developing Purpose, and Developing Integrity.

College students attempting to decide on a major may find themselves moving through Chickering and Reisser’s vector, Autonomy Toward Interdependence. A student may decide to choose a major against his or her parents’ wishes or finally decide on a major they are confident with. Chickering described several different environmental influences that he called “key influences,” that are believed to have a large impact on student development. (Evans, Forney, Guido, Paggon, & Renn, 2010). Student-faculty relationships lead the students to see faculty as accessible people who possess knowledge outside the classroom and have the ability to communicate with students. These relationships could be key when a student is deciding what major to declare. Chickering and Reisser’s theory also names friendships and student communities as an influence in student development. (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students may look to their peers to
help aid in their major selection process. Lastly, Chickering named student development programs and services as an environmental influence. He stressed the importance of education of the entire student (Evans et al. 2010).

As a student is exploring different majors they may transition from feeling overwhelmed by all the major options in the Identity Diffusion stage, to deciding on a major and entering the Achievement stage. (Ross, 2013). Chickering’s theory was used to compose the researcher’s interview questions so as to determine what stage students might be in. Chickering’s theory was also used to construct questions about personal relationships, faculty and peer relationships, and the type of research done while selecting a major. If an advisor can identify what stage the student is in, and how committed they are to a certain major they may be able to intervene and help the student come to a decision.

**Holland’s Theory of Career Choice.** Students in the process of declaring a major may be familiar with John Holland’s theory, as it eventually became the foundation for the Holland code career assessment. Holland’s theory relates to six different personality types, Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Holland also uses these six types to determine an ideal work environment based off the given personality types (Nauta, 2010).

Holland (1959) stated, “Within a major class of occupations, the person's selection of an occupation is a function of his self-evaluation and his ability (intelligence) to perform adequately in his chosen environment” (pg. 39). This relates to intrinsic motivators students may experience while choosing a major. If a student believes that they have more ability in a specific major they may be more likely to consider it.
Holland (1966) claimed that individuals will seek out situations that fit the preferred environment. Holland also stressed the importance of environmental influences (Nauta, 2010). Students in the process of selecting a major may identify with Holland’s theory because they must be conscious of the types of environment they prefer to work in once they graduate and enter the workforce. Holland’s theory allowed the researcher to structure interview questions relating to work environment and self-professed personality characteristics in relation to the student’s major selection process. A student may choose their environment based on how well they think they will perform in it, for this reason, Holland’s theory was used as a framework when questions were asked about the students perceived ability in the major they have selected.

**Baxter Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship.** Additionally, this research was guided by Baxter Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship. The scenario of selecting a major could be found in each phase of Magolda’s theory. In Phase One, Journey Toward Self-Authorship, students may be exploring a major they are not comfortable with because of authority figures influencing their thought process (Magolda, 2003). As a student progresses into Phase Two, Crossroads, the student may finally begin seeing that approval from others is not as important to them and as a result they begin questioning their major decision. At Phase Three Becoming the Author of One’s Life, the student may have declared a major and feel comfortable standing up for his or her decision when faced with animosity. This will eventually pave the way for entrance into phase 4 “Internal Foundation,” when the student trusts themselves and is at complete peace with his or her decision (Evans, et al., 2010).
Magolda’s theory has provided direction for the researcher’s interview questions. Questions concerning what types of relationships may have had an influence on their decision, and how comfortable the student is with their current major will be asked. Based on the student’s answers, an understanding of what phase of the theory the student may have been in while making their decisions was developed.

Summary

Chapter II has discussed what potential factors may influence a student’s major selection and the theoretical framework surrounding the topic. The decision making process of an undecided student is an important factor to consider in order to evaluate the assistance a student made need in choosing a major. Interpersonal relationships, interest in major, a student’s self-efficacy regarding major selection may all play a vital part in how the undecided student decides on a major. It is also important to find out where undecided students are receiving information about possible major choices, and if they are utilizing the resources on campus available to them so that they can make a sound decision. Next, Chapter III will present the methods being used for the proposed study.
Chapter III

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) defined qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. . . . This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” (pg. 3).

There are different factors that influence a student to select a major. By utilizing a qualitative approach, it allowed the researcher to examine emerging themes, and redirect or elaborate on certain topics as the study progresses. New information that arises during this qualitative research helped shape the study and allow for new research questions.

Design of Study

A case study methodology was utilized. Creswell (2012), defined a case study as a “qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection” (pg. 97). The researcher conducted six interviews with degree seeking students that have earned sophomore status. According to the research site’s 2014 Enrollment Report, approximately 8,247 were sophomore students taking at least one course in 2014. Between freshman and sophomores, 9,883 were degree seeking students meaning they will have declared a major. With these numbers, the researcher
selected six degree seeking sophomores to participate in the structured open-ended interview.

Participants

Participants for this study were degree seeking students who have earned sophomore status, and changed their major from undecided in the last year, which consists of the fall 2014 and spring 2015 semesters at a large rural community college. As of fall 2013, the college indicated 224 students were undecided. Students that completed the major change process were compiled into a list that contained demographic information, and was updated every week by an academic counselor. Permission was granted to utilize this list and reach out to students via email and telephone to invite them to participate in an interview.

**Ashley** is a White female student in her last semester at the institution. Her declared major is other but she will declare hospitality management when she transfers to a university. The highest education level her parents received is an associate’s degree.

**Carmen** is a White female beginning her third semester at the institution majoring in business administration. She does plan to transfer to a university. She indicated that the highest level of education her parents received is a bachelor’s degree.

**Scott** is a White male student starting his third semester at the institution. His major is mechanical electrical technician, he has no plans to transfer, and the highest education level of his parents is some college.

**Michelle** is a White female beginning her third semester at the institution. Her major is psychology and she plans to transfer. The highest level of her parents’ education
is a master’s degree. She indicated her mother had a master’s degree while her father had some college but did not receive a degree.

**Chelsie** is a White female embarking on her third semester at the college majoring in pre-medical studies. She plans to transfer to a university and the highest level of her parents’ education is a master’s degree. She indicated her mother had a master’s degree and her father had a bachelor’s degree.

**Doug** is a White male who just completed his second semester at the college. He is majoring in programming IT and has no plans to transfer. The highest level of his parents’ education is some college.

