

Trends

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Trends in Academic Major Migration: 2001-2003 New Students

Nearly 3,000 new students entered the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University between fall 2001 and fall 2003. Though not required to select an academic major until their sophomore year, nearly 8 in 10 new CSB/SJU students identified a likely major upon entering. Because student choices influence academic planning, budgeting, and advising, it is important to understand how the preferences expressed by students in their first year of attendance change as the students progress.¹

Tracking Migration

- Fully two-thirds of all new students say there is at least some chance they will change their major field of study during their time at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University. In the most recent year, nearly 30% of new students said there is a "very good" chance they will change their major.
- Between fall 2001 and fall 2003, nearly three-quarters of new entering students identified a departmental major preference and 7% indicated a non-departmental preference (e.g. pre-medicine, pre-law, pre-engineering). Over the next two years, academic preferences and choices among those students changed significantly. Fully two-thirds of those students were doing something different by their third year: 50% had selected a different academic major and 18% were no longer enrolled at CSB/SJU. Only 32% of those who indicated a departmental major preference in their first year identified the same major two years later.
- Early identification of an academic area of interest apparently has little impact on student retention. New students who indicated they were undecided about their major were no more or less likely to leave CSB or SJU within two years than those who identified a probable major. However, students who selected non-departmental majors were more likely to drop out than those who had selected a departmental major. Nearly a quarter of all new students who identified a non-departmental major upon entry were not enrolled at CSB/SJU two years later.
- Nearly half (46%) of all new students who identified a probable major as first-year students selected Management, Biology, Nursing, Elementary Education, or Psychology. Two years after entry, a large percentage of students remained concentrated in a handful of majors, though the list changed slightly in order and make-up. Among students still enrolled at Saint Benedict and Saint John's between 2003 and 2005, 46% had selected majors in Management, Psychology, Biology, Communication, or Nursing.
- Though changes in the number of majors varied significantly among academic departments, nearly two-thirds of departments saw net increases in majors between the first and third year (gains made possible largely because of the major choices of students who were initially undecided or who had initially identified a non-departmental major). However, for both large and small majors, students who identified the major in their first year typically represented only 40% of the total affiliates two years later. Only two majors (Art and Dietetics) kept at least 60% of all 2001 to 2003 new students who identified them as a preference at entry. Ten disciplines lost at least 70% of those students who identified them as a probable major as new students (though in many cases those "losses" were made up by students moving into the major).

Though most new students identify a likely major when they enroll, fully two-thirds do something different by their third year.

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COLLEGE OF
Saint Benedict



Saint John's
UNIVERSITY

¹ This analysis reflects only first majors.

Division Summary

- Humanities.** Only 10% of all new students between fall 2001 and fall 2003 expressed an interest in a Humanities field. Two years later, more than 1 in 5 students had selected a major within the Humanities. The number of students affiliated with the Humanities grew by 75% between the first and third year, the largest growth of any academic division. Nearly two-thirds of all students majoring in a humanities discipline in their third year had identified an interest in a different academic division when they entered CSB/SJU. The majority of students (61%) who initially expressed an interest in the Humanities ultimately chose a major within the division. Among the students who were no longer affiliated the division two years later, 62% were associated with a different academic division and 38% were no longer enrolled at CSB/SJU. Nearly 1 in 4 students who were initially undecided about their major ultimately chose a discipline in the Humanities – and 60% of those chose either Communication (39%) or English (21%).
- Fine Arts.** Less than 4% of all new students from fall 2001 to fall 2003 cited an interest in the Fine Arts, and that number changed little over the next two years. There was minimal movement within the Fine Arts; only 1 of 111 students who indicated a likely major in the Fine Arts changed their major within the division. More than half of all students who initially expressed interest in the Fine Arts remained in the division two years later. The Fine Arts division had the highest attrition rate of all majors, although their numbers were small. Among those no longer affiliated with the Fine Arts, 55% selected a major in a different academic division (most often in Humanities) and 45% were no longer enrolled at CSB/SJU. Approximately 10% of all students who were undecided about their major as new entering students ultimately chose a Fine Arts discipline.
- Natural Sciences.** Over one-third of all new entering students from fall 2001 to fall 2003 identified an interest in a science-related discipline – 29% in a departmental science major and 6% in a non-departmental science program (e.g. pre-medicine, pre-engineering). Two years later, students majoring in the Natural Sciences represented about one-quarter of all majors. Fully half of new students from 2001 to 2003 who indicated an interest in the Natural Sciences at entry were not pursuing a science major two years later. Among science leavers, about two-thirds were majoring in a non-science discipline and one-third were no longer enrolled at CSB/SJU. There was little migration into the Natural Sciences from other academic divisions. Fully seven in ten students who moved into a science major between their first and third year were initially undecided about their academic major.
- Social Sciences.** More than one-third of all new students from fall 2001 to fall 2003 who identified a probable major upon entering CSB/SJU selected one within the Social Sciences division. Two years later, the Social Sciences represented nearly half of all majors—with Management and Psychology comprising nearly half of the division total. Out-migration among students who identified an interest in the Social Sciences at entry was the lowest among all academic divisions. Fully 62% of students who expressed an initial interest in a Social Science field ultimately chose a major within the division. Additionally, only 16% of new students who identified a major in the Social Sciences were no longer enrolled at CSB/SJU two years later, a lower attrition rate than any other division. The Social Sciences attracted large numbers of students from all other divisions as well those who were undecided. Fully 40% of students who were initially undecided about their major chose one in the social sciences—most often Management and Psychology.

Change in Division Affiliation, Year 1 to Year 3

