

Listening to Students
Who Ever Thought about Leaving College
or
Did Leave College and Came Back

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**Listening to Students
Who Ever Thought about Leaving College
Or Did Leave College and Came Back...**

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Too many life demands. No clear path with college or payoff.

Many, many years later, opportunity and personal growth got me to come back.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I think you are doing a good job with encouragement and recognition.”

—58 yr old white female, Junior, first generation college student, parent

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Time consuming work from being a full time student, part time employee, and full time mother. It’s difficult mentally to be present. For my career I need a PhD to be a professor. Getting a bachelors seems pointless for what I want to do so why bother.

I’m almost done. Might as well finish. I’ll be the first in my mom’s side of the family to get a bachelors degree. I want to demonstrate to my child that education is important.

Stop changing everything every semester. Transferring was a hassle. My tuition almost didn’t get paid by fafsa because of technicalities that I was unaware of and wasn’t given proper answers to fix this issue and almost got kicked out of school....”

—Female, Mexican American, final year ish, mother, employee, eldest sister

“It is too expensive. Everything costs so much. I don’t have the time or money to learn like I wish I could and know I can.

I just keep going day by day.

I do love the campus, even the squirrels.”

—18 yrs

“Not knowing what to do with my current major, wanting to change major, and the cost of going to college when I didn’t get financial aid and I didn’t get help from parents. I still kinda want to leave college and I wish I had started community college first to really think about what I wanted to do.

The only thing keeping me here is the social pressure of dropping out. And the embarrassment.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Lower tuition or have better means of help for the students.”

—Caucasian female 20 years old started college at 17, veteran parent.

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, I wanted to leave college behind. I was a student at a California community college when the pandemic hit. I struggled for two semesters trying to figure out what I wanted to do and almost dropped out because I felt like a failure for deciding to change majors because that meant I was going to graduate later than expected. I struggled with my mental health because I doubted myself so much and because I did not tell my parents I wanted to change my major. I didn't tell my parents or any family members that I wanted to change my major because I didn't want them to judge me for it.

I decided to take some criminal justice classes and I enjoyed them. I also did research and found out that a career in law enforcement could be very rewarding and pay well. Although my parents weren't too happy that I changed majors without telling them first, they accepted that this is what I want to do now. If everything goes as planned, I will graduate in the Spring.

Sacramento State University does a lot, I'm not sure what they could do better for me. Advisors are always readily available for any question I have and I have had nothing but good experiences with my professors.”

— Hispanic/Latino First-generation college student 21 years old Junior

“I left and came back multiple times due to financial hardships. I am trying to finish now even despite the financial hardship I am currently facing.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) need to finish a degree program to qualify for the CLS training programs and/or Masters Degree programs.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Be a little bit lenient on us poor students when it comes to payments for the expensive classes.”

—I am a multilingual learner. I am Pacific Islander and a returning college student in my late 40s. I am first generation to ever attempt to finish college. This is my senior year.

“I am on academic probation, the major I am in is making me miserable, the major I want is in a far away college that I can't dorm in. The professors lessons doesn't make sense.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left?) My friends are in college and I don't want to disappoint my family and friends

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Nothing”

— I am a first year college student, who is asian. I am 2nd? generation college student. My parents left college due to not being able to speak english well, and my sister graduated college a few years ago.

“Not liking my major led to me not enjoying or caring about what classes I was in. It's very draining to be taking courses and going for a degree for which you have no passion or care. Going through a tough time also made me have little to no motivation to care about what I'm learning. These were huge contributors to the thought of dropping out and not graduating. One could say to just change your major, but once you only have one more year left, it seems more reasonable to stick with the major you're in to graduate the time you were given.

The fact that I was almost done, and not someone that could have the courage to drop out. I didn't want the beginning of my education to go to waste by dropping out and not attaining my degree. Although the last two semesters I didn't do my best, I did try hard in the beginning and that is what I didn't want to go to waste. My friends graduated last year and told me it's going to be me next time, and I didn't want to let myself down but also the people that were/are rooting for me to finish. So the main thing that kept me here is not letting people down, proving people wrong, and not giving up.

I think it's important for Sac State to continue showcasing all the resources they offer. I think my situation was more of a me-issue compared to a school issue. I think for someone that's struggling with things personally and not liking their major it's important to find other things enjoyable. A thing of that sort could be joining clubs or being more involved with your college. For example, COB holds events from here to there and I think those are super cool.”

— A first-generation Mexican-American, 22-year-old 4th year spring graduate.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Takes too long. So many unnecessary loops and hoops that need to be jumped through. For me Advisors have been useless. They either don't respond to you or they refuse to say anything unless you come see them in person. Half the professors don't reply to emails and are pretty bad at actually teaching a subject. Expect you to understand everything by watching one or 2 poorly made videos.

Spent too much money on school to not finish.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Hire better Teachers and get advisors that actually want to help others.”

—Anonymous

“Online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic made me feel lonely. I did not really want to continue, yet I did.

I had a professor who was very encouraging. Because of them I began to work hard and realized that getting my degree will be a great accomplishment.

I really like finding friendly emails in my inbox with encouraging messages 😊”

—Cis-gendered, female. Twenty-two years. White. Transfer Student (junior). Working part-time while in school.

“I left college because I was failing classes in a major that I didn't actually like.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left?) The jobs I desire with the pay that I desire require an education from a higher Ed institution.

Sac State needs better transfer student resources, I found them on my own. A physical space for transfer students would be helpful.”

—African American, female, age 30, first generation college student, reentry student, parent, graduating senior

“The lack of available courses and times with respect to working professionals, is making me consider leaving the university.

The ability to take online courses has allowed me to continue my education with the University.

Sacramento State can offer more online courses to assist those of us that have started working in a professional capacity.”

—Parent, Veteran, First Generation College Student, Native American, Multilingual Learner, Employed Professional

“I am just burn out. I have no motivation for my studies.”

—AAPI

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) I don't think it will help me with anything. I don't know what I want to do career wise and don't have any majors that I am interested in. Even though there is a lot of opportunities to socialize, I don't think they do a great job on trying to include people who might not be very social. No socializing.

The reason I came back was because I wasn't really sure what to do outside of school but I am now dropping out again.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I'm not sure if they already have this since I transferred here, but maybe having certain classes in which students get to explore several different majors. Also, hands on classes to get a better idea of what certain majors are about. Try to find ways to include people sitting on the outside when it comes to social aspects. I feel like you guys love catering to large groups but by doing that you leave out many people. I don't know what could be done but trying to find ways to include the people on the outside instead of just putting out messages on what's happening and hoping that people show up on their own.”

—First generation college student, senior

“College is way too expensive and takes so much of my time I started to neglect my own health, I was thinking of taking a semester off to work and save up money and to focus on my health before coming back

I stayed because I am in an impacted major- I have had many problems with getting into classes for my pre reqs before I can officially apply to the major and since it is now my third year, I already feel really behind and I will probably have to do an extra year so I stayed to not fall further behind.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Offer more class sections or still let students who are on track enroll into classes for their major even with the reserve seating. Reserving for first years and transfers is amazing but it really makes it difficult for returning students to get into classes.”

