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Double Majors Produce Dynamic Thinkers, Study Finds

By Dan Berrett

An undergraduate education is traditionally supposed to provide students with both breadth and depth of knowledge, which derive from their general-education requirements and major, respectively.

Increasingly, education experts also want students to develop a third skill, integrative thinking. It entails learning the deeper, underlying meaning of a discipline, making connections across courses and subjects, and applying different intellectual perspectives. Even better, some researchers say, is creative thinking, in which students master multiple disciplinary approaches to generate fresh and original ideas.

Students who major in two fields are more apt than their single-majoring peers to think both integratively and creatively, according to a new study. But they achieve those goals largely on their own, often despite the obstacles put in their way by academe.

"Double majors give students the opportunity to build bridges between domains of knowledge, and many students travel those bridges regularly," said Steven J. Tepper, an associate professor of sociology at Vanderbilt University and a co-author of "Double Majors: Influences, Identities, and Impacts," a report describing the study. The report was published on Friday by the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt, and was supported by the Teagle Foundation.

The report, which Mr. Tepper wrote with Richard N. Pitt, an assistant professor of sociology at Vanderbilt, amplifies findings that the two researchers released in draft form last year. It casts new light on what they describe as "perhaps the most significant trend in the curricular lives of students in the last decade." While important, the trend is often unexamined, they add: Universities know almost nothing about the benefits and drawbacks of double majoring.

Mr. Pitt and Mr. Tepper analyzed survey results of 1,760 seventh-semester students at nine institutions: Duke, Emory, Ohio State, Trinity, and Vanderbilt Universities; the University of Texas at

Austin; Dartmouth and Knox Colleges; and the College of Wooster. The Web-based survey gathered information on the students' academic choices, motivations, and measures of creative thinking and achievement. The researchers also conducted focus groups and examined the transcripts of smaller subsets of students.

While the rate of double majors at the nation's colleges is 9 percent, it was 19 percent in the researchers' sample, reflecting the generally high caliber of students at elite institutions.

'Deepeners' and 'Spanners'

The combinations of majors among students in the study varied widely. Most paired a social science with either a science, a humanities, or an arts discipline.

About one-third stuck to the same domain of knowledge: two arts disciplines, two in the humanities, two in the physical sciences, or two in the social sciences. The researchers dubbed students in that group "deepeners" because their two majors allowed them to hyper-specialize in one domain.

About 10 percent of students were what the researchers called "spanners" or "Renaissance students." They majored in one natural or physical science and one arts or humanities discipline, allowing them to bridge the furthest intellectual distance.

The combinations of majors also produced different effects on learning.

The deepeners were the most adept at integrating knowledge, Mr. Pitt and Mr. Tepper found. About 80 percent of them reported that their teachers encouraged them to apply material across majors, that they had completed an assignment for one major that could be reworked for the other, and that they could think of an assignment that drew on both majors.

The spanners were able to integrate nearly as well as the deepeners. But they were also most likely to report being able to think differently and approach assignments more creatively.

"I'm never stuck in one frame of mind because I'm always switching back and forth between the two," said a student named Richard, a theater and physics major, who is quoted in the study. "Whenever I am thinking about ways to do things, I never only think of what I learned in the class earlier that day because I had two completely separate and different classes to draw on."

While integrative thinking is important, creativity is even more valuable, the researchers said.

Mr. Tepper, who studies creativity, said the ability to see connections between very disparate methodologies and ways of knowing allows students to generate new ideas and novel theories.

Students often develop such abilities despite cultural and structural obstacles in academe. Even on campuses with interdisciplinary departments or centers, the researchers wrote, faculty members can often be chauvinistic about their discipline, slow to see connections between the fields in which their students are majoring, or unwilling to let students experiment.

"It's not like my business or econ teachers will bring up specific things about the Chinese and U.S. market," said Hannah, who is double majoring in Chinese and business. "When it comes to tying them together, it is just me doing it on my own."

Another student, Sara, said her biology adviser seemed to make assumptions about her abilities that she ascribed to the professor's dismissiveness of her other major, art history. "Scientifically, I am just as capable as everyone else in the lab; but I am always the one given the more fluffy jobs," she said. "They don't really know how to deal with me."

