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### How Often Does DU Change Their Major?

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#### Recommended Citation

Djupe, Paul A., "How Often Does DU Change Their Major?" (2022). *Faculty Publications*. 1792.  
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# How Often Does DU Change Their Major?

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Paul A. Djupe

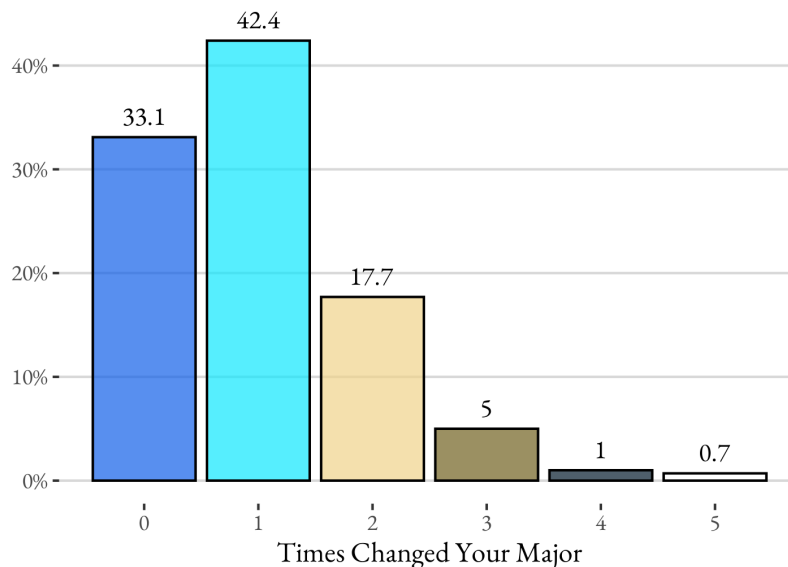
September 6, 2022

By Paul A. Djupe

They ask it (“What’s your major?”) as if it’s the only question, like there’s nothing else to the college experience than the major. Of course it’s an important choice, but one among many at a liberal arts college. And how are you supposed to know how to make that choice if you’ve never taken a psychology or environmental studies course before? There’s an experiential aspect to acquiring a major that is inherent in the college experience. In fact, it may be experiential by intention. That is, if the liberal arts means the art of freeing the self, then you should come by a major as a process of discovery after taking classes — learning about those subject areas as well as learning about yourself. Can we see any signs of this process? Do Denison students change their major from what they intended upon enrollment?

I’m drawing on our February 2022 survey data of 508 students, which asked, “Thinking back to when you first started at Denison, how many times have you changed your intended major?” The response options topped out at 5 and that proved adequate as the following figure shows. Only a third of students say that they have not changed their major since enrollment, which means two-thirds have. The modal change is once, but almost a quarter have changed majors at least twice. That’s a lot of change. It’s also interesting that this distribution looks almost exactly the way it did in 2018 when we asked this last. This is an enduring pattern.

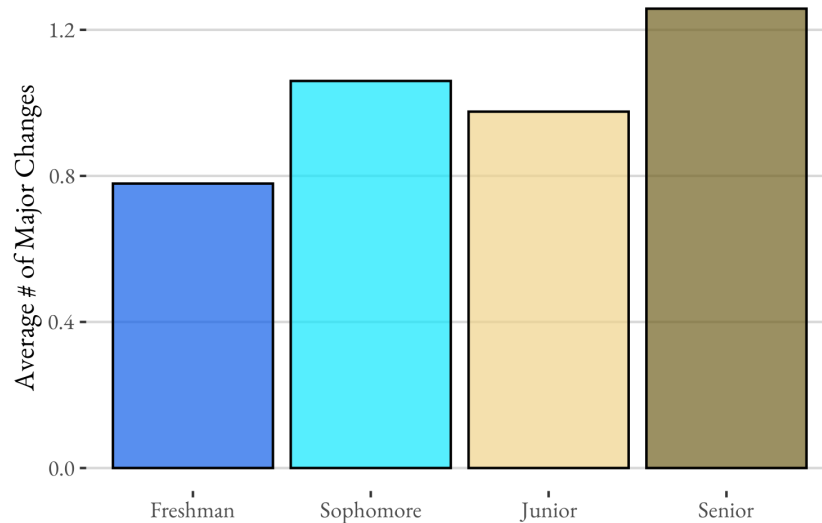
Changing Your Major is Common If Not Frequent



Source: February 2022 Survey.

You are required to have a major selected by the end of sophomore year, but that doesn't mean that the process of choosing a major ends at that point. Some were torn initially and later decide to pick up a second. Some start long majors (e.g., PPE) and then decide to just pick one leg (e.g., Econ). Things happen. So, there's a bit of a bump after freshman year, but it's a pretty small one – most all of the process of picking a major is done freshman year.