All participants declared an undecided major at some point during their previous semesters. After being undecided, they have to formally submit a change of major form to declare their current major. Change of major forms come through the counseling offices at the college. The researcher was employed in the counseling office at the time of the study and was given permission to obtain a running list of students that met all criteria from January to April. Any participants that met the criteria were sent an email explaining the details of the study. One participant responded to the email. After the participant’s interview was conducted they assisted with snowball sampling. Through snowball sampling the researcher was able to obtain four additional undecided participants that fit the criteria. The last participant was a chosen based on criteria and a recommendation from a counselor on campus who works specifically with all undecided students.
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Research Site

The research site was a large rural two-year community college in the Midwest. In 2014, Institutional Research for the college reported 2,185 students in transfer programs, 3,131 in career programs, and 12,090 non-degree seeking students, totaling 17,406 students. Only degree seeking sophomores will be utilized for the proposed study. Of those 17,406 students, 15,308 are White, 1,473 are Black or African American, 385 are Hispanic, 161 are Asian, and 59 are American Indian. The rural community college spans a 9 county district, 9,270 students come from within that district, 7,931 come from out or district, 153 come from out of state, and 52 are international students. The college offers over 130 different programs of studies, including transfer and technical programs. The interviews took place on campus in the Student Services building in the Counseling Services offices with the exception of participant five who participated in a phone interview.

Instrument

Semi-structured open-ended interviews were used to collect data. Semi-structured interviews consist of questions developed beforehand, but questions may also be developed during the interview following a student’s response (Patten, 2010). A demographic profile sheet was given to participants prior to the interview followed by semi-structured interview questions (e.g. “How did you feel when made a decision on a major?”). The interview questions were divided into four separate categories to coincide with the literature review. These categories include, questions about being an undecided student, student motivators, interpersonal relationships, and type of major research conducted.
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Researcher

As a student who changed majors twice during my undergraduate studies, and a prior new student orientation assistant, I am conducting this research to gain a better understanding of what factors influence undecided students in selecting a college major. After seeing students attend orientation and hesitating to tell me they are undecided, or turn to their parents after being prompted to tell me their major, I’m interested in determining how these students come to decide their major. I also remember feeling ashamed that I kept changing my major for fear I would not finish in time, and that I would be labeled “indecisive.” Thankfully I knew where to seek resources and kept my studies on track. Unfortunately, our Counseling Services office sees several students a day that are not confident in the major they have selected and may not have any idea where to turn to for help.

This study has also been inspired by my little sister, a current college freshman that is deciding upon a major course of study. After several personality tests, career fairs, and career assessments, she still is having trouble deciding what she really wants to do. I hope this research can help students come to the realization that it is okay to not have it all figured out yet, and that they should take their time and seek out help while making this decision. By understanding the factors that are influencing these students to finally decide on a major, I can make recommendations to student affairs professionals on campus. These recommendations will allow us to become better equipped to assist our students as they develop and explore different majors and opportunities. I also hope to gather information about where my participants received information regarding there major. This will allow me to assess if students on campus are aware of the resources
available to them, and if those resources were utilized, how satisfied the student was with the particular resource.

Data Collection

Students who met all criteria were contacted at the beginning of May, 2015. Email addresses and phone numbers were obtained from the “major change list,” that was obtained from Counseling Services. A purposeful sample of students was selected from this list. The researcher captured four females and two males that have all declared a different major. After the researcher explained the informed consent form and a signature was obtained, a 15 to 30 minute interview was conducted and audio-recorded.

Data Analysis

After interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed and coded the data. The researcher then utilized the member-checking technique, and all participants were given a copy of the transcribed interview for verification. Krefting (1990) states, “This strategy of revealing research materials to the informants ensures that the researcher has accurately translated the informants’ viewpoints into the data” (pg. 219). The researcher then started by defining categories, and then defined sub categories throughout the transcript. According to Krefting (1990), to increase the dependability of the data a researcher can participate in a code-recode demonstration. Based on this information, the researcher coded the data then waited two weeks to recode the data and compare the results. Additionally, a member of the researcher’s thesis committee reviewed all transcripts in an attempt to increase the rigor of the research.
Treatment of Data

All interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word and were saved on a password protected flash drive that will be deleted three years after the study concludes per IRB policies. Any data that has been printed for coding, interview notes, and audio tapes were stored in a file cabinet that will remain locked in the Chair of Counseling and Judicial Affairs office and stored for three years after the study. The audio tapes were destroyed after transcription. Only members of the researcher's thesis committee will have access to the data. Pseudonyms are being used for each participant to further protect their anonymity.

Summary

Chapter III has covered the methods being utilized to conduct this study including the design, participants, research site, and instruments. Background information on the researcher, and the process of data collection, analysis, and treatment were also discussed. Chapter IV will present the findings and results of the research questions posed in Chapter I.
CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter will examine the data collected from six participants that participated in one-on-one interviews about the factors that influenced them toward specific majors as an undecided student. The participants sat down for a 15-30 minute interview and five different themes emerged from the data. Several different subthemes were also identified. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What factors influence a student’s decision in choosing major?
2. What role did monetary returns play in major selection?
3. How comfortable is the student in their declared major?
4. Who influences a student’s major decision?

The interview questions attempted to explore the factors that may have influenced these participant’s decisions as they changed their major from undecided to their current major. Each theme that resulted from these interview questions will be introduced with the corresponding research question and then subthemes will be examined.

Research question 1: What factors influence a student’s decision in choosing a major?

Participants were asked to discuss what may or may not have influenced them to choose an undecided major when they enrolled in courses. Specifically, their feelings toward the label “undecided,” the pressures they may have experienced, and the moment they knew they wanted to declare their current major of study.

Declaration of undecided. The six participants had several different explanations for choosing an undecided major first. Ashley was trying to decide if business was the
right major for her but did not feel confident about it so she chose undecided first.

Echoing that statement, Michelle was also still exploring her options and said she did not want to “put herself in a box.” Carmen was less concerned about herself and more concerned about wasting her advisors time if she declared a major and was assigned to an advisor for that major, and then ended up changing her mind later. Chelsie had a unique situation, she later expressed her desire to be an occupational therapist and said she only declared an undecided major because she could not figure out what major she needed to declare at the college to put her on the right path to a career in occupational therapy.

Doug also had a slight idea of what he wanted to do but was not completely sure, so he chose undecided.

Open mindedness was another reason for declaring undecided. Scott said, “Basically I knew coming in I was going to be undecided. I watched both of my older sisters come and change their majors multiple times. I just came in with an open mind.”

Michelle was also very intentional about her decision to declare undecided stating, I thought about a few things, but I didn’t want to put myself in one place, and then decided that’s not what I wanted to be, and then be behind a semester or a year because I chose the wrong major to begin with.

