

EDITORS' NOTE

Victoria Phillips's essay argues against Cal Poly's policy that students declare a major upon admittance to the university. Phillips presents her experience with changing majors as a frame for this essay—does that experience afford her more credibility as one who can speak to this topic? What personal experiences might you consider incorporating into your argument in hopes of gaining your readers' support? Phillips offers two main reasons against Cal Poly's policy, and she adds evidence from outside sources to support those two reasons. From what sources does Phillips get her evidence, and as a reader how can you determine the validity of those sources? When Phillips addresses the opposition to her argument, does her tone affect the way you position yourself as a reader? Phillips's conclusion leaves readers with an emotional appeal. Do you find that choice to be effective? Why or why not?

WRITER'S NOTE

Throughout writing my essay, I found it easy to bring in supporting evidence such as quotations. I believe I did a good job of making the quotes flow, as well as placing the quotes in the correct places, which helped strengthen my argument. I also think that I did a good job in remembering that my audience was the Cal Poly admissions office; I did this by the way that I presented my argument. I found trying to organize how I was going to present all of my ideas challenging. I had such an abundant amount of information that it was hard at times to incorporate all my data without making my essay dry and boring.

I tried to use a lot of hypophora (The argument relies on question and answer. - eds.) because while reading political speeches and the class readings I found that I responded the best to what the person was arguing when they used hypophora. I asked my peers to take note if the body of my essay supported my thesis. I also asked them to take note of the ethos, pathos, and logos that I used and asked if they thought it was ok that I mainly used just logos to portray my argument. The advice that my group ended up giving me was mainly about how to rephrase some sentences to make them sound less awkward. I incorporated their advice throughout my paper by going back and changing sentences that they said were awkward. They also expressed to me that my use of logos wasn't excessive and that it added to the validity of my argument. The advice that I did not use that my peers gave me was to cut out of paragraphs in order to make my argument stronger. I did not do this because I believe that every piece of evidence that I used helped contribute to an even stronger argument. My use of ethos came into affect as I explained that I am a Cal Poly student who is affected by the policy of having to declare a major prior to being accepted. My use of pathos was shown through how difficult it is to change one's major after already being accepted to Cal Poly. And I used statistics as well as quotes to exemplify the rhetorical appeal of logos.

Major Decisions

Victoria Phillips

As a freshman at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo I have been able to experience the good and bad of Cal Poly SLO. Benefits include: amazing weather, a great location on the central coast, as well as knowledgeable and friendly professors. However, there are downfalls hidden under the wonderful exterior of Cal Poly. The major downfall is the fact that prospective students

have to choose a major prior to being accepted. With the immense pressure to pick the correct major that would prepare me for my future dreams and aspirations in the career world, I felt a huge amount of pressure my senior year of high school. As I pressed the 'submit' button on my application to Cal Poly with the Biology major box checked off in the lower region of the application, I thought the anxiety would come to an end; I was wrong.

As my second quarter approached I realized Biology was not right for me. Expressing my concern regarding my major to my advisor brought upon even more anxiety than choosing my major in the first place. I was told to apply to other schools because switching majors at Cal Poly can be an extremely difficult and long process. I grew angry with the system. How could the policy of choosing a major prior to acceptance be beneficial? Three words: it is not. Social as well as biological factors regarding a teenager and the influences on their judgment need to be taken into account when asking a high school senior to pick their major and furthermore their career path for the rest of their life. Cal Poly should admit students without having to declare a major prior to acceptance because of the biological and social factors that hinder teenager's (ages 17–19) decision making skills.

Teenager's general belief that they know everything and have their lives figured out is shown faulty as we observe the average percentage of college students that change their majors. Ron Ficek, a career counselor expresses that "66 percent of students will change their majors." This statistic shows that the majority of college students don't know what career path to take prior to being accepted into college. Ficek goes on to explain, "out of any group of friends about six will change their majors at least once, two will stay in their major even if they do not like it, while only one will actually be happy with their major." A prominent pattern can be seen across the nation as large amounts of students continue to change their majors each year. These changes regarding a major cannot be blamed on indecisiveness alone. There is something other than indecisiveness that stops students from choosing the correct major; brain development.

Authors from the *Journal of Adolescent Health* express that, "the adolescent brain continues to mature well into the 20's." Therefore suggesting that when a high school senior between the ages of 17 and 19 needs to make the decision on what major to choose when applying to Cal Poly, their brains are not yet capable of making such a huge decision. A teenager's inability to make correct decisions is because of the lack of development in the areas of the brain that control higher thinking and judgment. It can also be read in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* that, "the frontal lobes, home to key components of underlying "executive functions" such as planning, working memory, and impulse control are among the last areas of the brain to mature."

The parts of the brain that control planning and judgment are not developed until maybe "half way through the third decade of life," say the authors of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*. The lack of decision-making skills due to brain development will put a hindrance on a prospective student's decision of what major to declare upon coming to Cal Poly. Therefore, the student should not even have an option of choosing a major when applying to Cal Poly because an incoming freshman student does not have the brain development that's necessary to make a mature and rational decision regarding their major based off of logical reasons alone.

Some may argue, "What about all the students at Cal Poly that have not had to switch their major since being admitted?" My response: they are lucky. The development of the brain does not progress at the same rate for everyone. Also, the students who have not needed to change their majors may have been more prepared for such a large decision. Confounding variables, such as the student's experiences throughout their life may have also helped aid them in making a more logical decision regarding their major. The bottom line is that until a person's mid 20's, the part

of the brain regarding judgment and decision-making is not fully developed. The lack of development in the brain which involves having to choose a major prior to being accepted to Cal Poly should be thought about when forcing a student to make a decision of such magnitude. The early declaration of a major should be eradicated from the application process entirely.

