



San Luis Obispo

## EARLY CHOICE OF MAJOR: PROS AND CONS

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### Introduction

- High proportion of entering students are “traditional age” first time freshmen, relatively few requiring remediation
- All programs impacted
- Cal Poly seeks to enroll roughly 70 percent of undergraduates in “polytechnic” majors (primarily Engineering, Agriculture, Architecture, and related fields)
- Must specify major on application; admitted by major
- Cannot remain matriculated unless in a major
- Change of major (internal transfer) can be a challenge, especially if target major is greatly impacted (e.g., Psychology)
- Nevertheless, about 27 percent of Cal Poly students graduate in major other than major of entry

### Potential Advantages

- Focused advising is possible from the beginning; clear path to graduation can be charted; less likely to take courses that won't count
- Can take courses in major from the beginning; permits greater depth to be achieved; early familiarity with the major helps students to decide if they like it
- Association with host department from the beginning provides sense of belonging

### Potential Disadvantages

- Students forced to select major very early, without adequate knowledge or maturity; greater likelihood of “wrong” choices
- If choice is wrong, potential advantages of major-on-entry may become significant disadvantages
- May be difficult to change to new major of choice
- Some majors have strict “progress to degree” requirements which make it difficult to explore other majors or prepare for possible change
- Major-specific courses, which may be taken soon after entry, are less likely to count toward new major; many Cal Poly majors are highly structured and sequenced, with no free electives

### Other Observation

- 6 year graduation rates are typically higher for those who change major than for those who don't (note that most change from majors with higher unit requirements -- e.g., Engineering -- to majors with lower unit requirements -- e.g., Liberal Arts or Business -- which also have more free electives that can accommodate earlier course choices)