—Latina first generation, 3rd year student

“The reason I left college was because I was confused about what I want to do so instead of going and getting a degree in something I'm not interested in I decided to leave until I know what I want to do.

I came back because I learn that the world is hard and without a degree you will get low paying jobs or hard labor jobs if you don't have any connections in the world.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Should have someone who checks up on you and your grades.”

—Anonymous

“Everything is so expensive. I struggle to eat, find a safe to sleep for the night, breathe”

—Native American student 2nd year

“I left college after completing my general education, afterwards I was not sure what I wanted to do so I left to work and support myself.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) I am much older now, 27 and I also have much more responsibilities that will eventually require a higher income and a career with stability and benefits for my future well-being. Also I am very passionate about pursuing my selected degree.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Be more lenient with parking tickets in the parking garage... at least make things cheaper or a yearly car permit pass”

— Chinese, 20-23/25 yo drop college dropout, first generation, estranged from family, working part-time always to 3 jobs at once. I felt I was unworthy to go back, didn't have any direction with career outlook, didn't have any passion for anything at the time.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) I considered it multiple times this Spring Semester, I still am considering it. It really just is because of how financially unstable I am since coming into this. I have two on campus jobs and it can’t even cover half a month worth of rent. Plus, I was really depending on FAFSA, so grants and scholarships. This year I wasn’t even rewarded half of what I usually received during quarantine and community college. It sucks too because I’d get an off campus job but I can’t commute that far because I sadly can’t drive and that would cost a lot as well.

Being so financially unstable these few months, I’ve been so mentally exhausted that I’ve finally gotten the courage to get therapy. Which personally is so frustrating because it’s what got me to go, college, is the reason why I have therapy. Especially when my family has made my relationship so mentally emotionally not okay. I’ve been in arguments to stay here, and if I upset them badly, I could lose most of my financial dependence from them. I could go homeless, that is my reality.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) I don’t want to give up on college, I love the experiences. My dad is the one telling me to keep going, even if we don’t have the money. (FAFSA or not) I don’t want to feel like I wasted my time.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Offer more grants, better stability for housing like payment plans, on-and-off campus transportation, jobs on campus actually offer GOOD hours (I’m not even given 10hrs for one, my other job hasn’t given me a single shift since my training a month ago). Make campus feel like a safe space day and night.”

—1st Generation, Latinx, 21, Transfer Student Junior.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) How expensive it is. I would love to do the masters program after graduating but it's impossible to support myself and go to school at the same time.

I left a few years ago because I was afraid of taking out loans, and came back because I decided taking out loans was better than working an entry level job forever. There are a lot of financial aid opportunities which is great for helping with tuition for those that qualify but being able to afford rent and food too while going to school is really difficult.

I like Sac State.”

—Anonymous

“I have to work in order to support myself and it can get hard and makes me question if college is even worth it. I am not interested in pursuing the major I am in at the moment since many students who graduate with this major struggle financially.

I am already too deep in to leave, I have one more year left. Also, I am trying to accomplish this goal for my parents who came to this country with no college education.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Provide more online courses”

—1st generation College student, Mexican-American

“I didnt choose to leave college, but it was impossible to get a counselor to speak to about my career path. I had taken so many unnecessary classes because I didn't have someone to guide me. I finally found out Veterans have their own counselor (at my former community college) and that was the only way I can get an appt with one. I also think this is more common than people know.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) I have a plan that I can actually follow

I'm so disappointed in (my) program and the professors. I came to sac state because I heard they had a good ... program, but I never thought I would come to class to have the professor read out of outdated (2018-2019) slides or slides that still have President Obama on it as a current president. Reading out of a Powerpoint, the entire class is not teaching. We are (studying a profession that works with people), yet there is little opportunity in the classes to socialize with other students and get to network. I suggest looking into the program and some professors because I know many students who share the same feelings.”

—I am a 38 y/o Hispanic female, Served 17 years in the Army, first-generation college student, bilingual

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) The speed of deadlines - how quickly material is covered and needs to be learned, punishment for not dropping classes early enough, fiscal punishment for dropping classes, the vast gap in teaching styles across departments and professors.

The desire to learn is keeping me here but is overshadowed by the preceding issues and the strain on mental health to try to maintain grades while simultaneously trying to understand the material.

Standardize teaching methods (professors learning how to teach and being lenient with assignments - instead focusing on student understanding and learning rather than information regurgitation). Or lean more heavily into departmentalization: have the student's department teach all of their necessary courses (GE's etc) so the student isn't having to learn the English dept's teaching style while being a Phys major for example. This causes extra strain and workload on the student and prevents them from passing classes or understanding the material in an efficient manner.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Better communication (but less micromanaging) between departments, staff, and admin. Most admin just send students on a goose chase rather than giving them concrete information for their success. Y'all are also usually more focused on numbers (finish in four) rather than what is realistic for students (most STEM majors will not be able to finish in four and if they do it's usually through wildly unhealthy methods).”

—First gen immigrant, STEM major, part time student and employee, chronically depressed.

“I wanted to leave college because I'm very unsure about what I want to do. I don't want to waste financial aid on an education that might lead me to nowhere. While in school, I have to dedicate most, if not all, of my time and energy into school. I won't have much time to commit to anything else. I really wanted to step into the work field just for the experience. As I am already of legal adult age, I'm scared of still not being able to decide what I want to do. I'm scared that the major I graduate with won't be of use to me at all. I'm also scared that if I want to graduate in a certain major I'm not good at (but it will likely bring about very good job prospects) then I might risk losing the support of financial aid if I do really bad in that major. I'm just at that stage where I feel like maybe leaving now is better than later when I have already invested so much time and energy into it. I want to be good at what I major in, do well in it, get some experience, be passionate about it, have job prospects that promises good pay and stability. However, when I do my research, I just don't see all of that. I see discouragement in every aspect of what I just stated. My family said they'd support in whatever decision I make, but I don't even know if college is the right decision for me. It makes me scared to not know what to expect for the future.

I'm choosing to stay because I felt like maybe the experience of college is better than nothing. If I'm not in college, where else would I be able to learn what I am learning now. The classes are hard but they've given me very new and important insights I've never known before. And school has taught me more skills than I would ever consider learning on my own. Staying in school would only improve me, so why not stay? And besides, my education is fully covered by the government and I am one of the lucky students to have been able to join the EOP program offered at this school. I'm thankful that I am being provided with a proper education and I feel that maybe I should just stick with it. Also, a lot of jobs out there requires some sort of degree. Even if I still don't make it out there using my degree, it's better to have it than not. I want to try for a bachelor's degree and go on from there. The skills that I will develop along the way won't be all that I'll need in all of those future career goals, however, they will be the stepping stone to helping me get there. All of my research tells me that many people still have to return to college and higher education in order to chase after certain jobs anyway. If this is the case, why not earn the degree earlier and move up from there than doing it later. A bachelor degree and the skills I learn while in school does not guarantee me any sort of a perfect future, but it does give me an opportunity to better myself and gain respect from those around me. It'll be an invaluable learning experience. At my time and youth, all I have is time and I should use it wisely. I can't imagine using my time better anywhere else than going to college. Even if I work, I'd likely have to return to schooling anyways, so why not just keep at it. Life is hard and it'll only get harder. For every small choice you make, you'll always have a price to pay in one form or another. In choosing to stay in college, I'll lose a lot of time to build deep personal relationships, live a life without college stress, and I'll just be suffering a lot more mentally rather than physically. I'm a fairly frail, petite, and short type of gal. I'm not who one would consider to be the healthiest and strongest of people. Due to this, I know I won't be able to withstand a lot of laborious work that comes without a proper degree. I don't have many options here, and I think staying in college and getting some sort of degree would better prepare me for jobs that won't kill me off too fast.

