Changing Majors

Our findings compliment internal SFSU analysis of major declaration status and timing which also suggested that major exploration and changes even into the 3rd year can be advantageous to students. Contrary to commonly held assumptions that prolonging major declaration can negatively impact a student’s likelihood of graduating, the 2014 SF State Six-Year Student Outcomes by Declaration Status and Change of Major report found the “highest six-year graduation rate was among those [2007 FTF] who entered with an undeclared major but declared one later (75%),” compared to a 50% graduation rate among those who entered with a declared major. The study also examined timing of declaration; students who declared in their 2nd and 3rd years had higher graduation rates than those who came in undeclared and declared in their first year. The study also cites additional CSU and other national evidence which suggests students can benefit from major exploration and changes, and particularly in the 2nd and 3rd years (SFSU, 2014).

Some institutions have implemented “meta-majors”, where students are guided into broad academic and career areas (sometimes with corresponding course pathways) as they enter the university to introduce them to the field of study while allowing for exploration (Complete College America, n.d., Georgia State University, 2017).

Related Findings

Research Question: Are FTF who change majors more likely to graduate? (not those who start as undeclared, but those who come in declared and then change)

How might we, as faculty and staff, respond institutionally to these findings (e.g. advising changes, first year experiences)?

When Students Change Major Matters

- Of the students who changed majors, among those who changed in their 1st year: 7.2% did not graduate vs. 3.5% who did
- However, those who changed majors in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years graduated at higher rates than those who changed in their 1st year. 3rd year difference is most pronounced.

Additional analysis is needed (e.g. qualitative analysis of advising support that may contribute to the pattern found).

Share your ideas here!

SAPP Participants

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Comments: Changing majors during 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year are significant predictors for graduation.


Comments: Changing majors up to 3 times during student’s career is a significant predictor for graduation.


Comments: Changing major 2 or more times is not a significant predictor for graduation ( unlike to project graduation).

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