Modest Recommendations

After sharing the study's results with deans and faculty members on participating campuses, Mr. Pitt said he had come to appreciate how much timing matters. It is not until students are in their junior or senior year that they start to develop expertise in a subject. Asking them to draw connections between disciplines too soon is a risk. "We don't want to confuse our students who are just learning the material," he said.

The researchers also acknowledged the effects of privilege on double majoring. Students who come from wealthy families and whose parents graduated from college and are financially supporting their education are more likely than those not enjoying such benefits to double major. Black students also double majored at lower rates than did all other racial groups.

The cognitive benefits of double majoring could be enhanced with fairly minor modifications, the researchers wrote in their recommendations. For instance, students should be required to articulate the reasons they are double majoring and reflect on how their majors relate. Faculty members in each major should jointly supervise a student's capstone project, independent study, or thesis. Professors could also help students "cross-pollinate" their classrooms by asking them during discussions to apply what they

learned from their other discipline.


Implicit in the study's findings is also a disquieting critique, said Mr. Pitt. Students who double major tend to excel academically and be highly engaged in extracurricular and social activities. Perhaps such results suggest that majors are not as rigorous as faculty members think they are.

"Elite schools are supposed to be more challenging," he said, yet the double majors he and Mr. Tepper studied were able to finish their programs "with a higher GPA and with higher levels of student engagement. How is that even possible?"

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 **starrett** 2 weeks ago


The headline is misleading. It looks like creative, integrative thinkers are choosing to double-major (and bravo for them!) rather than double-majoring producing the integrative thought. Please, let's not turn this into yet another initiative to revolutionize education.

24 people liked this.


 **wclibrary** 2 weeks ago in reply to starrett

Post hoc ergo propter hoc.

9 people liked this.

 **cronicao** 1 week ago in reply to wclibrary

Ergo gluck.

 **bghansel** 2 weeks ago in reply to starrett

On the other hand, let's not discourage them, either.

6 people liked this.

schultzjc 2 weeks ago in reply to starrett



I didn't infer the logical order you describe here; I assumed that double majors tend to become more integrative - right?

Gee, education doesn't need change? The results here support the view that integrative learning is a good idea. In fact, it doesn't go far enough (to overt integration). I'm delighted to see disciplinary silos weakened.

5 people liked this.



navydad 2 weeks ago in reply to starrett

It's not an either-or. It is likely that creative, integrative thinkers are drawn to double major, and by double majoring they further develop their creative, integrative thinking. Reality isn't linear.

See sjtepper's comment below.

3 people liked this.



grward 2 weeks ago

"Implicit in the study's findings is also a disquieting critique, said Mr. Pitt. Students who double major tend to excel academically and be highly engaged in extracurricular and social activities. Perhaps such results suggest that majors are not as rigorous as faculty members think they are.

"Elite schools are supposed to be more challenging," he said, yet the double majors he and Mr. Tepper studied were able to finish their programs "with a higher GPA and with higher levels of student engagement. How is that even possible?"

I think Starret nailed it in his comment. I admit I haven't read the original report, but I see nothing in the article that proves that the experience of a double major produces the cognitive and creative enrichment the authors describe. It could just as well be that these students were self-selected in the first place on the basis of their superior academic abilities and interests (since only a certain type of individual seeks out a double major in the first place). I've known and advised many students doing double majors, and I've generally found them to be superior students even in their first year.

A randomized controlled trial, in which students were randomly assigned to double versus single majors, would likely give vastly different results. Of course such a study couldn't be done for both ethical and practical reasons, but I think that simply supports the point. We can't just force students to take two majors and expect to get a deeper-thinking, more creative generation of grads. We'll simply get higher attrition and more frustrated, burned out, withdrawn students.

17 people liked this.



waratah104 2 weeks ago

Doesn't this implicitly make the argument for inter-disciplinary approaches? Just wondering. I Like the previous comments. I think readers are on to something.

5 people liked this.




brucedeanlarsen 2 weeks ago

I look forward to reading the study. Here is the link: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/curb...>

What caught my attention was the distinction between 'deepeners' and 'spanners' and their apparent relationship to 'integration' and 'creativity'. It suggests that there may be approaches to encouraging integration or creativity (perhaps both?) that may not need a double major to achieve.

7 people liked this. **evansolomon** 2 weeks ago

I agree with starrett. It's like saying that going to Harvard turns you into a smart person.