I don't really know what Sacramento State University can do better for me. If anything, I just wish for this place to be a safe environment for me to learn and make those small mistakes that I can learn from. I want constructive feedback and challenging materials that would not

only support me towards a career, but for simply being a human. Although I don't have much time to participate in all those wellness programs that the school offers, I really do appreciate knowing that things are being taught not only to shape me into an employee, but to also shape me to become a better person. I want to become a better version of me, not just professionally, but as a whole. I went to the school to be a part of that change.”

— Hello there! I am a student at Sacramento State. I'm currently in my the second semester of freshman year as a first generation college student with the EOP program. I'm from a Hmong-American family, being the second oldest of five siblings. My family is considered to be quite the traditional Hmong Asian family. We believe and practice shamanism and the animist religion, which revolves around things like spirits, ghosts, souls, and other similar stuff to those things.

“I have been considering leaving college because at my age is hard to learn the material and Sacramento State University usually doesn't have tutoring for my classes in my major. A second reason is tuition isn't cheap.

I always dreamed of graduating from University.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I know that we have to fill out fasfa but the money I make yearly is base on tuition assistance. As a single mother this is hard to pay 3000 dollars in rent and don't get credit in our tuition assistance for any expenses like rent.”

—Latina first generation attending a university. Single mother at 14 years old and now 46 years old struggling to finish school.

“In 2015, I attended Sacramento State as an incoming freshman straight out of High School. I had my first daughter in my Senior year of high school and I think that is what made me have a lot of troubles staying in college. I had postpartum depression, I was 18, and I was also helping take care of my grandfather who had Lewy Body Dementia and COPD Stage 4. I was under a lot of external stress.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) I was not interested in working minimum wage jobs anymore and after I was academically disqualified in 2015, I waited 3 years to return to school.

I do think it's a little unfair that my prior GPA is being held over my head, but I have learned to navigate my way past hurdles in life. After losing my mom to Glioblastoma in 2021, my goal in life is to earn a degree. I had to change my major from Psychology after returning here, so I think Sac State could do better in helping someone like me graduate in a reasonable time frame. I was so close, just to have it taken from me.”

—I am a 27 year old, first generation college student. I am a mother to two children and also a Guardian to my youngest sister. I am African American and White.

“After my high school graduation during 2019, I went straight to a community college for 2 and a half years. While everyone had the ‘best’ majors or found their passion, I was lost in life and kept switching majors during my time there. I couldn't think of anything besides working in the art field but didn't know what was right for me. The majors I changed are, undecided, Theatre acting, Graphic Design, and Digital Media. During my free time, I would draw scenes and storyboards when I got an idea and yet those inspirations never lasted. In my heart I knew that I wanted to do storytelling and videography but I had families tell me that I need a reality job not a fantasy job. It made me doubt life for some time. I couldn't keep up my grades and didn't qualify for scholarships because I didn't have a 3.0 GPA. I really felt like a failure and ugly inside because I wished that I was just as smart or interested in all of these medical or high tech jobs like most students around me. I didn't know what was wrong with me and I had always thought of quitting school to follow my brother's footsteps of working full time retail to earn fast money. It was clearly difficult to juggle school, a job, and my unstable mental baggage. Also I didn't have reliable friends by my side to mentally support me. Despite all of this, I completed my GED with a Film degree transfer by fall of 2021 at a 2.7 GPA, and I knew that I wanted to take a rest and think about my life again.

In January of 2022, I was hired as a full time 8am-40pm production worker at a private company warehouse with the help of my cousins and brother, then my life changed from there. There was no more stress about my parents complaining about my major in school anymore, and homework or assignments being late on Sunday night at 11:59pm. I was able to watch all of the shows I wanted, sleep, bake, and go out. The repetitive schedule of heading to work, coming home, getting knocked out, getting up to eat, and showering was just as difficult during the time I was still attending college. Work was mentally and physically hard, it didn't matter who you are. Coworkers, employers, and many people around me were lazy, demanding, and no one cared besides fighting to be at the top of the chain. I experienced a lot, made sure I did everything I was told to, held onto my feelings even if it got to me, had people only negatively connected with me so they could gain an advantage for themselves, and I saw family coworkers turn against each other. I didn't enjoy any of that at all. It was heartbreaking and it made myself feel worse about myself and those around me.

At a point in 2022, I told myself that this is a learning experience and I need to find motivation. I can't afford to make enemies because I am a nobody. As time went on, I randomly laughed at myself to sleep and created a great idea of turning my work experience into a comedy script. That stuck with me for days and my inspiration grew deeper. I continued my storyboard from 2020 and it is in the process of becoming a webtoon. I was a happy virus again and casually applied to CSU schools... I resigned from my job in December of 2022 with no regrets, attended spring orientation transfer students of 2022, and am now currently taking classes. It's a weird feeling to be back in school, but I'm proud to be back.

I came back to school because of some hardships I went through. My older brother told me that he'll support me to stay in school because he believes in me and to take one for the team after I had figured out that I will probably be the only sibling that'll attend school. I didn't want to disappoint my parents of raising me and not going to college and for all of the things my older brother had sacrificed for me, I am willing to go back to earn a BA. I want to prove to the public that having an art major is just as great as any other major. And that no one

should be ashamed of themselves for it. I want to be the person to open doors for those who wants to be in the same route as me in the future.

I believe Sacramento State University should offer more lecture talk hosts with individuals who had real raw experiences in the industry of their careers. Have a mentor and mentee event for every major. Provide more internships opportunities from out of town/state/country for all majors rather than just a few majors.”

— I am a 21 year old female, Hmong American that transferred to my 3rd year at Sacramento state. The estimated graduation year for me is 2024-2025. I am the fourth child out of five siblings and is attending the same campus as the last sibling. I am a second - generation college student that is single with no children and I'm a full time student.

“At my city college I had to take two inconsecutive semesters off due to poor grades. After transferring to Sac State I took one semester off on purpose to travel on my own during that semester. After that, I had to take one semester off from poor grades, then later I was kicked out of the university for a year and a half due to poor grades and deaths in the family during the pandemic. I had to reapply to come back. My first semester back was last Fall and now I am about to graduate at the end of this spring.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) Firstly, it was because I was lucky enough to have stable finances and housing while in school. In city college I had a lot of support from grants and organizations for being a former foster youth. At Sac State I didn't have much of that support any more, but I received funds to support school from insurance claims after my mother died.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Provide funding for housing and tuition, and a better appeal process for financial aid. I never received any financial aid while at Sac state, even though that was what completely held me up during my 9 years at city college. Every time I appealed for financial aid at Sac Sate I was denied for excessive units. I had to do the same thing at my city college for every semester and I was always approved if I was honest and making progress. I was also denied in the appeal process when trying to get back into Sac State, even though I had large extenuating circumstances due from my mother and grandfather passing away (among other personal issues). At Sac State I always just felt like a number and a way for the university to make money.”