Feelings toward undecided. All the participants were labeled undecided students for at least one semester and they all had mixed reactions to the label. Participants were asked about their feelings toward the label “undecided student.” The two male subjects believed they were undecided because it “only made sense” for them to be labeled undecided. Conversely, all four of the female participants were somewhat ashamed that
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they were labeled an undecided student. Carmen shared her thoughts on being labeled undecided stating,

Honestly, I didn’t really like it because it makes you feel like you didn’t really know what you were going to do with your life. I mean it wasn’t a huge deal because I know I just started and a lot of people are undecided but it still kind of makes you feel like, “oh I need to figure out what I want to do.”

Michelle shared similar thoughts when asked how she felt being labeled undecided,

It was weird when I told people. They were like, “Oh what are you majoring in?” I was like, “I’m undecided.” I felt like they were like, “Oh you’re going to college undecided?” I felt like they were just thinking, “What are you doing wasting money?” For me it was my best option, since I didn’t know what I wanted to do.

Carmen also expressed her dislike toward the label undecided saying that when people would ask her what she was going to do after graduation she believed she needed to, “figure out what I wanted to do.” She also said that she did not enjoy professing her major on the first day of class. She said, “Yeah and at the beginning of classes it’s always like they have you stand up and say your name and what you want to do and I was always like oh my name is Carmen and I’m undecided.” Scholarships became an issue for Michelle. She thought she did not have an equal chance at getting a scholarship if she wrote down that her major was undecided. She said,

They don’t always make you declare a major, but a lot of questions are “Where do you plan on going with your major,” Or “What made you decide your major?” I felt like if I’d say I was undecided it sounded like, “Oh this girl doesn’t know
what she wants to do she’s going to be a waste of money for someone who is
going to go a year or two and then just drop out and we’ve wasted our scholarship
on them.

Chelsie had a unique situation with her major choice but she also expressed concerns
with the label undecided. She said, “I didn’t like it because I knew what I wanted to do I
just didn’t know what major to declare. I felt like labeling me undecided was not true I
just did not know which one to pick.” Ashley also remembers feeling ashamed when she
had to tell people what she was majoring in. Although four of the six participants
admitted feeling negatively toward the “undecided” label, only two of them said their
perceptions may change if the college changed the major code from “undecided” to
“deciding” in an effort to eliminate the negative stigma attached to the word.

**Pressure.** At some point all six participants declared their major. The next set of
questions focused on whether or not they experienced any pressure to rid themselves of
the “undecided label.” Five of six participants admitted feeling pressure at some point to
declare a major of study. Ashley remembers feeling pressure as early as her senior year
when she was taking dual credit classes with the college. She said it is one of the main
reasons that she chose to come to a community college so that she could “figure it out.”
She remembers a specific time her freshman year when she experienced pressure to
declare a major and said,

...Career Services the director told me because I gave a speech and said “oh it
will come to me.” That’s what everybody says, it will come to you. She came up
to me looked me right in the eye and she said, “It will not come to you. You have
to figure it out.”

Carmen sensed pressure when she was picking out her courses, she knew she needed to
start taking more specific courses toward a major. Scott, Michelle, and Chelsie echoed
her sentiments. Scott started taking more general electives and quickly realized that he
was in too many art classes and he did not enjoy art. Michelle was worried about wasting
money if she did not declare the right major the first time. When asked about the amount
of pressure they experienced the answers ranged from “none at all,” from Doug to “a lot
of pressure, and very stressful” from Michelle.

The participants were also pressured from different sources. Michelle remembers
her mother telling her that she should chose a major so she could have a “better shot” at
scholarships while Scott said that the only pressure he received to declare a major was
strictly from himself. Ashley does not recall being pressured specifically but said,

It’s one of those things that you know you need to think about but you push it off
because you don’t want to because it’s such a big decision. …No one forced me.
My parents would talk about it but they were never pressuring me. They knew I
would just figure it out. It would be more like outsiders and people I know.

Ashley was told by the Career Services Director that her major would not just “come to
her” and she admitted later that, “That was probably the most pressure for me to pick, but
it was also the best kick in the butt that I probably needed.” In conclusion, five of the six
participants admitted feeling some type of pressure to declare a major. Most of the
participants experienced pressure when they were building their schedules because they
knew eventually they would need to start taking additional major specific courses. The
participants also received pressure from different sources whether it was parents, faculty, or themselves. The next set of questions focused on the journey to declare their new major and what or who influenced them specifically.

_The ah-ha moment._ All of the participants in this study eventually declared a major. When asked about the moment they knew they wanted to declare a specific major, most of them remember the events leading up to the decision. Ashley who intends to study hospitality management when she transfers said she knew when she looked up the course descriptions of the courses she may take at her transfer university. She said,

I thought it was a blow-off major. It wasn’t business. Or it wasn’t engineering or math. You know it was hospitality management so I put it on the back burner. I looked it up. I looked at all the classes and said yes those are the classes I want to take. Compared to the business courses I falling asleep just looking at the descriptions of them but the hospitality ones I was like yep that’s it.

Scott shared a similar story about the moment he knew he wanted to declare his major. He remembers doing research online to come to a conclusion about his major. He said, “About halfway through summer, I was looking on the internet at it, after talking to a couple of buddies and I decided, that’s what I’m going to do. That’s where I’m at.”

Michelle remembers having to decide between two majors she was interested in a few weeks before registration for the next semester started. She referred to the college catalog to see how the credits she had already taken would match up with her desired major. She said, “I finally looked at the timeline for both of them I realized that my better option for what I had already taken and what I was fully interested in would be the
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psychology one.” She was considering graphic design but deemed it to be more of a hobby than a major choice.

Chelsie also realized that she wanted to stay on track with the courses she had already taken so she declared her major of pre-medical studies. Similarly, Doug expressed his interest in the subject as the driving force behind his declaration stating, Really it was just going further into the year and actually going to the classes and actually diving into some of the classes that I wanted to do. Actually participating in them and seeing that, “Oh! I kind of like this!” Just want to keep on going more and more and seeing where it takes me.

All of the participants had done some type of research about their major before they made the switch. The next theme that emerged will discuss the type of research, and how much research the participants did before determining their major.

*Research and campus resources.* The next theme that emerged was not related directly to the research questions but rather emerged as a result of the interview protocol. Many of the participants discussed how they found out about their major which prompted more questions about the type or research and campus resources participants used before declaring their major. Some of the participants conducted research using multiple resources. Of the six participants two job shadowed, three utilized the Career Cruising assessment provided by Career services, two relied on the college catalog, two did additional research online, and one contacted counselors on campus.

