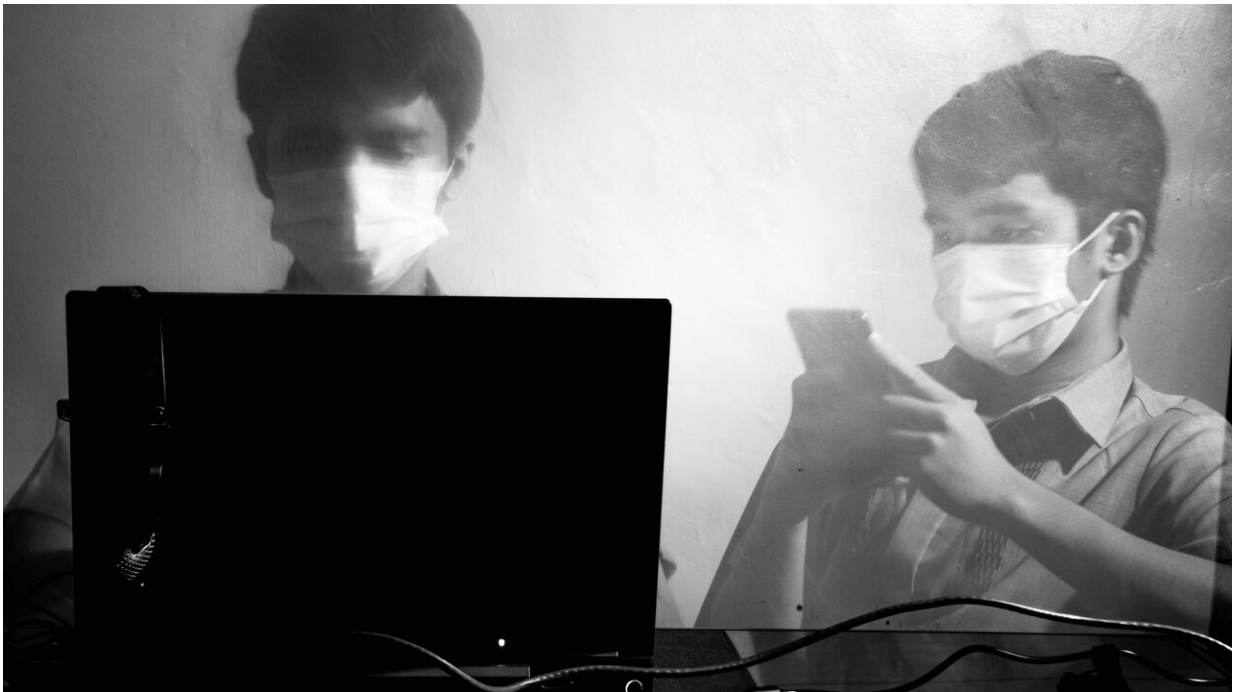


# Why double majors might beat you out of a job

April 9 2018, by Matthew J. Mayhew And Benjamin S. Selznick

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Two college majors are better than one. That is the conclusion that researchers are beginning to reach.

Prior research has already shown that students who double major can earn more than peers who majored in only one field.

New research we conducted recently shows that [double majors fare better](#) in another way as well: They are more innovative.

We are education researchers with an interest in how the [college](#) experience develops students. What we found in [our newly-published study](#) is that students who double majored scored 17.4 percentile points higher on our overall [innovation](#) measure than the average [student](#). The innovation advantage for double majors is almost three times higher than any other major, including business, engineering and math/statistics.

This finding held even after we controlled for a number of variables, including a family history of entrepreneurship, courses taken in college, race, gender and GPA. We even controlled for personality traits, such as being an extrovert and being open to new experiences. We also considered the institution students attended, the quality of teaching to which they were exposed and the nature of their interactions with faculty members.

So what does it mean to be more innovative and why does it matter?

## **What makes a person innovative**

For our study, we sought to measure students' innovation capacities. We did so using a relatively new survey instrument that enabled us to determine how institutions can help students develop their innovation capacities. These capacities include skills related to networking, persuasive communication, working on diverse teams, and risk taking.

These innovative qualities matter in the job market. That's because employers want more from [college graduates](#) than good grades. What employers really want – according to a [recent survey](#) – are graduates who can effectively work in diverse teams, are creative thinkers and have persuasive communication skills. In short, [employers want innovators](#).

Since innovators are in demand, it begs the question: Are graduates who double-majored more innovative because they double-majored? Or did they double-major because they were already more innovative?

Self-selection could be at play. To be sure, one aspect of the connection between innovation and double-majoring is related to the fact that certain students want more than any one discipline or major can provide. They want to choose, or perhaps [not choose](#).

## A desire for more

Perhaps double majors are the kind of students who need more than many programs offer. It could be a signal of proactive and creative choice for students who don't fit the mold in terms of how higher education is currently delivered.

Double-majoring might also provide students with experiences in which students see [connections between content](#) in different courses.

Additionally, taking classes required for two majors might increase [networking with peers](#) across disciplines.

Does this mean that all students should double-major and employers should only hire these graduates? Probably not.

While certainly our data demonstrate that double-majors are the most innovative, we do not conclude that this academic pathway is always the best choice for students or industries. What we do suggest, however, is that colleges and universities help students find ways to integrate material across disciplines, interact with each other across majors, and work on teams to solve real-world problems. This could be done through existing courses or perhaps new centers and spaces dedicated to innovation on college campuses.

That way, even if students don't double-major, they might still become more innovative – and more attractive to employers.

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