7 people liked this. **11127786** 2 weeks ago

Starrett and grward make the right points. This is research about self-selected students, not the effects of double-majoring. What I found most interesting was the characterization of "spanners" and "deepeners"; this suggests to me that intelligent advising of lower-division students might be able to identify some traits associated with the brighter students who are likely to double-major, giving us the opportunity to guide them into related or disparate fields of study.

8 people liked this. **bbaylis** 2 weeks ago

For years, the assumption in academe was that the requirements for a degree consisted of three parts: general education, major and electives. General education was intended to provide the knowledge, skills and values consistent with those of an educated and well-functioning individual and citizen. The major was intended to provide the knowledge, skills and values consistent with a professional entering into a first job in the specific discipline, or proceeding onto graduate study. The electives were intended to broaden the individual into a well-rounded educated person. At one time some of the guidelines thrown around were that general education should 25% to 33% of a student's time. The major should be 33% to 50% with electives completing the remaining time.

For the sake of simplicity, let's assume the minimum degree requirement is 120 credits (15 credits per semester for eight semesters). To earn a degree with a teaching certificate in one area, the minimum requirement in one state where I worked was 90 credits that consisted of 60 credits of education courses and 30 credits in the academic area of the certification. That left the student with 30 credits for general education. Where were the electives? The only electives that these students had were options that they could select to fulfill requirements in education or their specialty area. When the question of double major was asked, the response was, "These students are already double majoring -- in education and a specialty area."

I remember one student who wanted dual certification in mathematics and music. This student was persistent. However, because the school was NASM accredited, the music education program required 90 hours on its own. To complete the mathematics certification, she had to take 30 credits of mathematics and another 30 credits of education courses. It only took her six years to complete the dual programs.

The answer is not necessarily double majors, but to require programs to include cross-disciplinary and integrative thinking and approaches within their courses, along with multiple approaches to knowledge, and a foundation in communication, critical and creative thinking. There should also be work in the history, philosophy, and literature of the discipline within the major. We should forget the other side of the equation. There needs to be room in the programs for practical studies, not just in the obviously professional areas like education and accounting. Programs like English, history, mathematics, anthropology, psychology need room for internships and work on "how to do" the discipline. It is one thing to know about mathematics; it is another thing "to do mathematics." Shouldn't we be helping students become proficient in both?

8 people liked this. **cmorong** 2 weeks ago

If these students were creative before they decided to double major, how did they get that way? If they came from wealthier families, was that the reason? Were they exposed to a wider range of ideas growing up?

Like



cronicao 1 week ago in reply to cmorong

Not necessarily wealthier, but certainly more enlightened intellectually. Homes where there were books, where people were encouraged to read and to talk about ideas, instead of just watching television and rattling off the current politically correct mantras..

Like



cmorong 2 weeks ago

Maybe we should have a new type of college (just some like this)

At this new college, professors would not have Ph. D.'s but two master's degrees. For example, in the economics department, everyone would, of course, have a Master's degree in that field. But one professor would also have a master's in history, another psychology, another anthropology, another sociology, etc. Then everyone in sociology would have a master's in that field but each professor would also have a master's in another field like in economics, history, etc. Every academic department at the school would be like this. This might encourage the integrative or creative thinking and students who might want to double major would have schools that cater to their needs

13 people liked this. Like



collegesource 2 weeks ago

"The world stands out on either side no wider than the sky is high....but if the soul is flat the sky will crush it by and by."Edna St.Vincent Millay Creativity is the one thing educators cannot teach.

1 person liked this. Like



cronicao 2 weeks ago in reply to collegesource

Educators may not be able to teach creativity, but they can provide conditions for it to develop --or they can fail to do so.

2 people liked this. Like



squirrelygirl 2 weeks ago in reply to collegesource

i never try to teach my students anything, i only try to create an environment in which they can learn - albert einstein

1 person liked this. Like



rutalkentome 2 weeks ago in reply to collegesource

True...but they can and should encourage it at all times!

Like



sstepper 2 weeks ago

As one of the authors of the report (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/curb...>), we appreciate the excellent discussion relating to the research. We concur that we can't prove that curious students who are more likely to make connections between subjects are more likely to double major in the first place.

But, even if students have a predisposition to integrate, they still need to the opportunity to do so. The double major provides them with that opportunity. It is possible that students who are "integrators" do so across all their courses, even if they are not double majors.