There are many different resources available for undecided students, such as, Career Services, Career Cruising, academic counselors, the college catalog, and online websites. When asked to talk about what kind of research they did regarding their major
four participants said they conducted research online (including the online Career Cruising assessment) but they did not access the resources available on campus including Counseling and Career Services. Three of the participants did refer to the Career Cruising assessment that is offered through the campus Career Services office but two of them took it back in high school. Ashley mentioned assistance from the BLS.gov website that she learned about in one of her business classes, and job shadowing, but said she did not explore campus resources.

Similar to Ashley, Carmen also mentioned a business class in which the instructor informed her they would do some career exploration, but she did not do any other outside research about her business administration major. Carmen was the only student who did little research but later explains she learned about her major from her older brother. She said,

...My brother is doing business right now at Eastern so I chose that because I know there’s a lot you can do with it you can go into finance accounting you can open your own business there’s a lot of different options and that’s why I chose it.

Scott said he used the college catalog to learn about his major but after that he just did research on his own online. He did not use any other campus resources. When asked if he has used the Career Cruising assessment he responded, “No, I don’t know what that is.” Michelle also referred to the college catalog to learn about her major but only visited counseling services when she needed to change her major. For the remainder of her research, she spoke with faculty members.

Chelsie said she might have taken the Career Cruising assessment in high school. She also remembers being told to job shadow from her mom and her teachers in her
advanced health class in high school. She said, "When we were in that class [advanced health] they advised us to go job-shadow. Everyone was very helpful saying, "go job-shadow, go job-shadow and my mom she works at a hospital and she talked to the lady and I got to go there and job-shadow her." Doug was the only participant to mention any type of counselor involved in his research. When asked how he found out about his major he said, "Really, it was through looking it up on the catalogs for [the college] they gave us, talking with people, and getting an idea with counselors, and counselors from my school in Oakland, my high school."

Research Question 2: What role did monetary returns play in major selection?

In addition to the type of research conducted regarding their major the participants were also asked what role salary played in their major decision and if they knew what that salary would be upon graduation. Participants were also asked to discuss their preferred work environment.

Salary. At the conclusion of the interview, the participants were asked if salary influenced in their decision when they chose their major. Three participants said that salary was important during their major selection. Carmen the business administration major placed the most influence on salary out of the participants and said that salary did play a role in her major decision. She said, "Obviously I want to make a lot of money and be successful so I would say it was." Chelsie disclosed that working with people was most important to her but when asked what other things might be important to her when she’s searching for a job, she responded, "...Location and pay." Ashley the hospitality management major said that salary only played a "mid-level" role in her
decision. She said, “I would call it mid-level. I wouldn’t say it was a huge factor but it’s not the biggest factor because I just want to be happy.”

Scott, a mechanical electrical major, said that salary did not play too much of a role. Michelle, a psychology major, said she did not think too much about her salary when she was choosing a major. Doug, an IT programming major, said salary was not important when he was making his decision but followed with this statement,

No, but it’s not really like...I’m not really concerned with that but because you already know that you’re probably going to make something decent. If anything, it’s like having an idea of what I’m going to make. Not really a solid number but more like a range.

In addition to the role salary played in the participants major decisions, the researcher was also interested in knowing if the participants were aware of the salary they could expect if they graduated with their selected major. Overall, participants were confused by this question. Ashley, a hospitality management major, had looked her salary up on the BLS.gov website and guessed she would make $42,000 a year, but answered with uncertainty. Carmen, a business administration major, did not know how much she would be expected to make and admitted that she has not done any research on the subject. She did admit that she would be comfortable starting out at $50,000.

Scott the male mechanical electrical technology major knew that his range would be $35,000-$45,000 depending on the location of the position. He had looked the
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information up online. When Michelle was asked what she thought her starting salary might be she referred to her high school science teacher saying,

My science teacher, he originally majored in psychology, and got a bachelor’s in that, and then he went back and did the science thing. He said that he...I don’t know if exactly it’s a psychologist that makes this much, but he mentioned something about making $50,000 to $60,000 a year or something like that, but I’m not positive on that.

Chelsie, a pre-medical studies major, knew that she would make $70,000 dollars starting out, and Doug, an IT programming major, was not embarrassed to admit that he was not aware of the starting salary for his major.

Work environment. In addition to salary participants were also asked about their preferred work environment. Of the six participants, Michelle knew most specifically the type of environment that he preferred and how that related to her major selection. She said she values flexibility and stated:

Yeah [flexibility] with scheduling. Them willing to work with me if I do end up having kids at the time that I do get hired them being able to work around hectic kid schedules and being able to call in to work and not feel like they’re extremely mad at me.

She also said this about the graphic design major that she was considering before she chose her psychology major:

It made me realize for me that was going to be too much stress for me to handle knowing that I was going to have really strict rules and then I could work for
hours on something and they could completely shoot it down. That would be too much stress for me to handle.

Chelsie had specific goals because her major was so specialized. She knew she wanted to be an occupational therapist but that she preferred the outpatient setting and she would like to work with children. Doug, an IT programming major, did not have an occupation in mind so he was not very specific about his preferred working environment. The next theme explores the participant’s perceived abilities in their current majors and their future plans.

Ashley knew that she enjoyed the office environment, but did not want the paper work and administrative duties that came with it. She knew with her desired occupation she would be able to travel and setup venues and do some hands-on work which is what she preferred. Carmen, a business administration major, said she valued flexibility and did not want to have to travel for her job. Scott, a mechanical electrical technology major, said he did not have any preferred environment but he did know that he did not want to work, “In a factory on a machine line for the rest of my life.”

**Research Question 3: How comfortable is the student in their declared major?**

The participants were asked to disclose how comfortable they were with their current major selection and what types of goals they had for themselves in the future. Although the participants were only sophomores, many of them had very specific plans.

*Comfort with major.* All female participants reported feeling comfortable with their current major but the two males reported feelings of indifference. Doug said, “I feel okay. It’ll probably help with whatever I’m going to be doing.” Scott said, “I feel pretty comfortable with it. I don’t know if it’s something that I’m definitely going to finish it
and get the associate’s in. I don’t know if it’s something I want to do for the rest of my life.” Michelle knew she would have to specialize soon but was confident for the time being. She said,

I’m pretty comfortable with it. Just for being at this college knowing that it’s just the psychology major and I can have all these different class options and I don’t have to completely narrow right now makes me feel pretty good. I do know that I will have to narrow when I transfer so that’s when it’s going to get a little crazy again.