— Half Mexican, Half Northern European, 33 years old, I transferred from my city college to Sac State in Fall 2017 after being a student there since Fall 2008, and only taking two non consecutive semesters off. I have been apart of the Guardian Scholars Program and club since my first semester at my city college. I helped to found the club and then program at my city college. I was the president of it for a number of years before transferring to Sac State. So I was ward of the court from 16 to 18 years old. I also grew up in a very rural and impoverished place in the mountains of California without proper electricity and plumbing. I was "homeschooled" for the majority of my k-12 years as well.

“I have returned to college a few times over the years. The first time I left was my first year out of high school. I wasn’t ready for college at that age. I needed to take care of other things in my life. I returned to college seriously when I was 24 and completed my associates degree on time. After I received my associates, I started working full time and found it very difficult to fit classes in my schedule as I was stuck working off shifts. Presently, I am back to school seriously with the intention of finishing due to a provision in my union contract from my work that allows me to take a leave of absence and keep my job. I am only at sac state because of this provision, otherwise it would be too difficult for me.

I think about finishing my bachelors degree all the time. It is a lifelong goal of mine. I will not have a problem staying this time around because I am living off of my savings and can freely study due to my leave of an absence.

I feel like some of the classes are unprofessionally put together. Other than that, I love this place!”

—36 years old. Caucasian. Senior year.

“I’m constantly in a state of worry, so I often think about if I would want to leave college; but there were two specific times in which I nearly left college.

First Time: I was a (student in a) major who was unhappy with what he was doing, but instead of leaving college, I simply switched majors to something that is much more enjoyable for me.

Second Time: I was in a deep depression at one point and felt as though nothing I did mattered and that I should just leave what I enjoy and immediately start working instead of pursuing an English degree.

I mostly stayed because I enjoy what I’m being taught. Sure, an English degree would be wonderful for me and would perhaps allow me to get ahead of others in the workforce, but I’m in English because it makes me happy. Along with this, the courses and the professors of Sacramento State’s English department helped me to realize why I enjoy literature so much and that there are so many avenues in life with literature that I never realized even existed.

On another note, I enjoy college-life. There are a lot of fun things to do at Sacramento State and it makes me upset that I didn’t

A) come out of my shell earlier

B) get to enjoy a lot of it because I also was enrolled in college during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

I genuinely have no idea if Sacramento State University could do anything differently in order to help me (besides making parking free, however, this is merely a dream).

I have explored my own feelings on life in many different ways thanks to the countless options and opportunities that are available at Sacramento State, their wonderful community, and their great professors.... I couldn’t be more thankful that I chose to go here.”

— A 21-year-old, cisgender, and mostly white male who happens to be in his last semester at Sacramento State. As an additional note, I was enrolled in Sacramento State during the entirety of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Introduction

Millions of students enroll in higher education in the nation each year. Some will complete their educational journeys, yet many may struggle to stay and still others will go.

Those Who Leave College

The number of Americans with some college but no completion of a credential or degree (SCNC) rose to 40.4 million, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center report, [“Some College, No Credential,”](#) for the most recent academic period studied. This growth of 1.4 million students “is due to a lack of re-enrollment among the 39 million previously identified SCNC students and the 2.3 million new SCNC students (recent stop-outs).” By state, California has the highest number by far, at 6.6 million SCNC students, and the 6% rate of recent stop-outs of the national total SCDC population is also in the higher range.

Those Considering Leaving College

And many of the students who are enrolled in higher education are struggling. According to the Gallup/Lumina Foundation report, [“The State of Higher Education,”](#) based on a survey of students currently enrolled in college, 41% surveyed said that it was “very difficult” or “difficult” to remain enrolled in their program, up a bit from last year. When asked whether or not the student had considered withdrawing from their school for at least one term in the past six months, 41% of students responded yes, a number that has risen steadily in the past few years the survey has been done.

The Risks of Stopping Out

Once a student stops-out, they are statistically less likely to come back—and those who do are less likely to complete to degree. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center report, [“Some College, No Credential,”](#) notes that fewer SCNC students re-enrolled than in the previous year (down 8.4%, totaling 864,800 students) and fewer SCNC students persevered into their second year of re-enrollment (down 4.3%, totaling 508,700 students) from the previous year.

A student may discontinue college for any number of significant reasons, especially in the wake of a global pandemic, continuing economic uncertainty, and mental health epidemic, and all of this in addition to the problems long associated with college enrollment, including cost, time, and competing work and/or family responsibilities. Yet research tells us that for the student, achievement of a college degree means more career paths and promotions available, greater likelihood of financial prosperity and security, and better health and quality of life. The nation needs its most educated workforce to maintain its standing in the world economy and for its judicial, political, healthcare, and education systems, and other important sectors of society. And we, as an institution, need our fullest, most diverse student body for the betterment of all our campus experiences, learning, and scholarship.

This Project—and Our Work

Listening to Students Who Ever Thought About Leaving College or Did Leave College and Came Back is the unfolding of survey responses from students on this campus this year, centering on the different factors in their difficulty in enrollment and consideration of leaving or actually leaving—and what gets them to stay or come back. Each section of the project will focus on one key aspect of keeping students on-track and successful in college life through to completion.

This section, Part 11, focuses on the need for students to find their path in their college journey.

Part 11: The Need to Find One's Path

As the preceding section notes, too many students leave their higher education, some never to return, and so many students currently enrolled in college consider leaving academia, at risk of not returning once they do so. The reasons are many, but one is not finding a fulfilling academic and/or future career path, research has long told us.

Some students don't know what major to declare, what career path sounds good for them, or both. If students have declared a major, they may not know what career to pursue in that major, or even if they have chosen the right major for themselves. And some students know exactly what they want to do and study, but find their path blocked by different factors in a desired program of study or their career choice, and now are searching for a new path.

The Number of Students Undecided

It has long been estimated that 20% to 50% of students enter college without knowing their major, although one study put the number at 9% ("[The American Freshman](#)"). Whatever the number may have been, the rate is likely now higher. In the ACT research issue brief, "[Influence of the Coronavirus Pandemic on High School Seniors' Views: College and Career Choices, Challenges, and Opportunities](#)," the graduating class of 2023 was surveyed regarding how the pandemic had affected them in relation to their thoughts regarding college. One of the top challenges for high school seniors then—who are first year college students now—was education or career undecidedness. They used to know what they wanted to do in terms of major and career, but the pandemic changed this. "Some graduating high school students indicated that before the pandemic, they had relatively clear ideas about...majors they wanted to pursue, and careers they thought would be in their future. During the pandemic these students became less sure of their ideas and more uncertain about their options."

Adding to the number of students coming into college undecided are the students who've declared a major but now are considering changing their majors. About a third of college students who are in bachelor's degree programs change their major at least once and one in ten students more than once in their first three years of enrollment, the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) has reported. Others estimate higher rates, up to 85%, which may be due to the added number of students who change majors after the initial three years of enrollment.