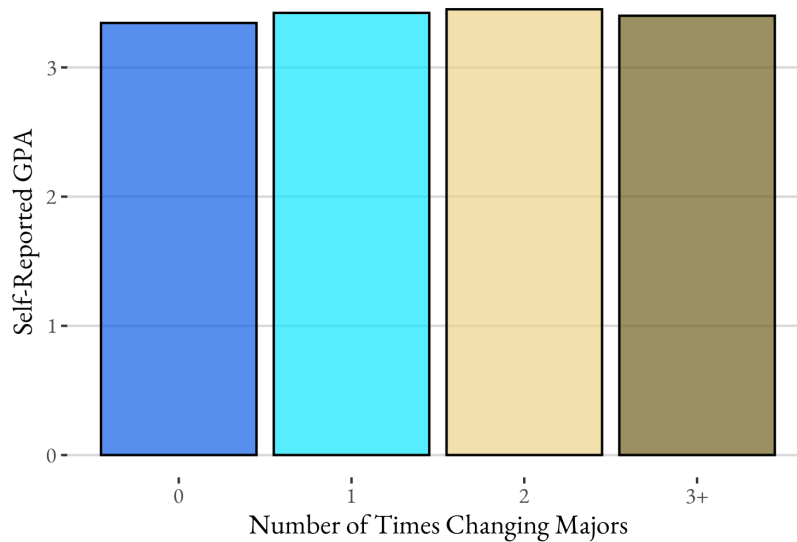
Major Changes Need to Happen Early But Don't End



Source: February 2022 Survey.

There is surely some push and pull of changing majors – some are drawn to the questions, methods, and professors, while some are surely nudged to find greener pastures (i.e., they weren't getting good grades). Can see any evidence of this in the data? Not really. Well, there is a slight bump for those who have changed majors, but it is not statistically significant. The average GPA for those who haven't changed is 3.34 while it rises to just above 3.4 for everyone else who switched. That's a pretty small difference.

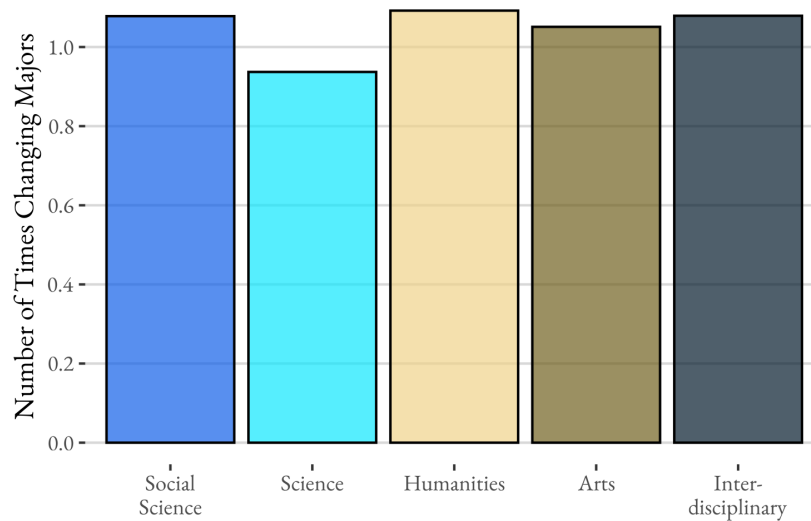
## Do Students Who Change Majors to Do Better?



Source: February 2022 Survey.

Those who have changed majors have slightly more majors (1.3 versus 1.2 for those who haven't changed) and I expected to see certain kinds of majors changing more. Maybe I'm just projecting, but when I applied to college I wanted to be a chemistry major and then never took a chemistry class in college! That is, I bet that non-science majors are more likely to come to that decision because of changing majors. There's some meager evidence for that notion – science majors do indeed report slightly fewer major changes (.93), while all other majors report equivalent numbers of switches (just over 1). But none of these differences are statistically significant.

## Science Majors are Slightly Less Like to be Switchers



Source: February 2022 Survey.

Changing your major is something that most students experience. It is a process that is encouraged by taking courses around the curriculum and it's no surprise that some of those bite in ways that may have been unexpected. It mostly does not seem motivated by GPA climbing, but that probably does factor into the calculation on the margins. So, if you've been thinking about changing your major, just know that most of your peers have gone through the same process at least once.

Paul A. Djupe is a local cyclist who runs the Data for Political Research minor. He started onetwentyseven.blog a few years ago in a bid to subsidize collective action. He's on Twitter and you should be too, along with your president.