

Major Troubles

Picking a major could be as simple as changing a car battery – if only that, too, was easy. This was the thought process of Louisa Ajayi, then a Berkner High School graduate, as she skimmed over her Texas Apply application to the University of Texas at Arlington.

Ajayi always had a passion for helping people, especially those with medical issues. After caring for her elderly stepfather, she figured that a path in nursing would suit her, but she was unsure if she could endure the wants of patients.

As she scrolled down the list of majors, while simultaneously searching for the degree plan on the university's website, Ajayi became racked with confusion. She closed her application and opened a fresh tab on her browser.

There were many sciences major options offered that she has never heard of before. Her search history multiplied rapidly as she searched up pay ranges for different jobs.

In a frenzy, Ajayi slammed her laptop closed and let out a sharp breath.

“At that moment, I was freaking out,” Ajayi recalled. “I don't want to go to college and end up broke later. I didn't know the best choice. I didn't know what to do. Sometimes I still don't.”

Ajayi's plight is a plight of many college students who can never decide what they want to major in. This indecisiveness can lead to wasted years and money pursuing the wrong major, lack of passion or being stuck with a degree that a student may not necessarily be able to use.

Ajayi said her dream was to be a nurse until she saw that chemical engineers earn two times more than what nurses make and reconsidered.

“It was very eye-opening to me because then I don't know what to chase: my passion or the money. And for the fact that nurses, who must deal with sick people daily, get paid less is crazy to me,” Ajayi said.