And then there are the students who may be sure of their major, but not sure about their career path after graduating with that major. According to a [Student Voice Survey, "Life After College,"](#) by *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse last year, when college students were asked what stage they're currently in when it comes to choosing a career to pursue after graduation:

- 5% of students said they don't have any potential career in mind,
- 50% of students were exploring their options in a broad area or specific field, and
- 25% reported they are somewhat decided or definitely decided on a career.

In sum, many students on our campus at some point will struggle with these decisions about academic and/or career paths that, truly, can change the trajectory of their lives.

Their Reasons for Not Yet Deciding or Wanting to Change a Major

“There are as many reasons for being undecided as there are students,” noted one of the seminal scholars in this area, Virginia Gordon. Reasons can include lack of knowledge about major and career options, indecision due to competing choices or dissatisfaction with choices, a student’s preferred major or career choice no longer a viable option, and feeling pressure to decide on paths that may be more what their parents or peers want for them. Reasons for considering changing a major the student has declared include those prior, with some added ones: Difficulty getting into the program’s classes, feeling unprepared or not suited for the major, disinterest in the classes, lack of engagement with faculty or sense of belonging in the program—and/or the student discovers new interests, talents, or paths they can pursue with greater passion.

Some Changing of Views

The undecided student population has been studied for about a century now, and with time, some things change. For one, other names are sometimes used instead of the term, “undecided,” such as exploratory, open, or undeclared, which may be seen as more positive in connotation or more in line with a more active part the student plays in the process of major selection. Then, too, it’s often thought that changing a major, especially later in the student’s college years, is detrimental to the student’s likelihood of graduation and time-to-degree, but research shows otherwise, in many cases. An Education Advisory Board Student Success Collaborative study, [“How Late Is Too Late: Myths and Facts About the Consequences of Switching Majors,”](#) found the following: Students can change majors as late as their senior year without impact on graduation rate, and the median time-to-degree stays constant for students changing majors through to their fifth semester, with even a quarter of students changing majors in their sixth or seventh semester still graduating in four years.

The Benefits of Choosing a Good Major for Themselves

Choosing a major that the student feels is right for them carries tremendous benefit. The student has increased likelihood of succeeding in college, including greater engagement and enjoyment of their studies, and satisfaction and fulfillment in their college experience. Declaring a major also puts the student into a program of study where it may be easier to make connections with peers, professors, and major advisors, and have greater access to programs and services, opportunities specific to the program of study, and advice about and assistance with coursework from classmates. Declaring a major, as well, feels like a significant milestone for a student, a step up and into more of a direct line to their career goals and personal aspirations.

One of the most significant benefits of students choosing a major right for them is increased retention in college, research has noted for many years, as well as more recently. According to the Gallup/Lumina report, [“The State of Higher Education,”](#) when asked in a survey what was important to their being able to remain enrolled in their college studies, one of the top factors, reported by 52% of the college student respondents, was enjoyment of the program, including course content and social interactions. When exploring further, the report notes that 19% of students who had not recently considered stopping out and 27% of students who had recently considered stopping out said a change in program or major was an important factor to their remaining.

In this Document

To follow, you will find suggestions for students, as well as for faculty and staff to help students, to find the right path for them in their college studies.

For Students

Needing to Choose A Good Major and Career Path for Themselves

Some students knew what they wanted to study and do in their future careers coming into Sac State or before—and know they are on their right path here.

Other students may not feel certain the path they chose is the right one for them, and still other students may not know at all what their path should be.

And for some students, finding a good major to lead to a good career for them is one of the hardest things to do in their college journey. But it is important!

Choosing a good major for yourself can give you greater purpose, direction, and meaning in college life. Your choice in major shapes the courses you will take, the knowledge you gain, the people you will get to know, and the types of opportunities you will have here and after college.

If You Haven't Yet Chosen a Major

What's your major? What do you want to do when you graduate? These are frequent questions, but not all students may have the answers yet. It's okay not to know your major or career path right away! College is where you figure that out. Many students don't know when they enter college, but you have a few years (here or elsewhere before transferring in) to decide. According to [campus policy on declaration of major](#), lower division students should declare their major by 60 units and undeclared upper division transfer and returning students must do so before registering for their second term at Sac State.

If You're Unsure of Your Choice in Major

That's okay, too. It's fairly common for a student to enter into their chosen program of study with doubts or to then have doubts: *Am I on the right path? Am I doing the right thing?* Some students find themselves in a major they thought they'd like, but now are reconsidering their decision due to such factors as not being sure of their fit with the major, how much interest they have in it, or their aptitude for it. Other students find themselves with competing interests in other programs of study, career choices, or both. If you're unsure of your program of study, then you can change. It's important to try to find a good major for you. A [BestColleges study](#) conducted last year found that while a little over 80% of college graduates surveyed found their college experience to be a good investment, about 60% said they would go back and change their majors, if they could, with about a quarter saying they would make the change to pursue their passion.

Finding the Major and Career Path Right for You

Take joy in the unfolding and discovering of who you are and what you want to study and do in the working world someday! Being unsure can be exciting—this may be the one time in your life your future is not precisely laid out for you, and there are so many different paths you might take. It's empowering to be able to define or redefine your sense of self by choosing your path.

And please don't let pressure overwhelm you. In the working world, many jobs just require a college degree—any college degree—rather than a degree in a specific field of study. People also switch careers often these days, too, with many not doing anything in relation to what they

originally majored in during college. All of this is simply to say that finding a good program of study for you is important, while also lowering the pressure of finding the “perfect” major or career path.

So enjoy the journey! *It’s exciting to explore yourself and all of the opportunities available to you in career and academic paths!*

If you haven't yet decided on a major—or are unsure about the major you have chosen—then to follow are a some key ways to explore majors and career paths right for you:

Explore Who You Are—and Who You Want to Be

Deciding on academic and professional goals will require some good self-reflection of who you are now and the future self and life you envision.

Ask yourself:

- ***What are your passions and interests?*** Consider the things you love to learn, do, and talk about. What are things you find intriguing or call to you? What fills you with excitement and drive?
- ***What are your aptitudes and abilities?*** Consider where your talents lie and what skills you’ve developed. What are the things you are good at? What are areas you are not-so-good-at-yet but want to develop?
- ***What are your values and beliefs?*** Consider deeply held values and important beliefs you have. What do you believe to be good, right, desirable, or worthy in this world? Or not?
- ***What classes appeal to you?*** What subjects in your past classes have you been drawn to? What subjects do you think you would be interested in? What subjects have you found yourself naturally good at?
- ***What type of work do you think you want to do?*** Consider the type of work you think you might enjoy, in general. For example, do you like to work with your hands, work with people, work outside, work with numbers, work with words, and/or work with creativity?
- ***What type of work setting is important to you?*** Consider the type of work or work-life you would like. For example: Do you like more or less structure to your work? Do you like to work on your own or work more with others? What type of schedule is important to you? Are you willing to travel or relocate for a job?
- ***What are your shorter-term and longer-term goals?*** Consider your professional, academic, and personal goals, and how these may relate and impact one another. For example, do you want to go straight to interviewing for jobs after graduation or straight into graduate school or come back someday for higher levels of education? Do you want to be in a job with a particular company, start your own business, and so on.
- ***Further questions to ask:*** What did you want to grow up to be or do, as a child? If you could have your dream job now, what would it be?