However, we ask the following question about what happens in a student's chosen major: Do you agree that "Assignments in this major often allow me to make connections across multiple course units and readings." It turns out that double major and single major students answer this question in similar ways. So, it doesn't seem like "integrators" are necessarily more likely to choose to be double majors. Double major students generally self-report that they can integrate across their majors. Some more than others, but overall they say they are able to think of ways to transfer learning from one major to the other. Of course transferring learning from one domain to another is only the beginning of creative thinking — reconfiguring that learning as the result of the transfer (thinking about things differently) is the next step. We can confidently say that double majors give students the opportunity to build bridges between domains of knowledge and many students travel those bridges regularly. From our focus groups, students explain how this integration takes place in practice. Together the self-reports from the survey and the focus groups suggest to us that students are making connections. Do single majors also talk about interesting connections between their courses? Possibly. But, we think double majors have an advantage. One of our interviewees discusses the importance of confidence; the feeling like she has enough expertise to bring in a new perspective in a class discussion or assignment. Leigh says, "Because I have expertise in this area as a sociologist, I have the confidence to bring this up in this different setting. It is important to be competent enough to feel comfortable bringing in another perspective." There is something about having depth in more than one area that allows for more robust integrative thinking. That is what learning sciences and theories of creativity would suggest as well — exposure alone is not likely to lead to integrative thinking. Some bi-mastery is also necessary.

(Edited by author 2 weeks ago)

11 people liked this. [Like](#)



cmorong 2 weeks ago in reply to sjtepper

Thanks for taking the time to respond and for the additional insights

1 person liked this. [Like](#)



seeingsystems10 2 weeks ago in reply to cmorong

For instance, check out the Integrated Studies program at Utah Valley University. Students choose two emphases—sometimes "deepening" and sometimes "spanning"—and finish with a capstone class, paper, and a three faculty oral on the paper (one from each emphasis area and one from IS faculty). I have met some impressive thinkers from the program, and it is possible to complete within the 4-6 years normal for other students.

[Like](#)



pnwangwu 2 weeks ago in reply to sjtepper

Interdisciplinary studies, and allowing students the opportunity to participate in interdisciplinary research is a better investment in the lives of students than double majors. The essence and value of true education is to develop in students the capacity for critical and creative thinking. That capacity is part of the meaning and definition of an educated person, and does not require a double major to achieve.

1 person liked this. [Like](#)



DarwinWeeps 1 week ago in reply to sjtepper

Thanks for taking the time to respond in this forum, Prof. Tepper. Looks like an interesting study. I think you make some good points, but there's one logical leap that troubles me. You write, "we ask the following question about what happens in a student's

chosen major: Do you agree that 'Assignments in this major often allow me to make connections across multiple course units and readings.' [...] double major and single major students answer this question in similar ways. So, it doesn't seem like "integrators" are necessarily more likely to choose to be double majors."

My concern is that using students' characterization of their assignments as a basis for inferring whether they are or are not integrators is quite a leap. Doesn't this really tell us that for most students, whether double majors or not, assignments in their courses do not facilitate integration?

Like



copesan 2 weeks ago

My thoughts on double majors after a decade of academic advising:

--Too many of the students who want to do double majors are interested in dressing up their transcript rather than deepening their intellect, and may seek two similar or parallel majors that they can double count courses toward.

--In the competitive undergraduate culture of my school, being a double major is a source of status but I am not sure that lasts after graduation.

--Double majors often rush around fulfilling requirements--distribution requirements and the requirements for two majors--rather than getting an education in way that allows organic development and change within a field or discipline. Instead of a thoughtful program and time for research and independent study, they take whatever course fits their schedule to meet the requirements needed.

--For some students, being a double major is a great idea that develops naturally and suits their temperament, energy and focus, but its not a one-size-fits-all solution or option for most students.

--Majors that include interdisciplinarity can accomplish the same double major benefits without requiring a whole second major

--Why not just take a bunch of courses in a second field? why does it have to be a formal title on the transcript? no one is going to read the transcript anyway--use the cover letter or the application letter to direct attention to what the student has studied and why. In other words, stop the credentialing frenzy.

16 people liked this.

Like



cronicao 2 weeks ago

"Double majors's different than you and me, Didi."
"Yeah, Gogo. They got smarts."

Like



gbrandin 2 weeks ago in reply to cronicao

I'd like to hear from someone who double-majored as an undergraduate and is now working as a professor in the academy. Especially in relationship to interdisciplinarity (or what seems to be passing for it these days) and its relationship both to graduate study and hiring. Any takers?

