

Lack of Labor Market Awareness May Impact Major Selection in Community Colleges

By Don Sutherland

A newly published National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) [working paper](#) revealed that community college students' tended to select majors for a "preeminence of factors other than labor market outcomes." The paper's authors attributed that outcome, as possibly a result of those students' uncertainty concerning labor market outcomes.

The paper revealed, among other things:

- 13% of students were able to correctly rank four broad categories of majors in terms of salary
- 40% of students were able to correctly rank the majors in terms of salary when presented with the two higher-paying and two lowest-paying majors
- Students overestimated salaries by 13% and underestimated the probability of finding employment by nearly 25%

With transfer students accounting for more than two-thirds of all new Lehman College students and Lehman College's undertaking its Self-Study review for re-accreditation, such newly published information can provide guidance to working groups examining the College's curriculum, services, processes, and performance. Even as the study focused on community college students, the working groups can use the findings as leverage for examining student major selection and the process by which students evaluate and select their major. With growing federal interest in post-college outcomes for students, such an inquiry can be particularly informative.

That kind of inquiry could examine a number of issues. It could assess the level of awareness students have in linking majors with outcomes related to graduate-level study or careers. It could examine the degree of collaboration among advising, career services, and faculty in guiding students to more purposeful choices. It could connect such outcomes with the satisfaction of graduating students and alumni engagement.

In sum, a continuing scan of literature related to the university experience can provide insight into a wide range of academic and student support issues, programs, and services. In turn, this insight can allow proactive institutions to identify and pursue opportunities for continual improvement.