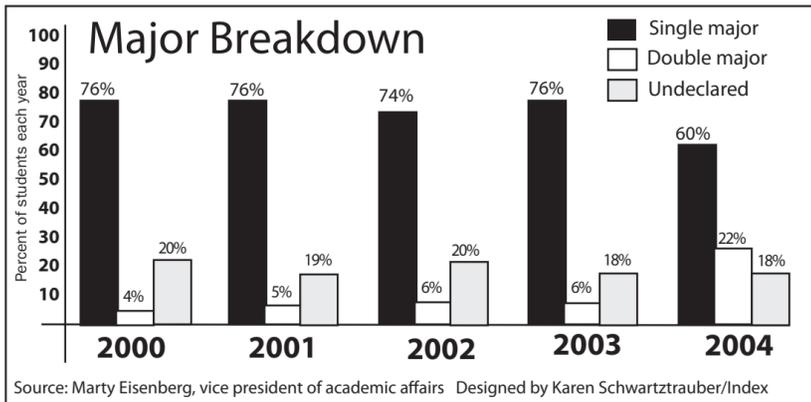


Dilemma or, any major



Courtney Robbins / Index
Associate professor of philosophy and religion Ding-Hwa Hsieh speaks with Julie Minn, instructor in Chinese at the Asian Studies Booth at the Major/Minor Fair on Wednesday afternoon.



Multiple reasons prompt students to change majors

Lauren Jackson
for the Index

It is not uncommon for students to change their minds, ideas and goals as they make their way through Truman.

As of fall 2004, 60 percent of students were declared with one major, 22 percent were double majors, and 18 percent still were undeclared.

Nineteen percent of students who arrived at Truman with declared majors changed their minds at least once within the first year, according to a fall 2004 census. The census also stated that after three years, 35 percent of students changed their majors at least once.

Reasons that students change areas of study include a change of interest, difficulty in classes or financial and scholarship concerns.

Junior Niki Cox said she has changed her major four times while at Truman.

"I started out as an art major, but it didn't really last very long," Cox said. "I thought about going undeclared, but at that time I was also looking into becoming a missionary, so I went philosophy and religion."

Cox then tried psychology before finally settling on English.

Cox said concerns about losing her scholarships caused her to switch to a major where she could get better grades and retain her scholarships.

"I'm a dreadful math student, and with psychology you have to know about graphs and statistical information," she said. "Then I asked myself what I enjoyed. I like to write and read books, so I changed to English."

Cox said she now plans on graduating with an English major.

"I still love art," she said. "If you look around the room, I have a couple of my paintings up. It was just the fact that no matter how hard I worked at art, I would never get an A. It would always be a B or a C."

Junior Christine Novak

changed her major for different reasons.

Novak said she started out with a double major in business administration and math, but trouble in a class that was required to graduate made her think twice.

"I took microeconomics, and I hated it, so I dropped the business part of my major at first," Novak said.

She said the upper level classes for her math major didn't interest her, which caused her to drop that major as well. A conference this summer through service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega piqued her interest in business once again, and she picked that major back up.

Lesa Ketterlinus, director of the University Career Center, said students who continue to change majors can run into problems.

"I think the primary disadvantage to students who change their majors repeatedly is that it can add on time to Truman," she said. "So if they are having limited funds, it could be a drain on their resources."

Ketterlinus also said she thinks people get discouraged when they stay longer than four years or aren't focused enough, and eventually they just give up.

Cox said she will be here another year and a half because she has changed her major so many times, but that doesn't bother her. She said she knows what she'll be doing after she graduates.

"My English major will help me because the area of the world I'm interested in going to is London, and I can always use it as a fallback for editing or publishing," she said.

For Cox, Novak and every other student on campus, advisers are designated to help when students change majors.

Cox said she had helpful advisers in her first two majors.

"By the time I had my third adviser, I had a better idea of what I was to do [with my life],

America's TOP 5

Four out of the top five richest Americans made their fortunes without a college major.

1. Bill Gates achieved a net worth of \$51 billion as a Harvard drop out.
2. Warren Buffet is the only one of the top five to graduate college.
3. Paul Gardner Allen from Microsoft left Washington State University degreeless.
4. Michael Dell of Dell computers quit the University of Texas at Austin.
5. Larry Ellison of Oracle Software opted out of his University of Illinois education.

Source: Forbes Web site
Designed by Karen Schwartztrauber

so I could make my choices based on experience," she said.

Novak, on the other hand, said one of her advisers was more administrative and simply signed the sheets as needed.

"It's frustrating that that's all they were there for," she said.

Ketterlinus said she agrees that some advisers work hard to help their students.

"It's just like anything else — there's better and maybe not as good," she said.

Advisers in the Residential College Program can be helpful because they are not attached to any particular major, so they will give more of an unbiased opinion of different options for students, Ketterlinus said. They can tell a student what the major will entail and what kind of work will be expected.

Once a major has been chosen, the career center then can talk to the student and state what options he or she will have after graduation, Ketterlinus said.

If a student has not decided fully on a major or path for college, however, there is no rush to do so, Novak said.

"Come in undeclared, and play with some things," she said. "It's not a big deal at all to change majors."