Chelsie seemed to lack guidance when it came to her pre-medical studies major. She knew what her end goal was but was not sure how to achieve it. She said, “It’s just I’m very confused about it but I know that this is what I have to do.” Ashley said she was really comfortable with her major, but also expressed some concerns about how her major is viewed by her peers:

When I tell my friends hospitality they get it but I always wonder if they think that’s not a real major like “That’s not hard.” Sometimes I guess I get embarrassed saying it but then again I don’t really care. …sometimes when people ask and I tell them hospitality they’re like you want to manage a hotel? It’s just not the stereotypical I’m going to be a doctor. I’m going to call you with venues and stuff so it’s just different but I try not to let it bother me.

When asked how comfortable they were with the current courses they were taking in their major Carmen recalls how much easier it has been to work with students in her classes since she sees several of the same students after declaring her major. The other participants reported that their classes were also going well, and only one student
reported that he might change his major. Doug said, “I probably might change my major because there are other majors I could probably go for and other certificates that will probably help me go towards those goals but...I don’t know.” The other male participant said that he may also come back after he gets his associate’s degree to do something in the business field. The female participants did not anticipate changing their majors.

Future plans. All six participants had some type of future plan or goals for themselves. All six participants also mentioned finding a job that would allow them to stay in the area. The female participants were very specific with their plans while the male participants remained open to the possibilities. Ashley said her goal was to find a job that she liked but she was most interested in becoming an event planner. Carmen was very specific and said she would like to one day own her own part of a franchise like an Applebee’s. Scott said he would like a maintenance position somewhere, while Doug said he has a few ideas about what he would like to do but he is not really sure about them. Michelle said,

I haven’t completely decided but I know I want to do something with youth. I don’t know if I really want to be an actual psychologist therapist that people take you to. ...My mom mentioned they have a school psychologist that comes in with the kids and tests them for special learning disabilities and stuff. I thought maybe I can go that way or maybe I can just be the school guidance counselor or
something like that. Chelsie was also very confident about her path to becoming
an occupational therapist.

Research Question 4: Who influences the student’s major selection?

The community college where this study took place has several different
resources available for undecided students, yet only a few participants turned to such
resources for help. The participants were asked to disclose who, if anyone, influenced
their selected major. All participants had some type of interaction with a peer, family
member, or faculty member about their major selection they were asked to discuss.

Family influence. Doug was the only participant that said his parents were not
really involved in his major decision. He indicated he was not influenced by his parents
but they were very supportive in his decision. Ashley said her parents never told her
what to major in, but they did tell her what she should not major in. When asked if her
parents have always been supportive of her major she recalls her dad giving her some
advice,

Well when I was young I always wanted to do make-up for a living and my dad
was like you’re not going into cosmetology. That was kind of like crushed at a
young age but it’s not what I want to do. I enjoy doing it for fun but it’s not like
I’d say there was pressure there because my dad told me I couldn’t.

Carmen also said her mom influenced her major because she has a business
background. She attributed her decision to choose business mostly to her brother because
he is currently taking business courses at a university.

Similar to Ashley, Michelle remembers her mom feeling frustrated with her
because she could not make up her mind about what major she wanted to declare. Her
mom, like Ashley’s dad, said this about the decision, “My mom influenced me to steer clear of the teaching major just because of her stories coming home from having to deal with kids made me realize I wouldn’t be able to do that.” Her parents also helped her figure out what skills she was good at and how they could translate her skills into a major. Chelsie had a similar experience with her mom. When asked if any of her family members influenced her decision in pre-medical studies she said:

I was thinking about doing social work and my mom she’s a social worker but she’s a licensed clinical professional counselor and she did not want me to do that so I explored my options and I decided I liked OT better.

Although half the participants received some type of advice on what not to do, Scott excitedly recalled,

My dad and grandpa they all came from industrious backgrounds working in the factory and stuff so my dad was pretty happy about it. He knows basically what I’m doing. He’s able to help me out. It was pretty cool.

Peer influence. Of the six participants, four mentioned their peers of friends playing some type of role in their major selection. Michelle recalled her friends helping her figure out what skills she possessed that might relate to her major. Ashley said that she would not have known about her major if her friend did not tell her about it. She said [in regards to finding out her friend was a hospitality management major]:

My first week here I was like “What’s that?” She goes, “I really want to do event planning.” Oh my gosh, I wanted to do that before! I’ve always enjoyed that.
When she told me I put that in my mind and highlighted it and then went back and looked up hospitality management...

She also mentioned that her friends were always supportive and positive whenever she was deliberating about a major. Scott had a similar experience with his friends. He said his friends were the ones that told him about the major he said,

I knew a couple of my buddies from my school. They had signed up for it. They liked the same things that I liked, working with hands and stuff like that, hands-on learning. I knew that was somewhere I wanted to go.

Doug was influenced by his peers once he decided to participate in club IT. He recalls, “Yeah they just helped out with telling what the classes would do, and telling their experience, and what I would learn, what the classes would be more oriented with what I’m moving towards.” Carmen was most heavily influenced by family members and mentioned that most of her friends were also undecided at the time or were interested in nursing. A few participants mentioned specific faculty members who helped them with their decisions.

Faculty/Staff influence. Participants were asked if faculty advisors, counselors, or Career Services representatives influenced their decision. Half of the participants mentioned specific faculty members. Michelle seemed to be the most influenced by faculty members in her psychology major. She spoke highly of her advisor and explained that her advisor helped her realize she needed to take a sample course in both majors that she was considering to determine which courses she enjoyed. She also
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mentioned one of her psychology instructors and credits her with the most influence on her selected major she said:

Lara [her instructor] when you're in class with her she explains it better and is able to use more normal, regular life circumstances for everything so it helps you realize, "Oh this is literally everywhere." She helped me realize I could do pretty much anything with this major.

Doug also recalls turning to two different faculty members for advice about his major. He was also the only participant to mention turning to the academic counselors on campus, and his previous high school counselor for help with his major decision.

Carmen spoke highly of her academic advisor stating:

My advisor is Kathy and I really like her and she was telling me about how they do career cruising and she's gave me some different options about things I could go do at [transfer institution], just some different papers that I looked through if I want...

In conclusion, participants were influenced by many different types of relationships including peers, family members, and faculty members.

Summary

Five different themes emerged after one-on-one interviews and analysis of transcripts regarding influences on major selection were covered in this chapter. The majority of participants experienced some type of pressure to change their major from undecided. Many of the participants were not influenced by salary but rather their enjoyment of the subject. The participants also seemed to under-utilize some of the career oriented campus resources available to them. Lastly, all participants mentioned
either a family member, peer, or faculty member playing a role in their major selection process. The next chapter will further analyze the research and provide suggestions to student affairs professionals.
This study was intended to explore what factors influence student’s major selection. Specifically, what influenced undecided student’s major selection? The following research questions were asked: What factors influence a student’s decision in choosing major?; What role did monetary returns play in major selection?; What is the student’s perceived ability in their declared major?; and Who influences a student’s major decision? This chapter will review the findings of the study in relation to the research questions, provide recommendations for student affairs professionals, and include suggestions for future research.

