

DATA POINT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Beginning College Students Who Change Their Majors Within 3 Years of Enrollment

This Data Point examines the extent to which first-time associate's and bachelor's degree students change their majors within 3 years of enrollment. Rates of change in major are shown for students by degree program and by original declared field of study.

Data in this report are from the 2012/14 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:12/14), a nationally representative study of about 25,000 students who enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time in the 2011–12 academic year. These analyses are restricted to students who had ever enrolled in an associate's or bachelor's degree program and declared a major within 3 years of initial enrollment. Students with declared majors represent a majority in both associate's (94 percent) and bachelor's (97 percent) degree programs (NCES 2017).

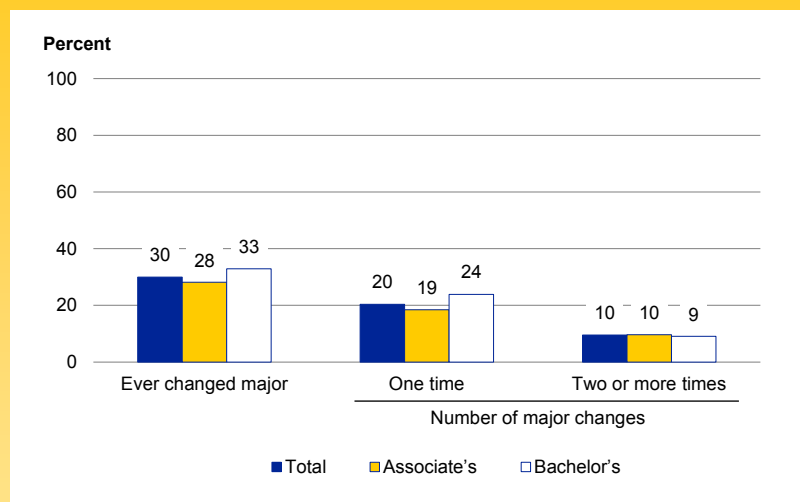
What percentage of students enrolled in associate's and bachelor's degree programs had changed their majors within 3 years of initial enrollment?

Within 3 years of initial enrollment, about 30 percent of undergraduates in associate's and bachelor's degree programs who had declared a major had changed their major at least once (**figure 1**).

About one-third of students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs changed majors, compared with 28 percent of those enrolled in associate's degree programs.

About 1 in 10 students changed majors more than once: 10 percent of associate's degree students and 9 percent of bachelor's degree students.

FIGURE 1. Percentage of 2011–12 beginning postsecondary students who ever changed majors and number of times students changed their major, by undergraduate degree program: 2014



NOTE: The total percentage includes all students who had ever enrolled in either an associate's or a bachelor's degree program and declared a major. The associate's and bachelor's degree percentages are not mutually exclusive: the associate's percentage includes all students who had ever enrolled and declared a major in an associate's degree program, whereas the bachelor's percentage includes all students who had ever enrolled and declared a major in a bachelor's degree program. Students who had any enrollment in both degree programs within 3 years after initial enrollment, e.g., associate's-degree holders transferring into bachelor's degree programs, are therefore included in both percentages. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Standard error tables are available at <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2018434>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012/14 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:12/14).

To learn more about BPS:12/14, visit <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/bps>. For questions about content or to view this report online, go to <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2018434>.

What percentage of all students had changed their majors within 3 years of initial enrollment, by original field of study?

The rate at which students changed majors varied by their original field of study. Whereas 35 percent of students who had originally declared a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) major had changed their field of study within 3 years, 29 percent of those who had originally declared a non-STEM major had done so (**figure 2**).

- About half (52 percent) of students whose original declared major was mathematics switched majors within 3 years. Mathematics majors changed majors at a rate higher than that of students in all other fields, both STEM and non-STEM, except the natural sciences.
- Among students in STEM fields, those majoring in computer and information sciences and in engineering and engineering technology changed majors at

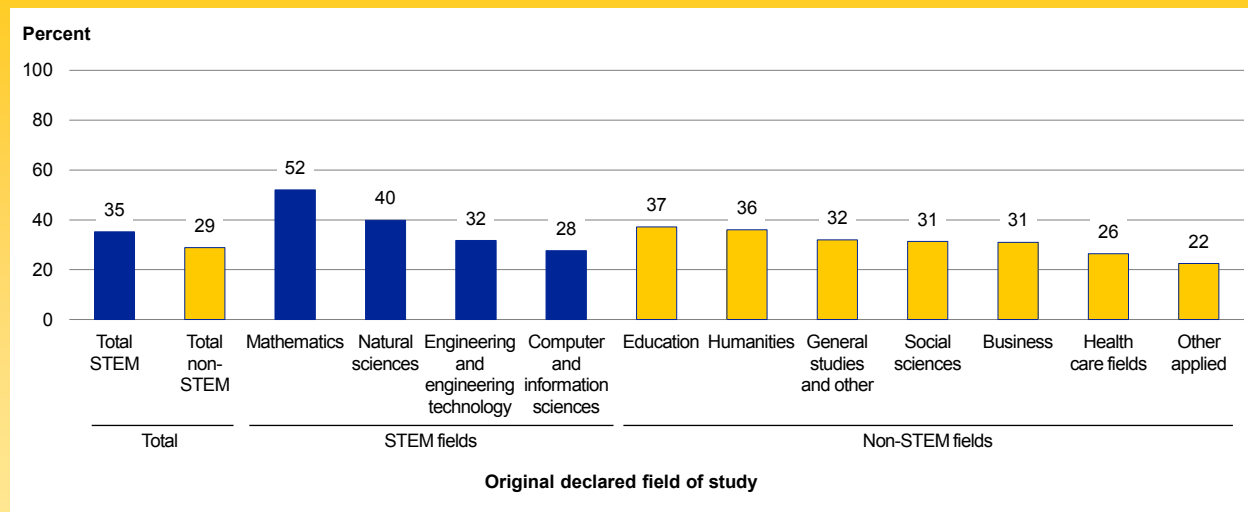
lower rates than did students majoring in either natural sciences or mathematics (28 and 32 percent vs. 40 and 52 percent, respectively).

- Students whose original major was computer and information sciences changed majors at a rate that was lower than the rates for students who originally majored in humanities and education, but was not statistically different from those of students who majored in any other non-STEM field.
- Among students in non-STEM fields, those in other applied fields had the lowest rates of major change (22 percent), followed by students in health care fields (26 percent).

References

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2017). *Percentage of 2011–12 First Time Postsecondary Students Who Had Ever Declared a Major in an Associate's or Bachelor's Degree Program Within 3 Years of Enrollment, by Type of Degree Program and Control of First Institution: 2014*. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/tableslibrary/viewtable.aspx?tableid=11764>.

FIGURE 2. Percentage of 2011–12 beginning postsecondary students who ever changed majors, by original declared field of study: 2014



NOTE: Natural sciences includes biological and physical science, science technology, agriculture, and natural resources. Other applied includes personal and consumer services; manufacturing, construction, repair, and transportation; military technology and protective services; architecture; communications; public administration and human services; design and applied arts; law and legal studies; library sciences; and theology and religious vocations. Standard error tables are available at <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2018434>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012/14 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:12/14).

This National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Data Point presents information on education topics of interest. It was authored by Katherine Leu of RTI International. Estimates based on samples are subject to sampling variability, and apparent differences may not be statistically significant. All

noted differences are statistically significant at the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of NCES surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error.