Freshmen navigate options

Undeclared students explore different areas of study at Truman

Katie Curry
for the Index

Freshman Betsy Smith knew from the start what she wanted to major in.

"I picked nursing because it is always something that has fascinated me, and I want to help people, as corny as that sounds," Smith said. "Biology and basic [chemistry] are surprisingly the hardest for me. But I am up for the challenge, and I am ready to take on the task."

Many first-year students, however, might not share Smith's zeal. About 20 percent of the incoming freshman class for 2005 is undeclared, said Stephanie Dager, an admission counselor and transfer coordinator at the Office of Admission.

The largest percentage of declared students chose biology, with business administration a close second, followed by English and psychology. Dager said she thinks there were several reasons for these statistics.

"I think a lot of that has to do with the quality of the programs and the reputation of Truman," she said. "But I think that there are a large number of students who are looking at a medical field [for] a career."

She said Truman's research and extracurricular opportunities in numerous fields outside of the nor-

mal classroom experience contribute to the high percentage of first-year students who have selected a major.

"[Truman's] opportunities for research and internships, to get some of those hands-on experiences that students don't often get at the graduate level, I think, are a big pull," Dager said.

She also said students who were interested in a major before visiting Truman often decide to come to Truman after visiting with a faculty member in that field.

"Students come to visit campus, and they happen to visit with a professor, and it's a great experience," Dager said. "Time and again I hear them say, 'I talked to this professor and he just made up my [mind]. I want to come to Truman. I want to be this major. I want professors like that.'"

Dager said the liberal arts and sciences curriculum is a big pull for undecided students because it gives them the opportunity to take classes in a lot of different areas.

Once at Truman, students have several options available to them to help them decide on one particular major. The Residential College Program assigns every first-year student an adviser.

Marty Eisenberg, dean of the

RCP and vice president of academic affairs, said the responsibilities of an RCP adviser extend far beyond just helping students schedule classes.

"Academic advising is about helping people become lifelong self-reflective learners," Eisenberg said. "Ideally we're helping people become better decision makers, gain independence and successfully make the transition between high school to college."

Eisenberg said a large part of this function is helping students who already have declared a major make sure they've made the right choice and follow their passions. He said that just because someone selects a major doesn't mean they have finished investigating all of their options.

"I sort of view it as everybody in their first year of college is still really exploring," Eisenberg said. "Some people are willing to say, 'I'm putting this label on myself,' but really exploring a major involves taking courses in that major. And many people discover it's the right thing for them, and others find it's not." Eisenberg said he thinks the division between declared and undeclared majors for first-year students might not be as relevant as some think. He said a large portion of students change their major

within one year.

"There is a group of students that come in with a major and don't change it, [but] there is a very large group who maybe have a major declared who are exploring, and another group that is exploring but hasn't decided what label to put on yet," Eisenberg said. "I'm not sure that those two groups look all that different."

For students still exploring or for those that have chosen a major because they believe it will garner a degree of financial success, Eisenberg warned against picking a major that does not correspond with one's passions.

"People often discover quickly that it's hard to sustain yourself through a bunch of courses that you don't like, if that's your only motivating factor, and you tend to do as well," Eisenberg said.

Eisenberg said it's also important that students who have chosen a major realize their major and their eventual careers are not always as closely related.

"The reality for most majors is what you end up doing is not that closely related to your major," Eisenberg said. "There are other options. Majors are not related to careers directly. There are some that are, but most are not."

The RCP is not the only place that offers help for first-year students, however. David Kincaid, assistant director of the University Career Center, said he also helps many first-year students need help

"Your major is not necessarily going to serve as a training for a particular career. It's going to teach you skills to be successful."

David Kincaid
Assistant Director
of the Career Center



Facts of the game



About one-fourth of those with a declared major at their first census date will drop a major after one year of college, while 80 percent of them will keep at least one major.



Ten percent of first-year students with a declared major change at least one major during the first four weeks of college.



One in five first-year students will change a major from the fourth week of fall semester to the fifth week of spring semester.

Source: Marty Eisenberg, vice president of academic affairs
Designed by Karen Schwartztrauber/Index

exploring their interest areas and making the right choice for their major and career choices.

"I think that you feel that if you make that decision, you're going to cut off all the other options," Kincaid said. "I think one of the problems is talking with students about ways to be flexible with that choice."

Kincaid said that between four and six people out of 10 will change their career goals within their time at college, and the best way to approach picking a major is to investigate all the different careers that can be associated with that major.

"Your major is not necessarily going to serve as training for a particular career," Kincaid said. "It's going to teach you skills to be successful, but it's not going to be specific vocational training."

Kincaid said that many times students are under a lot of external pressure from parents or friends to choose one major or another. One of the challenges for first-year students is to make a decision based on their interests and talents.

"I think there's always a misconception that certain careers — say attorneys, physicians and those kinds of careers — pay really well," Kincaid said. "And they can, but you're talking about a longer window to get yourself through school and to get yourself established."

He said the career center offers several resources to help students hone their real interests and skills, including personality tests, workshops, job shadowing, mock interviews and numerous opportunities for internships.