What Factors Influence a Student’s Major Selection?

Overall, there were several different factors that influenced the participant’s major selection, but interest in subject was the most dominant. A study by Beggs, Bantham, and Taylor (2008), found that a student’s interest in the specific major they chose was the most important factor when making their selection. These results were echoed in the current study. The participants all eluded to a match with interest either when they were doing research on the major, or when they were taking major specific classes. This supports Zara’s (2013) and Deci and Ryan’s (2000) study that determined that enjoyment of the job, and the coursework in the major was important to both the male and the
female participants. These results also lend support to DeMarie, and Aloise-Young’s (2003) study that students have interest in their own major.

**How comfortable is the Student in their Declared Major?**

While all participants chose their major because of their interest in the subject, it is also important that they experience comfort with that major. The participants were asked how comfortable they were with their current major and all participants were comfortable with the exception of Doug who said, “I feel okay…”. This suggests that the participants are intrinsically driven and are confident with their capabilities in their courses. The participants were also intrinsically driven in the type of work environment they would prefer. Michelle preferred to have flexibility, Ashley preferred a mix of administrative duties and travel, and Dylan appreciated structure, but also the ability to be his own boss.

**What Role Did Monetary Returns Play in Major Selection?**

When the participants were asked about extrinsic motivators such as salary, only Carmen said it played a large role in her major selection while another Ashley and Chelsie said it was important to them. These responses do not lend much support the 2013 study by Zafar that indicated that males were more interested in monetary returns than females. A study by Malgwi, Howe, and Burnaby, (2005) surveyed 788 undergraduate business students at a business college about why they chose their business major. They found that students who were originally undecided and then later declared a major were ranking monetary returns as the most influential factor in their decision. Carmen, who declared a business administration major, was the only participant that said
salary played a large role in her major selection. This may suggest that business majors are more extrinsically driven and place a higher value on compensation.

Ashley said salary was important but she was more intrinsically driven. She said that happiness with her future job was more important than the salary she may receive. Chelsie echoed Ashley and said that although salary was important to her working with people was the most important. Choosing a major to satisfy family members is another example of being extrinsically driven. The participants did not base their major selection off family member suggestions, although two students were told what majors they should avoid. This suggests that intrinsic motivators played a larger role than extrinsic motivators in the participant’s major selection.

In order to assess how much research the participants had done regarding potential salary, the researcher asked what they expected their starting salary to be after graduation. Chelsie and Scott answered this question confidently, while Ashley, Michelle, and Carmen had somewhat of an idea. Doug was the only participant who admitted he did not know what his future salary was expected to be. This provides support to Arcidiacono, Hotz, and Kang’s 2012 study that suggested that upperclassman have a better understanding of how much certain majors are expected to make when compared to underclassman. The participants in this study were only sophomore students who had changed their major in the past semester or two. They may plan to research earnings later on in their academic careers once they narrow down their focus.

All four female participants had very specific future goals compared to the two male participants. It should be noted that when asked about these future goals, all six participants mentioned that they would like to remain local. With this information, the
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researcher was interested to see how the participants estimated salary upon graduation would compare to the actual salary upon graduation if they were to stay in the local area.

Ashely aspired to be an event planner and guessed she might make around $42,000 annually, according to the 2014 Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) for the region, event planners can expect to make about $31,562 annually at entry wages. Carmen was a business administration major and would like to manage her own franchise. She admitted she did not do any research on what her salary would be but would like to make $50,000 to start out. According to IDES Carmen can expect to make $40,836 in a management occupation upon entry. Scott the mechanical electrical technology student thought he would make $40,000 after graduation, but according to the IDES he can expect to make $37,421 upon entry. Michelle had yet to choose an occupation but was told that as a psychologist she could make anywhere from $50,000 to $60,000 a year which, according to IDES was a close estimate. School, Clinical, and Counseling Psychologists in this area make $47,768 annually upon entry. Chelsie was on the path to becoming an occupational therapist and expected to make $70,000 upon entry but IDES lists the entry wage as $53,817.

The average of the participant guesses versus actual data reported is a difference of $8,119.20. This factor may not be important to the participants because only one of them placed high importance on salary, but it may suggest that students do not have realistic expectations when it comes to expected earnings and geographical location. This difference may also be attributed to where the students are doing their research. Ashley mentioned that she obtained her information from BLS.gov, but she may not have realized that the earnings listed on that website are national averages versus location
specific. Although the question was not asked directly, it is interesting to note that all six participants mentioned that they would like to stay in the area after graduation. The participants may have selected their major based on what they know about the location’s job market and availability. Advisors can assist with this situation by making sure their student’s goals and expectations are realistic before choosing a major.

**Who Influences a Student’s Major Selection?**

Peers, family members, and faculty members also seemed to play a large part when it came to making a decision on their major. All six participants mentioned either finding out about their major from a peer, or being inspired by a family member or faculty member. Although none of the participants were told by their parents what major to choose, two participants recalled their parents telling them specifically what not to do. A study by Roese and Summerville (2005), examined 11 regret ranking studies to explore what people’s biggest regrets in life were, and found that education ranked number one, with career following closely behind. The parents of the two participants may have regretted their own college major and are making sure their students do not follow in their footsteps.

Beggs et al. (2008), found that the majority of the students in their sample found information about their major from people they knew including their peers and family members. All participants in this study also mentioned influence regarding their major from peers, family members, and even high school counselors. Ashley and Scott recall finding out about their major through a conversation with friends and realizing it may be something they would like to do. This result may suggest the importance of consulting with others before making a major selection. Students could benefit from thinking about
the occupations of peers and or family members and deciding if it is something they could see themselves doing.

Faculty members also played a role in the participant's major selection. Michelle recalls being indirectly influenced by her psychology instructor, while Doug turned to an academic counselor on campus in addition to his high school counselor. Carmen also spoke highly of one of her instructors who was also her academic advisor. Porter and Umbach (2010), found that faculty in fields like social sciences or art are more likely to interact with their students in comparison to other academic departments. Michelle was the only participant in the social sciences and she did mention her psychology teacher as an influence but she also mentioned that she never personally talked to her about her major selection, she was only influenced inside the classroom.