There are also any number of self-assessments online to help you better understand who you are and what you’re looking for, including the Myers-Briggs Personality Tests and True Colors Personality Tests. The Career Center on campus also offers the [FOCUS 2 Career](#) online self-directed program that helps students to learn more about their personal strengths and attributes.

When it comes to choosing your path in college, there are a few different ways to proceed:

You can explore areas of study and majors and then the specific career paths of those you find of interest. Or you can work backward—explore careers to decide on the one(s) you are interested in and work back to the major(s) needed for working in that area.

Explore Areas of Study

Sacramento State is home to eight academic Colleges, each with different departments, that in total offer over 75 bachelor's degree programs.

To learn more about different programs of study:

- ***Do Your Research.*** Check out the campus [Colleges, Departments, and Majors website](#), which lists all of the different Colleges at Sac State. There you can click on the departments that sound interesting to you and then explore the degree opportunities offered. For the College of Business and the College of Education (which don't have departments listed), you can click on the undergraduate programs section and look through there. The [Campus Catalog](#) also lists each of the academic Colleges on the left if you scroll down, and you can click on these to see each of the departments in a specific College (for the College of Education, click on "Undergraduate Studies in Education" first). Then, click on a department in that College to see the degree programs offered, and you'll see the description of a specific program of study, the coursework entailed, and the career possibilities for students who graduate with that degree. This and other information may be found on each department's website, as well, or available in pamphlets in the departments, too. It should also be noted that a student may design their own interdisciplinary major when existing programs of study do not meet the student's needs (please see the [Special Major Policy](#) for further information and requirements).
- ***Take Some Exploratory Classes.*** Try enrolling in classes that sound interesting to you, to get a sense of different programs of study and what seems like a good fit and connects with you. This is one of the reasons why taking general education courses is so important! It's also helpful to try introductory courses in major fields of study that interest you.

As you consider different programs of study, you want to think about what interests you and what you think you'll be good at (but please don't underestimate yourself and your ability to learn and grow!). You also want to take note of any prerequisites for admittance into the program and the course requirements of major choices.

The [Career Center](#) services may be very helpful to you in exploration of majors and programs of studies. You can:

- Make an appointment for [Career Counseling](#) to explore career paths and majors or to assess your strengths, skills, values and interests to see what types of jobs might be right for you.
- Click on the [What Can I Do With This Major? Website](#) to see the career possibilities of various majors.
- Take the [FOCUS 2 Career](#) online self-directed program that helps students to learn more about their personal strengths and attributes, explore careers and majors to match, and more.

Explore Careers

Another way to choose a major—or to choose what you want to do with a major you have already declared—is to explore different careers in terms of such things as salary and earning potential, job demand, educational requirements, in-demand skills, and what work-life for that occupation would typically be like. There are many ways to explore future professions, including doing some research, informational interviewing of someone in a job you want to learn more about, job shadowing, interning, and more.

The [Career Center](#) services will again be very helpful to you in career exploration. You can:

- Make an appointment for [Career Counseling](#) to explore career paths and majors or to assess your strengths, skills, values, and interests to see what types of jobs might be right for you.
- View the [“Explore What You Want to Do through Career Center Services” On Demand Workshop Video](#).
- Click on the [What Can I Do With This Major? Website](#) to see the career possibilities of various majors.
- Take the [FOCUS 2 Career](#) online self-directed program that helps you learn more about your personal strengths and attributes, explore careers and majors to match, and more.
- Check out the [Labor Market Insights Website](#), where you can look up labor market trends to explore top employment opportunities, salaries, educational requirements, and more.
- Check out the [California Career Zone Website](#), which provides information about California’s industry sectors, in terms of careers, employment, pay, growth, and more.
- Utilize the [Sac State Career Network](#), which offers insight, advice, and networking opportunities with Sac State alumni. Students can have conversations with alumni who are in the industry or company of the student’s interest, get their resume critiqued, engage in mock interviews for practice, and more.

Explore through Internships

Internships are a great way to explore career paths, while also gaining valuable experience, strengthening professional skills, and making helpful connections that can lead to rewarding job opportunities! Internships may be full- or part-time, on or off campus, in-person or virtual, paid or unpaid, and for units or not—and some majors require interning for degree completion.

Here are a few different ways to look for internships:

- Explore the [Career Center Internship Services website](#), which offers tools and resources to help students identify and obtain an internship. The website provides further information, including links to [Handshake: Find Internships](#), [the CA Internship Network](#), and [CSU Entertainment Alliance Internships](#). Students may also schedule an online appointment for [Career Counseling](#) to get help with internship search strategies, cover letters and resumes, interviewing preparation, and more, or look at the [Job and Internship Handbook](#) and [Job and Internship Search Strategies video](#) for helpful information.
- Explore further internships in your current program of study. You can do this in a few different ways: Some of the academic Colleges have a webpage on internships: The [College of Arts and Letters Internship website](#), the [College of Business Internships and Job Board website](#), the [College of Engineering and Computer Science Internships and Career Services webpage](#), and the [College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies Internships website](#). Specific departments within a College may also have further internship opportunities or an entire internship office or coordinator.

- There are still more ways to learn about internships, including checking for internship opportunities with the campus programs and organizations of interest to you and campus bulletin boards. Forming connections with classmates and faculty within your major or area of study can also prove fruitful in finding internships.

Talk with Someone

Discussing with someone choice in major or career can help you to talk through thoughts and feelings, work through the advantages and disadvantages of choices, get insight into new paths to explore, and provide support in the sometimes daunting, pressure-filled task of choosing or changing a major.

There are a variety of people you can talk things over with:

- ***Career Counselors:*** Make an appointment for [Career Counseling](#) to explore career paths and majors or to assess your strengths, skills, values and interests to see what types of jobs might be right for you.
- ***Advisors:*** Advising options are plentiful. The [Academic Advising Center](#) helps students to clarify and implement their educational plans, and also offers [Undeclared and Expressed Major Advising](#) to assist 2nd Year/Sophomore students with major and career exploration to ensure a timely declaration of major. For students already in a program of study, but not sure what degree in that department to pursue, Major Advisors are faculty who assist students in planning an academic program appropriate for each student, and are also helpful in the exploration of career options for that field of study. Students in declared majors will see a list of Major Advisors in their Student Center (under their “To Do List”) or may inquire further at a College’s or department’s website or office regarding advising in that specific field of study or major. Additionally, the [College Success Centers](#), which provide academic advising, may also offer basic career advising or career exploration courses.
- ***Faculty and Staff:*** Most instructors enjoy talking about what they love about their field, the areas of study within a department, and corresponding career options. You can ask staff members, as well, about their major chosen as an undergraduate and what they enjoy about their positions on campus.
- ***Mentors:*** A mentor in college is someone who guides you through your college journey and helps you to clarify your goals and achieve your dreams. Mentors can be informal—for example, a faculty or staff member with whom you enjoy talking and find to be someone you can turn to with questions about college. You can also be formally assigned a mentor, by, for example, [signing up for a U Mentor](#) here at Sac State or inquiring about other mentoring opportunities on campus and in the different programs of study. You might also have an informal or formal mentor in the working world in a career you want to explore, and can talk with them.
- ***Students:*** Your classmates and friends on campus can also be very helpful. Ask them about the major they’ve selected or are considering and their reasons why. If they’re already in a major, ask about their experiences and thoughts regarding their program.
- ***Family and Friends:*** They know you and want the best for you, and they may see strengths and interests that you have that you may not see as well or at all, and offer you helpful advice, insight, and support.