GB

Like



squirrelygirl 2 weeks ago in reply to gbrandin

I double majored as an undergrad in History and Psychology and went on to earn a master's degree in clinical psychology and a PhD in developmental psychology before taking a position as Assistant Professor of Psychology.

I have found my double major to be quite useful in terms of my profession if only because I am able to easily integrate historical perspectives into my everyday teaching material. I also think my decision to pursue a developmental PhD was greatly influenced by my appreciation for the study of change over time. I've already started working with a faculty member in the History department to develop and co-teach a summer study abroad program on the events leading up to and including the Holocaust.

1 person liked this. [Like](#)**rutalkentome** 2 weeks ago in reply to gbrandin

Double majored in Anthropology (mostly archeological studies) and Political Science at Univ. of Michigan. People laughed and said those things were so far apart, but I always saw them as complementary. That academic experience was invaluable, and not only was it seen in a positive light in my corporate career, when I finally went for a Ph.D. it worked in my favor because I articulated the connection between the two fields. I believe in both cases it differentiated my academic CV from others. However, this is hard to tell from my point of view, without asking those who hired me and admitted me. As current professor in the academy, my double-majoring never comes up among peers, however I do use it to encourage my students.

[Like](#)**murphy_mouse** 2 weeks ago in reply to gbrandin

I double-majored in music performance and mathematics, and went on (eventually) to earn a Ph.D. and teach in math. As an undergrad I knew my music major was "just for fun" and as a B.A. (not a B.M.) was not the most rigorous out there; but the goal kept me motivated and the status of being a major gave me opportunities I wouldn't have otherwise had. The kind of focus you need for music performance, where both technical proficiency and style are important, is not completely different from the kind of focus you need for both technical proficiency and creativity in mathematics. I doubt the extra credential has had any impact on my acceptance to grad school or hiring, but that wasn't my goal. There were a variety of content-specific applications I could draw between the two subjects, but I think the more profound result was more about mind-set: I could puzzle through music theory and notations because the mathematics was more difficult; or I had the patience to deal with tedious computations because of the discipline of playing scales.

3 people liked this. [Like](#)**keithwms** 2 weeks ago in reply to gbrandin

I double majored in physics and German literature and philosophy.

If I have one thing to say about my path, it is this: I simply never thought it worthwhile to do exactly what everyone else was doing. What's the point?! Life is short. That's the way I thought about it then... and I suppose I still agree with that. In my case, my choice(s) added all kinds of interesting experiences and exposed me to new worlds of thought. Scholars think *so* differently in those fields.

In my case, both sides strongly discouraged me from the other! The physics people thought I was completely batty; the typical physics BS course load is pretty difficult and time-consuming. The Germanistics people also questioned why I bothered with physics. On that side, I was surrounded with people who had little interest in the sciences or anything remotely quantitative- it mostly mostly linguistics, novels, and poetry. Anyway, their approach tickled other parts of my brain and gave me a *lot* of extra training in written and oral communication. And I still had time for a job in a research lab and some dating. Okay, not enough dating ;)

One of the best benefits of my odd combo was that I received a stipendium to study for a year in Germany, which made me very independent-minded and opened my eyes in many ways. For one thing, I went over to study physics and wound up spending more time learning about music. The physics people thought that I was stark-raving mad! But it all worked out. I finished a MS in physics and then a PhD, got some good papers and awards etc, did a postdoc in the Netherlands, and became a physics professor at a good school. Check!

But... a few years ago, I wound up basically leaving academia... certain infighting and small-mindedness finally go to me and I just couldn't stand it any more. The famous Kissinger quote pretty much summed it up for me. I was surrounded by ultra-conservative people, and I don't mean that in the political sense- simply... change averse. I needed to try some new things. All that said, I still have a very strong connection to academia and am a visiting professor now always looking for a new niche where I can contribute. We'll see.