Prior to going away to college, students—for the most part—have lived with and have been cared for by their parents or guardian for their entire life. Although these usually positive relationships result in learning about morals and social norms, a parent-student relationship can also influence the career path of the student. Parents play a powerful role in their student's career choice because the student has seen how successful his or her parent(s) is/are and strive to achieve the same level of success; students then think that the only way to obtain this same level of success is to pursue the same career path as their parent(s). The authors from the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* suggest that, "a variety of familial factors such as socioeconomic status and parental occupation and employment have been identified as antecedents to career choices." A student's parents not only play a part in shaping the individual student's personality and morals, but they play a key role in shaping the career path that the student believes will be most suitable for them.

It is inevitable that prospective students do not have much experience in making decisions for themselves because of the many years that their parents have helped aid in their decision-making. Students lack of experience in making decisions supports the idea that forcing a prospective student to choose a major prior to acceptance is wrong and unfair. The authors of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* suggest that: "the young adult who has had minimal experience with independent decision making (because of their parents aid in their decision making) may lack the development of a strong self-efficacy." Without a strong self-efficacy and without the ability to make logical decisions by themselves, how are teenagers supposed to understand themselves enough in order to determine what major and career path is right for them? According to the theories presented in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, not possessing the ability to make effective decisions would make choosing the *right* major extremely difficult. A teenager's lack of self-efficacy, which results because of the "minimal experience with independent decision making" that teenagers possess, should be put into consideration when enforcing the policy that a student must declare a major before acceptance.

Anyone who has been to college or any higher form of education would be quick to say that higher forms of education courses differ greatly from high school courses. The majority of incoming college freshman do not realize the new and more difficult challenges that they are going to be confronted by. Due to the ignorance of the challenges ahead, most students feel compelled to become a certain major solely based upon a great high school class or teacher that influenced them. Stephen Dahl, dean of the school of arts and sciences at St. Bonaventure University, put it nicely, "students often enter college picking a major because an influential teacher in high school got them interested in a subject. Once at college, students learn that they are not interested in this subject and change." Students do not put into consideration that high school classes are not like college courses. Students do not realize the level of rigorousness that is demonstrated in college classes and do not realize that college courses require much more work than what would be expected in high school.

Molly Kjartanson, a freshman at Cal Poly, did not put into consideration the vast difference between high school and college classes. Kjarstanson says, "I loved my AP Biology class in high school and thought that becoming a Bio major was the right choice. But I was shocked to find how different my AP Bio class in high school was compared to my 400 person biology lecture in college." Molly is now trying to become a political science major and "wishes [she] could have

explored more general education courses before having to pick a major.” Perspective students should be able to be admitted into Cal Poly without declaring a major and should be able to take a variety of general education classes before declaring a major because, Molly put it well, “college is a whole new ball game.”

Having an opportunity to take general education courses would allow a student to find what they are passionate about by being exposed to different material in a variety of courses. Dean Stahl also noted that, “some students switch majors because once they arrive at college they are exposed to many different areas of study.” Cal Poly’s admissions office should take note of this statement and cut the amount of students who are going to end up switching majors by allowing students to be admitted without declaring a major.

Although I believe Cal Poly should allow students to be admitted without declaring a major, it can be argued that declaring a major before being admitted into a school can be beneficial for the student. Pauline Diaz, an author of an article titled, “Should you choose a major before choosing a college?” argues that, “choosing your major early can save you time.” Diaz further explains that, “in many colleges and programs students jump right into their major courses the first term of freshman year, particularly in more rigorous majors. If you miss out on these courses, it could take longer to graduate.” Although Diaz makes a valid point about the benefits of picking a major right away, I believe Diaz has left out the consequences involved if the “rigorous” major that the student chose ended up being the wrong one for them. If this is so, then it will take the student even longer to graduate due to all the time wasted in classes for a major that the student now wants to switch out of.

Cal Poly is a polytechnic school: a technical school offering instruction in many industrial arts and applied sciences. Due to Cal Poly’s “polytechnic” title and what this title represents, Cal Poly has taken on “learn by doing” as a motto. The “learn by doing” motto exemplifies the large amount of experience that students receive in their particular career field through hands on major classes. Because of the “learn by doing” motto people may refute the idea of allowing students to be admitted into Cal Poly without choosing a major. The people refuting the idea of not declaring a major prior to acceptance might speculate that without taking four years of major courses the students would not be fully emerged in a “learn by doing” environment. But the reality is that the first two years of college need to be about discovering what one is passionate about. Therefore, the first two years of college should not consist of wasting time in a major that the student chose because of previous false speculations about what that major entails.

My own experience of choosing the wrong major when applying to Cal Poly has greatly affected my first two quarters of being a college student. I feel anxiety stricken as I wait for the day that the long process of switching majors is complete. My experience at Cal Poly thus far could have been much more enjoyable if I did not have the threat of maybe not being able to switch my major lingering in my consciousness. Cal Poly SLO is an amazing school and is looked highly upon in the academic world; I want more students to be able to be apart of this amazing student body without feeling the pressure of making the wrong decision about their major and then having to live with the consequences. The biological and social factors that influence a students decision making abilities as well as the immense pressure of having to declare a major that one is not certain of, are the main reasons why students should be able to be admitted to Cal Poly without having to declare a major. Having to miss out on a great college experience at Cal Poly SLO would be devastating, but trying to switch majors after already being accepted to Cal Poly is even more burdensome.

VICTORIA PHILLIPS is a biology major.

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