Explore Interests

College is a great time to explore interests and aptitudes in campus clubs, college events, and volunteer/service opportunities. Here are just a few of the many opportunities the campus offers:

- [Student Organizations and Leadership \(SO&L\)](#): Offers close to 300 student-led clubs and organizations, including those that are academic, cultural, fraternal, political, professional, recreational, religious, service, and special interest in nature.
- [Sacramento State Campus Calendar of Events](#): Provides listings of upcoming events, including program workshops and events and informative forums, lectures, the performing arts, and exhibits.
- [Associated Students, Inc. \(ASI\)](#): Serves as the official governing body of Sacramento State and provides the framework for students to become engaged in campus life through participating in student government, joining campus committees, advocating for higher education, planning and promoting ASI events, and more.
- [KSSU Radio](#): Is the student-run radio providing regular programming for the campus, including a range of different radio personalities and music genres, interviews, podcasts, and broadcastings for Hornet athletic events. Students interested in volunteering may help out with events or deejay an on-air show for the station or host a podcast (and KSSU folks with help show you how to do this and get your voice and creativity out there!).
- [UNIQUE](#): Offers students the valuable volunteer opportunity to plan, promote, and produce quality campus events such as concerts, lectures, performing arts, and multi-cultural programs.
- [Student Research Center](#): Provides opportunities for students to share their research and creativity in poster sessions, campus fairs, and more, and to collaborate with faculty on research, scholarship, and creative activities.
- [Community Engagement Center](#): Offers students opportunities to develop the skills necessary to become engaged in their communities by volunteering in a number of ways.
- And there are so many more events and groups than those listed here, so be sure to check out the campus website and notices on campus all around for further opportunities!

If You're Reconsidering the Major You've Chosen

If you're not sure your major is the right one for you, then any of the suggestions discussed previously for exploring majors and occupations may be helpful. You especially want to explore the career options for that major you're in and unsure about, because what you do on the job may be different from the coursework you're doing, depending on the specific career you pursue.

Here are also some further considerations: Think about how far along you are to achieving the degree and what coursework remains. You may find that the class or two you're taking right now are not as characteristic of the major classes you have left to take, or that you're so close to finishing, it may be best to continue forward. You may also want to explore other majors you're interested in, and then do an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the potential new major and the one you have now.

From all of this, you may decide to stick with your major, now feeling more confident with your choice. If not, you may decide to pursue other options, such as changing your major to one you

like more, double-majoring or adding a minor (of either your original major or the newer program of study you like more), or even designing a new [Special Major \(or Minor\)](#). For all of these routes, be sure to consider the ramifications, especially with regard to cost and time-to-degree, and consult with an advisor to see how to make this process as efficient as possible for you moving forward.

A Few Last Important Considerations

Remember that Your Happiness is Important

When choosing your major and career path, please put yourself first in decision making! Don't let other people decide for you, such as parents or influential others, because this can ultimately lower your motivation and satisfaction in that major or line of work. Listen to their advice and guidance, but make the decision based on what you think and feel is best for you.

Be sure, as well, to not choose or change majors by default, meaning on the basis of such factors as the perceived ease of course load or scheduling classes, well-liked professors in a field, or where your friends are. If a major or program interests you and has these things as well, then great! But these shouldn't be the only factors in major selection.

Please also don't make money the sole basis for choosing a career path and program of study. Many folks have well-paying jobs that they don't like or care about, yet spend the bulk of their waking hours doing. *Your happiness is important!*

Follow Your Dreams

You want what you end up studying and doing for work to give you meaning and purpose in life. But sometimes we block ourselves or talk ourselves out of opportunities and options. In deciding on academic and career paths, please don't limit yourself. Sometimes students underestimate their abilities or engage in negative self-talk that they can't make it in a certain program or be hired in a certain profession. It's important to be realistic in self-appraisal, to see areas for improvement, yet also strengths. It's also important to believe in yourself, hold a growth mindset, and take the steps you need to find the resources and support, to grow and learn, to stay on the path to achieving your goals.

Our dreams are important. Please hold onto yours! A college degree isn't always a direct line to achieving every dream, but it's almost always the right step—if not the best step—to bringing you closer to accomplishing your goals, and certainly holds many other benefits to you, as well.

Our University President, Dr. Luke Wood, when once an undergraduate student, envisioned himself one day in the job he has now. He recalls how, as a student here on this campus, "I used to say all the time, 'Someday I'm going to be President of Sac State.'" Now, in his current position, he urges students to "*Find your purpose. What is your why? What is it that you want to be able to accomplish with your degree?*"

Officially Declaring a Major or Changing Your Major

To declare/change a major, students must visit an academic advisor or the department of the major they are trying to add so they can fill out a major declaration form. To delete a major or minor, students can use the form they will see for this available to them in OnBase.

For Staff and Faculty To Help Students to Find a Good Path for Themselves

Studies over the years of incoming first year students as well as continuing students in college show that an important goal is to find a major or career of interest to them. We can be tremendous sources of support, assistance, and inspiration to students in their journey to finding the right path for them.

To follow are suggestions for staff and faculty to aid students in this process:

Understand the Stress and Pressure that This Decision May Cause

What do you want to learn in the second half or so of your college years and what do you want to do for the rest of your life (potentially)? This is the huge question students are asked to decide, and one with significant consequences to their time here and future after they graduate. Some students take great joy in the adventure and freedom of determining their path, while for others, choosing a major and career can be confusing and overwhelming. And for some, it can be even harder. For example, students with anxiety may now feel they have this added stressor, and this when anxiety makes decision making harder. Older returning college students may feel a sense of shame, believing that they ought to know by this point in their life what they want to do. First generation college students and students of financially disadvantaged families often have less exposure to the professional world and world of college, limiting their understanding of the options of both.

Talk with Students about Their Goals

We can ask students about what they want to learn and think they might want to do for work someday, their interests and abilities, and hopes and dreams for the future. Such questions can get the student thinking and moving forward in the necessary self-reflection that's a good first step to choosing a major and future career. We can also be a sounding board—that person the student talks out their thoughts to about what they want to study and do for work someday, or why they're having second thoughts about the major they're in. We can listen actively and openly to what they say, ask helpful follow up questions, support the student in the process, and help them to clarify their goals and the way forward to achieving those goals (in, for example, advising or career counseling or other courses of action). *These can sure be meaningful conversations and pivotal moments for the student in their journey to finding their path in college life!* And showing the care and interest in asking and listening can mean so much!