Not to quibble with anyone here, but I would just point out that there are double majors and then there are double majors. I could have easily double majored in physics and math... almost every physics BS student is a few classes away from that by the time they're finished. Also, nowadays, it's much easier to double major—many kids enter college with all manner of AP credit and there seem to be many options to take some extra things over the summer. The American class schedule is really rather luxurious: students usually only spend 9 months out of the year actually studying. A few years ago, I sent out a questionnaire to undergraduate physics students, and roughly half of them reported that they could finish their degree in *3* years. For that reason and a few others, I see two very different "lanes" through American higher ed, i.e. two vastly different kinds of outcomes from the same system of higher ed. I wrote a bit about that here:

<http://keithwms.blogspot.com/2...>

^^^This blog entry contains a few thoughts about the role of the "prep" problem and says a few things about ways to reinvigorate the liberal arts. I certainly wouldn't propose that everyone do what I did; I was rather unusual... and still am ;) Simply piling on more classes isn't for everybody, but I truly question what higher ed is for, if it doesn't strongly challenge our students and vigorously shake them out of their comfort zone.

1 person liked this.



pnwangwu 1 week ago in reply to gbrandin

I engaged in interdisciplinary studies at the University of Nebraska that was broad-based in Arts and Sciences, with Chemistry major and Biology minor. I was an undergraduate research assistant in Chemistry, and teaching assistant in Biology. I was a lab-technician in Botany, and a proctor of Physics in a peer-to-peer general physics undergraduate teaching. I cannot say enough about the effects and benefits that accrued to my life in creative thinking and research creativity from that early exposure. In graduate school, my Ph.D was in medical sciences interdisciplinary area, specializing in cardiovascular pharmacology, which I combined with a Pharm.D (doctor of pharmacy) professional degree simultaneously. They were excellent investments that are continuing to pay me great dividends today, 34 years after. To begin with, in my first job as an Assistant Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology, my salary was \$5,000 higher than the annual salary of the co-chairman of my Ph.D dissertation committee (he told me), because the dean that hired me convinced the Provost that with my Pharm.D and Ph.D, he was hiring two faculty members in one. I would probably say that I had my creative instincts and abilities before my interdisciplinary adventures, but there is no question that I was greatly helped by them. If I had to do things over again, I would do exactly the same thing because they were a great blessing to my life.



greshik 1 week ago in reply to gbrandin

I had undergraduate double majors in History-Political Science and Accounting. There weren't any crossover courses at all. Then I earned a masters degree in Business, and I think the History-Poli-Sci helped a lot there, especially with the (at-that-time) increasing globalization of business. The Accounting major definitely helped with the MBA. I've been teaching undergraduate Accounting for over 20 years at a 4-year teaching institution and am finishing my dissertation for a PhD in Higher Education. My topic has nothing to do with any of my prior fields of study. I've had to think in multiple ways whether I wanted to or not, but I like to think my varied education has all worked together. I didn't come from wealth (at all!) but I did come from a home where reading, learning, and discussion were all valued.

Because my student accounting majors need 150 credit hours to sit for the CPA exam, I encourage them to explore other disciplines and many do (if they aren't going the graduate school route). I encourage students to take advantage of a project in one field and use it as a base for a project in another; many of the faculty members at my small institution do so. Part of it may be because we're small; the faculty members pretty much all know each other and our students. So it makes it easier for us to work together on multi-disciplinary projects.

I don't know if this is a measure of success or not. I only know it works for me and for my students.

**aoxo_moxoa** 2 weeks ago

I found this article fascinating and revealing about myself.

As a double major in humanities from Vandy ('96, Literary Theory and Aesthetics), I found much of the insight the report produced to be spot on in terms of my own intellectual and academic development during and post- undergraduate degree. I really liked the quotations from the bio/art and the physics/theatre majors - again, spot on in terms of the lived experience as a multiple major student.

I think some would argue that English and Philosophy at first glance seem highly complementary. However, the cognitive skill sets necessary to read and to understand Heidegger or Plato are at once similar and different from those needed to understand Plath or Aeschylus. The overlap between integrative and creative thought is still to be mapped out fully, but there is no doubt in my mind that the analytical and writing skills that I laid a foundation in then, continue to fire my critical eye and competencies today.

One final note, I downloaded the report to my digital library of research for my own pedagogic purposes, if and when I get the chance to return to instructing undergrads in a college of education again. Thank you for the material and the spur to introspect this fine Friday afternoon.

3 people liked this.