*Research and campus resources*

Four of the six participants said they did some type of research online. This included the Career Cruising assessment tool that is provided through the college’s Career Services website, BLS.gov, the online version of the college’s catalog, and a general web search. Only Carmen admitted that she did not do any research prior to selecting her major. Bullock-Yowell, McConnell, and Schedin (2014), surveyed 226 undergraduates and found that the students they surveyed did not have adequate information in terms of career decision-making. In order to assist with career decision-making, the campus where this research took place offers a Career Cruising assessment. When the participants were asked if they knew about the Career Cruising assessment only three of them were familiar with it. Carmen mentioned that her instructor told her they would complete the assessment in class. It may be beneficial for instructors to
introduce this tool in their introductory level courses to provide students with career information their first semester.

*Academic advisors*

All participants in the study had an assigned academic advisor and access to academic counselors on campus. Yet only Doug mentioned being directly influenced by an academic counselor or advisor. Although only one student was directly influenced by an academic counselor or advisor, Carmen, Michelle, and Chelsie all mentioned their advisor or counselor either assisting them with academic planning while they were undecided, or talking about potential major choices with them. Scott and Ashley, were the only two participants that did not mention receiving major declaration assistance from an academic counselor or advisor. Bullock-Yowell, McConnell and Schedin (2014) found that the undecided students surveyed experienced a lack of information when it came to their career decision making. Although Doug was the only participant that mentioned being directly influenced, half of the participants mentioned receiving some type of information regarding their major choice. This suggests that even though the participants aren’t being influenced directly by their advisors and counselors they are providing them with information them during their major selection process which could have led them to make a more informed choice.

Michelle said it was hard for her advisor to assist her with academic planning for her first semester because she was an undecided student, but she did discuss major selection with her advisor. She was advised to take a sample course in the subjects she was interested in so that she could “test the waters.” If interest in subject is the most important to students when deciding on a major, other undecided students may benefit
from this same advice. Bullock-Yowell, McConnell and Schedin (2014) also found that the undecided students they surveyed experienced higher levels of negative career thinking compared to decided students. Advisors and counselors can help students overcome their negative career thoughts by focusing on the students strengths and matching them up with potential career interests.

According to Bitz (2010), who studied 113 college freshmen at a small, public, university, students value the relationships they have with their advisors. Undecided students may find it difficult to build a relationship with their advisor if they are limited by the course offerings, or there is no direct path they can follow until they declare their major. The participants in this study are also assigned a new advisor each time they change their major so they may not have had adequate time to build a relationship with the advisor for their new major.

Undecided students

The majority of research on undecided students is done in the university setting. This study attempted to explore the undecided students of a community college. Four of the six participants experienced shame as an undecided student and felt pressure to declare a major. This is similar to the results Hagstrom, Skovholt, and Rivers (1997) found when they interviewed 16 undecided college students at a large Midwestern research university. They found that the most common emotions described regarding being undecided were, hopelessness, anxiety, and frustration. The students in their study
also expressed a fear of judgment. This is similar to Michelle’s reaction when asked about her experiences as an undecided student she recalled:

It was weird when I told people. They were like, “Oh what are you majoring in?”

I was like, “I’m undecided.” I felt like they were like, “Oh you’re going to college undecided?” I felt like they were just thinking, “What are you doing wasting money?”

The two male participants, Doug and Scott, seemed to view being undecided as a logical decision because they had not made up their mind yet. All the participants experienced an “ah-ha” moment while they were undecided. For Chelsie it began after she job shadowed and took a few courses. Scott remembered the moment he knew he found his major saying, “...I was looking on the internet at it, after talking to a couple of buddies and I decided, that’s what I’m going to do. That’s where I’m at.” Ashley also remembers looking up course descriptions of her potential major and realizing it was the one for her. These results suggest that the participants were actively exploring while they were undecided students. With this in mind, it is important that undecided students are encouraged to research potential majors, whether it’s talking with peers, browsing online, or looking up course descriptions to help facilitate the decision making process.

Suggestions for Student Affairs Professionals

Create an undecided academic plan

First, institutions should consider implementing a specific academic plan for undecided students. Currently, the research site does not treat undecided majors like all the other majors listed in the course catalog. When students first come to campus they are given a course catalog. Two of the six participants in this study mentioned using the
college catalog when researching different majors meaning they do utilize and value the catalog as a resource. The catalog may also be used during advisement appointments for guidance when planning out courses for upcoming semesters. If colleges and universities don't have a program for undecided students and as a result no page in the college catalog dedicated to undecided students, students may feel confused when attempting to map out their plan.

Although undecided students still meet with academic advisors for academic planning, administrators could develop an academic plan that consists of at least two semesters of courses to get these students started and give them a sense of direction. The plan could be implemented into the college catalog, printed materials, and the website and would put these students on the right track to transfer. The plan could include career exploration options and sample courses from some subjects they show interest in. By developing an academic plan and implementing it to the college catalog undecided students may be able to visualize their plan and feel less pressure to declare a major right away which could lead to a rushed decision they may later regret. The students that experienced negative feelings while being undecided may also feel reassured if they have a set path to get them started during their first couple semesters entering college.

*Strengthen programs for undecided students.*

After the interviews it was evident that the participants do not see academic advisors or career services representatives as the first place to turn if they need help deciding on a major. Half of the students knew they needed to meet with their advisors for academic planning but didn't mentioned being influenced by any discussions they had regarding their major selection process. It's difficult to measure the influence of these
offices if the participants don’t see Counseling and Career Services as place for help regarding career decisions. Only one participant mentioned specifically that a counselor or academic advisor influenced their major decision. This result is similar to Beggs et al., (2008). Their survey results indicated that only 6% of the participants reported feeling like they were influenced by counselor recommendations.

Students may feel that career services offices are only a place for someone who has a career path, or that academic advising centers are only a place for course registration. Advising staffs and career services staffs could work together to strengthen marketing campaigns targeting undecided students and offer workshops for students struggling to decide on a major. If undecided students know they have a place to turn to for assistance they may be more apt to seek out the resources the offices are offering including career advisement and assessments. Student affairs professionals could also develop a brief piece discussing options for undecided students at orientation so they do not feel discouraged or overwhelmed during their first visit on campus.

*Improve the language surrounding undecided students.*

Although only two of the six participants mentioned they would prefer to be labeled “deciding,” even small changes like reminding students it is okay to be undecided for a period of time could help. Five of the six participants remember feeling pressured when it came to making a decision. By improving the language and removing the stigma of being undecided, these students may feel less rushed into making a major selection that they have not had time to properly explore.
**Required career exploration**

Four year colleges and universities may have more freedom when it comes to mandating specific freshman seminar or career exploration courses but a suggestions for community colleges would be to require all new students to do some type of career exploration before they sign up for their first semester of classes. This requirement could be implemented into new student orientation or a freshmen seminar class. If all brand new incoming freshmen were required to take a one or two credit freshmen seminar course it would allow time for more in-depth skill analysis and application. Activities such as job shadowing, internships, and goal setting could be covered in the course.