Tell Your Story

Staff and faculty members can also share their own story of choosing their path. As an undergraduate student, how and why did you decide on a chosen major and career path? What other lines of work were you in and what was your experience with these? What do you like about your job now and/or the field you teach? Telling our own story, even struggles, of major and career choice can help the student feel more at ease in knowing that even a professor or University employee underwent this often uncertain process. And, if they haven't yet opened up about where they are in their own process of deciding, they may feel more comfortable now doing so with you. The student may also become interested in exploring for themselves the major, field, or occupation you discuss, as a possible academic or career path. If so, offering any suggestions or advice to help them along would likely be very much appreciated.

Encourage Students to Discover Their Interests

College is the time to try new things, explore interests, and learn about oneself—and there are so many great opportunities to do so here! From the learning provided in class on various topics or in student study or research work, to the numerous extracurricular opportunities in campus life and campus events, to internship, volunteer, and service experiences and studying abroad, this campus has so much to offer! Let students know the value of exploring all they are and can be while here in college, to see more of what there is in the world and what's needed, and to gain real life experience to help them to see what resonates with them. Empower students to get out of their comfort zones, experiment, and, in doing so, to be okay with making mistakes, and learning and growing from these.

Help Students to See Their Gifts

College is such a transformative time, characterized by immense learning about self and society, and growth in awareness, knowledge, beliefs, values, and voice. For most students, it is a time when the aptitudes awaiting within them start to bud and bloom, where potentialities become actualities, as gifts and talents are made known to the world. We can help students to better see and strengthen their talents and skills through compliments and encouragement to develop their talents further. As faculty and staff, we may not fully realize just how much our words may matter to a student in crystallizing awareness, use, and development of their gifts—or propelling them forward to a good academic and career path that allows them to put their skills and strengths to best use.

Show Connection to the Working World

Sometimes when students haven't decided or are unsure of their declared major, they may really flounder in college life, or wonder why they're even here. Highlighting connections to the working world with what students are learning or doing on campus can give a sense of purpose and reassurance that they are still preparing themselves for their future careers someday, even if not yet decided on a path of study. There is also research to show that some students especially need to see the connection of what they're learning to the world of work, including students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, first generation college students, and nontraditional, often older students who have returned to college. In our various spheres of campus work, we can show students applications to the working world. We can highlight the professional skills students learn in college life or their classes, including communication, critical and creative thinking, problem solving and decision making, teamwork and leadership, and the ability to interact and work effectively with a diversity of people. We can promote the many helpful services of the [Career Center](#). If we teach, we can also speak knowledgeably about the different career paths one can pursue from our field of study and invite guest speakers into our classes or program events who can provide insight into these occupations. We can also consider embedding major or career exploration into our courses in various ways (e.g., Career Center assignment, research a profession, go to a meeting of a campus club created for students to explore academic or professional interests and report takeaways).

Make Students Feel at Home in Their Program

When students don't feel a sense of connection with their professors, peers, and program, they are more likely to change their major—even one that really interested them. As faculty and staff in departments and programs all across campus, we can make students feel more at home in their chosen area of study in our interactions, correspondence, teaching, and advising. We can

welcome newly declared students into our department, including the students who have recently switched majors to now be in your program, who may feel especially nervous or uncertain, and students who are underrepresented in a particular program of study, such as women in STEM classes. We can provide opportunities throughout the semester for connection with us, faculty and staff, and with their peers to create that sense of belonging and fit in the program.

Make Programs and Paths Very Clear and Accessible

Some students may forego their desired academic paths and change majors when they discover that the way forward in their originally desired major program and into a future career with that major isn't made clear to them. This makes it essential that we critically assess—through a student's eyes—just how well we communicate what students need to know to progress in the program with ease and fulfillment. What aspects of a major or program of study could be made more immediately clear, written in a student-friendly way, and the information easily located or accessed? Specific courses to take, in what order recommended or required, the specific occupations that a major can translate into, what a major advisor does and how to find one, why internships are important or required in that program and how to get one, how to find academic support for the specific coursework in the program of study, how to find groups, events, and networking opportunities within the program, and more, all may need assessing for better student understanding and use. Making things as clear as possible also helps students to feel more at home in a department and confident in their way forward on their college path. It should also be noted that some students, too, abandon their desired program of study when the courses for it aren't offered at times or in modalities suited to their needs, including family and work responsibilities, making this also an important area to assess for possible improvement.

Help Students Struggling in Their Major

Sometimes students know coming into college or before exactly what they want to study and do for work someday, yet find themselves underprepared or struggling in the coursework of their selected program and now feel they must abandon their dreams. It may be that the student is experiencing difficulty in just one or a few courses that most students find difficult in the program, and if so, letting the student know this is the case may be the reassurance they need to persist. It may be that a different major is a better fit for the student's aptitudes and abilities, and it may be that there is a different major which can be an alternative path to that student's desired goal. But what if that isn't the case or isn't what the student wants? What if that major and/or career path coming out of it was a long held, treasured goal—and all the student needed was greater academic support, greater understanding of a growth mindset, greater knowledge of how to build academic self-efficacy, and greater encouragement to persist? With such support, that student may now choose to stay in the program and stay on track with what may be a cherished dream for them. And these students may even one day become the breakthrough researcher or prolific scholar in the field, a leader in the industry or pioneer in innovation in the practice!

Give Students Peace of Mind and Encouragement

It is one of the biggest—if not the biggest—decision they may have ever yet made—and a life-changing one. Let students know it's okay to take their time or change their mind, if need be, regarding what they want to study or do in their future. Many students—and their professors and other employees on campus—also struggle(d) with the decision in their college education. Inspire students to embrace the process of discovering who they are and will be someday in their college studies and beyond!

Conclusion

This section of “Listening to Students Who Ever Thought About Leaving College or Left and Came Back” highlights the need for students to find a field of study and career path right for them.

Choosing a major marks a milestone in the college journey, increases the student’s academic success and time-to-degree, and shapes the student’s experiences here on campus and beyond.

Choosing a good career path for themselves gives them a way forward into the working world, a beacon light to many students making their way through academia, helping them to better understand what skills to develop, experiences to cultivate, knowledge to gain, and steps to take to someday be hired and begin their careers in that profession.

Choosing the paths that are right for them can be an exciting, albeit uncertain process, and the role we play on that student’s journey can be one of the most impactful things we do in our work with students.

For more perspectives from students and information regarding this work, “Listening to Students Who Thought About Leaving College or Left and Came Back,” please see the sections:

- [“Part 1: The Pivotal First Year in College”](#)
- [“Part 2: The Need for Belonging”](#)
- [“Part 3: The Need to Do Well and Feel Confident in Coursework”](#)
- [“Part 4: The Need to Manage Stress and Cope with Struggles”](#)
- [“Part 5: The Need to Manage Costs and Financial Pressures”](#)
- [“Part 6: The Need to Finish Each Semester as Strongly as Possible”](#)
- [“Part 7: The Need to Return”](#)
- [“Part 8: The Need to Be Engaged in Learning”](#)
- [“Part 9: The Need for Greater Mental Health”](#)
- [“Part 10: The Need for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice”](#)
- [“Part 11: The Need to Find One’s Path”](#)
- [“Part 12: The Need to Graduate”](#)

This work is part of the larger [Listening to Students](#) project done at this institution.

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