

It pays to major in fields with close ties to jobs, study shows

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Credit: 123rf.com

College graduates make more money if they major in fields with close ties to jobs, according to a new study from the Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC), part of Rice University's Kinder Institute

for Urban Research and School of Social Sciences.

"School-to-Work Linkages in Texas," authored by HERC researchers Brian Holzman and Bethany Lewis and [graduate](#) student Irina Chukhray of the University of California, Davis, examines Texas residents with bachelor's degrees who are 25-64 years old using microdata from the American Community Survey 5-Year Sample for 2013-2017.

The researchers studied what they refer to as "linkage," the connection between [college](#) majors and specific occupations. Some college majors like architecture and engineering have clear paths to jobs, while other majors like history and [social science](#) do not and end up working in a variety of professions ranging from teaching to business. Holzman, Lewis and Chukhray found that graduates who completed college majors with clearer paths to jobs not only tended to make more money, but also were less likely to find themselves unemployed.

"Aside from the [positive relationship](#) between linkage and earnings, we also found linkage mattered more for women, Black, Hispanic, foreign-born and non-native-English-speaking workers," Holzman said. "Linkage appeared to close wage gaps between marginalized and privileged populations."

The report also found:

- People who completed college majors with weak ties to jobs (such as graduates with degrees in history and social sciences) had a 3.2% likelihood of being unemployed, compared with 2.4% for those who completed majors with strong ties to jobs (such as graduates working in professions like architecture and engineering).
- Older, female, Asian, foreign-born and non-native-English-speaking workers were more likely to choose college majors with

closer ties to jobs than those who were younger, male, white, Black, Hispanic, native-born or native English speakers.

Holzman and his co-authors recommend education policymakers and researchers explore why students choose college majors strongly or loosely connected to the job market. The researchers also suggest higher-education practitioners develop new strategies to help students understand the career pathways open to them when choosing a given major. Finally, they recommend college career placement and academic staff collaborate with employers to help students, particularly those from underserved backgrounds, find [jobs](#) in occupations related to their majors.

More information: The paper is available online at kinder.rice.edu/

Provided by Rice University

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