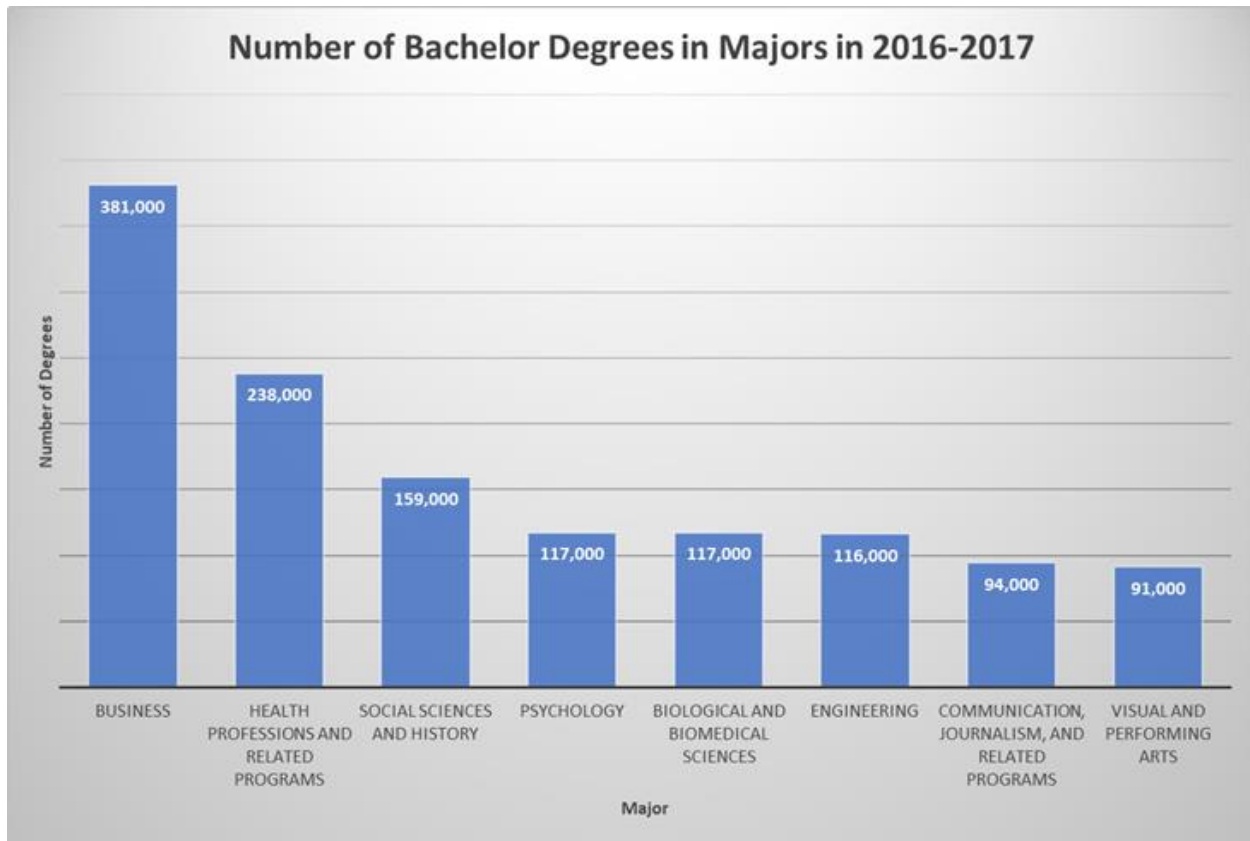
Data Source: The Hamilton Project

Julia Ukattah, a UT Austin speech pathology sophomore, said that she was heavily discouraged by the job market for her field but still chose it because of her compassion for others and love of music.

“For me, I had to weigh between doing what I love and simply doing what I don’t love. I’m a gospel artist. I love music and I had to find a major that compliments that part of me,” Ukattah said.

Ukattah said that as a speech pathologist she will be able to help patients that have speech or communications difficulties and offer help through different forms of therapy.

“I would say my main form of therapy would be musical therapy. My major doesn’t get the recognition it deserves for sure, because we are such a small number of students in our liberal arts college. I don’t know if it would pay much but I feel like if I put my focus in perfecting my skills academically, then this could be a very financially stable career for me,” Ukattah said.



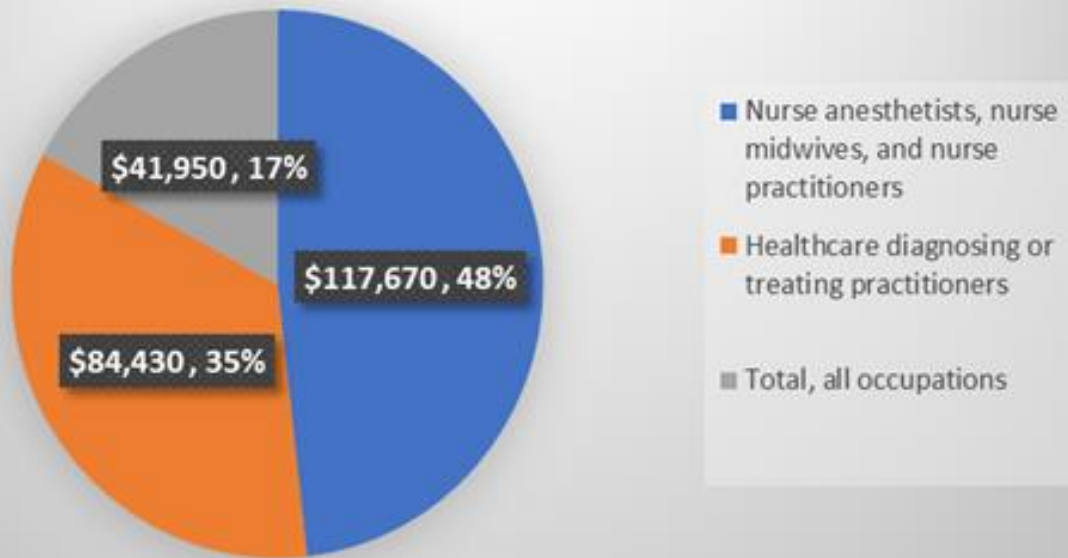
Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Though the workforce can be a determining factor for choosing the right major, Jessica Stubsjoen, a transfer advisor for DCCCD community colleges, says that it may not be a solid reason since the job market is always changing.

In an email, Stubsjoen writes, “I have many students who want to transfer to a four-year college or university and always get confused with a major they want to do because of the future financial gain. But from this pandemic, it shows that you never know what job sector is going to have their moment to shine.”

Drawing from a current example of the pandemic, Stubsjoen wrote about how nurses and medical individuals were in high demand for the last year with much government funding going towards hospitals and healthcare centers.

May 2020 Median Annual Wage for Nurses



Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.

Data Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics

“I feel like passion outweighs everything. I tell students, ‘If you do not love what you do, even with all the money, how will you do it?’ I also let them know that having one degree does not mean you have to do one thing forever. Think of having a degree as a good add-on to the list of things you have achieved and that add to your value as an intelligent person, not straightforward guide to what you must do with your career,” Stubsjoen writes.