**Advising and career collaboration**

Advising offices and career services offices could consider collaborating in some way. It seemed as though most of the participants chose their career first and then matched that up with their major, not vice versa. If colleges and universities could adapt a different model of advising, like a career cluster model, undecided students may be able to match up their interest in a specific career to a major earlier. The career services office on campus could help undecided advisors become more versed in different occupational trends to provide students with the most updated occupational outlook for their potential major. When advisors meet with a student to discuss subsequent semester classes, job shadowing could be suggested to the student. Advisors could also require their students to meet with the career services office on campus at some point during the year to determine if their career path is matching up with their expectations.
Suggestions for Future Research

There are several suggestions for future research regarding factors influencing a student's major selection. A quantitative study surveying participants about the importance level of specific factors that may have influenced them during their major selection process may prove beneficial. Another suggestion would be to obtain a larger sample size that is equal in terms of male and female participants. A follow-up study with the same students may be warranted to see how many of the participants changed their major after the interviews, and how many of the participants actually went on to accomplish the goals they set for themselves. It would also be beneficial to interview the same students after they enter the workforce to see if their expectations of the major they selected were met, and whether or not they were still satisfied with their selected major.

Conclusion

The analysis of the experiences of these six participants revealed that multiple factors influence an undecided student's major selection. Interest in the subject was the most influential factor, followed by relationships involving peers, family members, and faculty members. The participants were not largely influenced by their potential earnings. Finally, the majority of students had done some type of research either via the internet, course catalogs, or assessments before making a major decision.

Five of the six participants revealed feeling pressure to declare a major at some point. When students are choosing a major they don't just see a program of study, they see a future career. We can support students with this important decision by encouraging them to consult with others around them about specific careers they might be interested in, guiding them to resources already available on campus like Career Services,
recommending job shadowing, and reminding them that faculty and staff members are available for guidance. Eventually, all six students were able to declare a major, but if they had sought the appropriate resources available to them they may have had a more pleasant experience.
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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

I. Introduction

a. Informed consent

b. Test for audio

II. Demographic Information Sheet

a. The demographic information will be solely for the purpose of the researcher and will be removed from any results. This sheet will be handed out prior to the interview.

   i. How old are you?

   ii. What is your current major?

   iii. How do you identify racially?

   iv. Do you attend classes full time or part time?

   v. Are you planning on graduating next semester or transferring?

b. Interview will open after sheet has been completed

   i. Tell me about yourself (family background, why did you choose LLC, etc.)

III. Major related Questions

a. Questions addressing experiences while the student was undecided:

   i. How did you feel being labeled “undecided?”

   ii. How would being labeled a “deciding student” make you feel?

   iii. What led you to choose undecided?

   iv. Did you first feel pressure to declare a major? If so when?
v. If you felt pressure describe the amount of pressure you may have experienced to declare a major.

vi. If you felt pressure can you describe why you felt pressured, and by whom you were pressured?

vii. Tell me about the moment you knew you wanted to declare your current major.

viii. Have you taken any courses in your current major?

b. Questions addressing information search:

i. Tell me about the moment you knew you wanted to declare a major.

ii. What kind of information did you use to declare your major?

iii. Did you use Counseling Services or Career Services in your major selection?

iv. How did you find out about your current major?

v. Have you used the Career Services website?

vi. Have you used materials provided by Career Services (e.g. Career Cruising assessment)

c. Questions addressing interpersonal relationships:

i. How faculty members influenced your selected major? How?

ii. Has your faculty advisor influenced your selected major? How?

iii. Have counselors in counseling services influenced your selected major? How?
iv. Have family members influenced your selected major select? How?

v. Have your peers influenced your selected major? How? Has anyone else?

d. Questions addressing motivation:

i. How comfortable do you feel with your selected major?

ii. How comfortable do you feel with the current courses in your selected major?

iii. What type of goals do you have for yourself?

iv. What occupation would you like to pursue with your current major?

v. What type of environment are you hoping to work in?

vi. What other things might be important to you when you’re searching for a job?

vii. Where do you see yourself five years from now?

viii. How much of a role did salary play or not play in your major selection?

ix. What do you expect your starting salary to be if you obtain a job pertaining to your major?

x. How satisfied are you with your major so far?

xi. Do you anticipate changing your major in the future?
Appendix B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted under the guidance of Dena Kniess, Ph.D. from the Counseling and Student Development Department at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you were previously an undecided student here at [College].

By agreeing to participate in this study you will be eligible for a $25 dollar gift card. Your name will be entered into a drawing, along with five other students and the winner will be announced approximately one week after the final interview is conducted. You will be notified by phone if you are the winner.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
This study seeks to understand what factors influence a student to select a major at a community college.

PROCEDURES
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a 30-45 minute audio recorded interview asking about your experiences pertaining to major selection.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
There are no known risks or discomforts to participating in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
While the personal benefits may be few, your answers will assist the researcher in providing feedback to student affairs professionals and other campus areas in regards to the major selection process.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding, this coding will assign each participant with an alias. Only the interviewing researcher will know the name of you as the participant. Any audio recording produced today during this interview will remain locked in a secure drawer and destroyed after transcription.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from [College] or any other organization sponsoring the
FACTORS INFLUENCING MAJOR SELECTION

research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. Reasons for withdrawal may include withdrawing and/or dropping all courses.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:
Kellie Keck, (217-246-7706),kkeck16009@cc.ccil.us, Principal Investigator, or Dena Kniess Ph.D., (217-581-7240), drkniess@eiu.edu, Co-Investigator and sponsor

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS
If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

Signature of Investigator Date
Appendix C

Initial Email to Participants:

Dear Student,

My name is Kellie Keck. I am an employee and graduate assistant in the counseling department at [Redacted] College and I am working with Dr. Dena Kniess in the department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University. We are looking for participants for our study on undecided students at a community college.

You are receiving this email because your major was previously listed as undecided. You are invited to participate in a 30 to 45 minute interview on [Redacted] College campus about your experiences as an undecided student. If you agree to participate your name will be entered into a drawing for a $25 gift card.

If you would like more information about the study, or are interested in participating please contact me at kkeck16009@cc.cc.il.us.

Thank you,

Kellie Keck