

## Many students perceive their choice of major as leading toward a specific career path (but it doesn't).

(Survey results complementing WE1S big-data research)

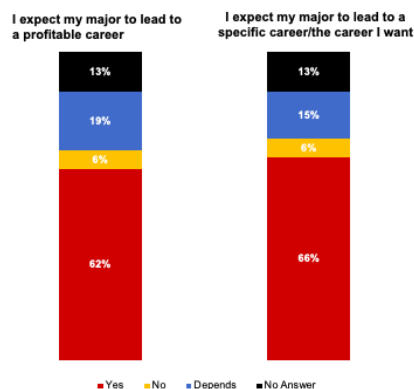
At the University of Miami, our surveys of undergraduates and non-undergraduates revealed that many students see their major as oriented to a specific career.<sup>1</sup> As the graph shows, 62% of undergrads expect their major to lead to a *profitable* career, and 66% expect their major to lead to a *specific* career. Asking non-undergrads how they originally felt about their major yielded broadly similar results.<sup>2</sup> When asked if their major had *actually* led to a “specific career,” however, only 48% of the latter group said yes; and only 36% said their chosen major had led to a profitable career.

Fields of study that do not have a clear vocational career path are thus seen as less valuable. In our follow-up [focus group conversations](#), subjects associated *liberal arts* and *humanities* with “not a necessary career path” and “not a defined career path,” respectively. But as one grad student pointed out, this is not just a humanities issue. She described having to defend her science career to her father, because he “couldn't see the path.” And even when paths *can* be seen, they are restricted by precedent. One Black, female motion pictures major said she often gets asked, “Are you trying to be the next [Shonda Rhimes](#), the next this or that?” For her, it

seems that any deviation from such known career paths is perceived as failure.

However, in response to the survey question, *What relationship does your major have to your current job?*, 43% of non-undergrads (excluding current grad students) said that their jobs had either “*no relation*” or an “*it depends*” relation to their major. This is a substantial number of staff, faculty, and administrators in the university setting who view their major as having a “slight” to “no” relationship to their job.

In contrast to survey respondents, however, undergrads in our focus group were highly aware that their majors do not inevitably lead to a specific career. One commented, “Nobody cares at the end of the day what you major in.”



([Larger image](#))

<sup>1</sup> Survey conducted Jan. to Feb. 2020 as part of WE1S's human subjects research to complement big-data media research. There were 312 undergraduate respondents and 216 non-undergraduate respondents, including graduate students, faculty, staff, visiting scholars, and affiliates. (See our methods card [M-6](#) on human subjects research.)

<sup>2</sup> A few exceptions: only 45% of non-undergraduates said yes, and 18% said no, to the expectation that their major would lead to a profitable career. Additionally, 13% said no to expecting their major to lead to a specific career.

**Population Studied:** [C-HS-2](#), [C-HS-4](#) (U. Miami undergrads & non-undergrads)

**Evidentiary Documentation:** [MR-9-3](#), [MR-9-17](#), [MR-9-18](#), [MR-9-19](#)

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