**rutalkentome** 2 weeks ago

Most of my students, whom I would categorize as "dynamic thinkers" are drawn to a wide range of subject-matter interests. They tend to have a hard time nailing down one particular major. Yet too often double majoring is "poo-pooed", to use a technical term, by thier advisor and many professors. So, like many of the comments thus far, it appears that certain thinkers are drawn to wider studies and double majors, versus the notion that simply putting more on your plate as a student and picking another major is going to rewire the way you think. Yet, as I reflect, I now sense that these same dynamic thinkers would not be inclined to "minor" in things...I wonder what sort of study could be done in this arena to show the difference in perception between a double major and a minor.

**eckelcc** 2 weeks ago

Or perhaps dynamic thinkers are more likely to choose to double major.

2 people liked this.

**schultzjc** 2 weeks ago

AWK!!! I didn't think that CHE would publish an essay extolling the virtues of a crap study - but it's true. While I'm a supporter of all things inter- (see my other comment) I have to agree upon reading it that the study a) failed to separate cause from effect, and b) provides absolutely no statistical confidence concerning the results. None of the measures are subject to more scrutiny than "there was more of this than that".

In a (polite) word: Bunk. And how about some editorial oversight, CHE?

4 people liked this.

**cronicao** 1 week ago

Re Copesan's comments:

"My thoughts on double majors after a decade of academic advising:

--Too many of the students who want to do double majors are interested in dressing up their transcript rather than deepening their intellect, and may seek two similar or parallel majors that they can double count courses toward."

"Too many" isn't "all"; "may seek two similar or parallel majors" -- first of all it has yet to be demonstrated that there is something intrinsically wrong about pursuing two similar or parallel majors; secondly, many double majors follow programs as different as a foreign language / English / philosophy and a hard science.

--"In the competitive undergraduate culture of my school, being a double major is a source of status but I am not sure that lasts after graduation."

"I am not sure" is not an argument -- it's just an indication of a lack of enough/reliable information.

--"Double majors often rush around fulfilling requirements--distribution requirements and the requirements for two majors--rather than getting an education in way that allows organic development and change within a field or discipline. Instead of a thoughtful program and time for research and independent study, they take whatever course fits their schedule to meet the requirements needed."

This argument is invalidated by the adverb "often" -- some "often" do, some "often" don't. Unless this argument can be backed up by hard data, it's no more than a straw-man argument.

--"For some students, being a double major is a great idea that develops naturally and suits their temperament, energy and focus, but its not a one-size-fits-all solution or option for most students."

Nobody is suggesting a "one-size-fits-all" solution. Another straw-man argument.

--"Majors that include interdisciplinarity can accomplish the same double major benefits without requiring a whole second major"

This comment begs the question -- it assumes that having a second major is necessarily bad; but that has yet to be demonstrated.

--"Why not just take a bunch of courses in a second field? why does it have to be a formal title on the transcript?"

"A bunch of courses" is hardly a quantifiable amount. This statement takes for granted that there is something wrong about having a formal title on the transcript. Might it be because it's "elitist"?

"no one is going to read the transcript anyway--use the cover letter or the application letter to direct attention to what the student has studied and why."

Is there any reliable evidence for categorically stating that "no one is going to read the transcript"? At my institution --a top-tier research university-- we go over transcripts very carefully indeed when considering applications to our graduate programs.


3 people liked this.



finknottle6 1 week ago

I majored in Russian literature and Economics while an undergraduate. In graduate school I added quite a few extra classes in the natural sciences, and more particularly in mathematics. The breadth of my education has had a tremendous positive impact on everything I have subsequently undertaken. I believe the more intensive approach to a second subject gave me more specific information and methodologies than I would ever have gained from one major and set required courses from a broad spectrum of subject areas. These broader courses often try to provide more information than a student can take in if this is the first exposure he or she has had to the subject area. The one unfortunate feature I found in making the double major choice was being excluded from writing a senior honors essay. Without a senior essay I was not eligible for magna or summa distinctions. In addition to losing the higher distinctions on my diploma, I also lost what I have always believed to be an important experience for undergraduates--an in-depth study of a subject.

The institutions at which I have taught and/or been a Dean did not allow double majors. The closest thing to a double major was a major and a minor. This is not the same kind of enterprise at all. A minor usually has no internal restrictions or course requirements. A student may go through a minor without ever taking an advanced course or a seminar. They may also evade some of the notoriously difficult, but essential, courses.



bemsha 1 week ago

I think it is the student's job to make connections: "When it comes to tying them together, it is just me doing it on my own." Nothing wrong with that. I think the creativity comes from having to do it yourself, not having your hand held at every step of your academic career.

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