Clueless what to major in? How parents can help
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This column is aimed at high school seniors and incoming freshman. See the accompanying table of salaries by major.

Some years ago, in the summer before her freshman year at a college in Texas, I took my daughter off to university orientation, a three day fun filled collection of activities. We met other in-coming freshman, toured the college, did fun things and on the morning of the third day, the parents accompanied the students as they went around campus to register for their classes. Well ... the problem was, almost no parents or students had thought much about what classes to register for and so many, many selected something that sounded a little interesting and headed for that department where a graduate student helped them sign up for classes. This was non-threatening and the end result was that students were registered and everyone went home happy.

Call me anal and over prepared and ... whatever you may want to say, as a parent, I found time to go to the bookstore on the first day, get a Course Bulletin, read it, learn about things called majors, required courses, and I knew enough to realize that some majors like Computing, Engineering, Science, Math - the technology majors - really required you to know up front that you were aiming in that direction. That is, if you did not take a fairly rigorous collection of courses like Calculus I/II, Physics and Computing university introduction courses, then you could find it much harder to get into those disciplines later. I was also vaguely aware (since I was in a technical field) that the opportunities for students in those fields were considerably greater in terms of future careers than in many other fields.

My general impression of most of the parents and student around me was that they were incredibly clueless. They had no idea they were locking their students out of these opportunities.

And so it was that both my daughters majored in technology areas - one in computer science and the other in bio physics. The older one graduated with a BS in computer science, married an industrial engineer, went to work for Motorola in Fort Worth and now at age 33 leads large international teams related to cell phone networks. She has two children and they own their very nice home - well before my wife and I accomplished that feat. My younger daughter also married an engineer and she recently received her PhD in bio informatics from Scripps Research Institute in San Diego. Both have interesting, demanding, fun careers and a lot of choice.

Standing back, I can say - it paid off realizing that both should at least try the technology route since both daughters were technology prepared and interested. As I described in a companion article, the reasons to go down this route are not just future financial gain. In a career, many technical students move from programming to other professions like business or law. Students with strong technology backgrounds not only command solid incomes but they become future managers, leaders, and entrepreneurs - while they may have more responsibility (which sounds like a burden but is not), they have way more fun and many more options to innovate and make the world a better place.

Note to parents: it paid off to go over my daughter's class schedules throughout the freshman year - by the sophomore year, both daughters were off and running on their own.

Note: the table of degrees and salaries should be better publicized - students and parents need to be aware of the consequences of majoring in just anything.