

Key Piece in College Completion Missing: Personality-Major Match

Report for state and national policymakers, and educators.

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“Major studies show that a close personality-major match predicts college and job success. But some states and the federal government have made this match more difficult. And, those recommending policies to increase college retention and graduation rates appear unaware of this research and its importance.”

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Key Piece in College Completion Missing: *Personality-Major Match*

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WHAT IS “PERSONALITY-MAJOR MATCH”?

It is the degree to which students’ interests and personality match,

- What they are doing in their major, and
- The personality of the students and faculty in their major.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

1. *This match affects how students’ feel and act: People do best in school and work when they are doing what interests them, and are around people who have similar interests, skills, and values.*

There is a large body of scientific research that supports this.

2. *Major studies show that, the more students choose a college major compatible with their “Holland personality type”, the more likely they are to:*

- *Earn higher grades,*
- *Stick with their choice of major through graduation,*
- *Graduate on time, and*
- *Be more satisfied and successful in their career.*

3. *A significant number of students choose a major that is not “compatible” with their personality.* They find themselves studying topics that do not fit their interests or skills, and in a college major environment of students and faculty who have different interests, skills, and values. Their grades and chances of graduation suffer. Those who do graduate are less likely to be satisfied or successful in their career.

SOME SCHOOL, COLLEGE, AND GOVERNMENT ACTIONS MAKE A GOOD MATCH MORE DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE

Invalid career tests are widely used which,

- *Give students incorrect information about their interests and personality, and*
- *Misdirect them toward incompatible programs of study and majors that do not fit their personality.*

The *Career Clusters Interest Survey (CCIS)* is an example. It is widely promoted by states and the federal government to assess students’ interests and guide them in choosing one of the USOE 16 [Career Clusters](#) and career pathways -- *a program of study to pursue in high school and college.*

The first study of the CCIS’s validity (2010) shows that it does **not** measure interests in the Data/Idea area -- four of the six Holland personality types: Enterprising, Conventional, Artistic, and Investigative.

In other words, thousands of the students (and their parents) are being told their interests are something they are not, and are directed toward programs of study and majors that do not fit their personality.

The CCIS is one example. It is common practice for many schools, colleges, and states to use invalid measures, often in web-based career guidance packages they license.

POLICY PAPERS ON COLLEGE COMPLETION SILENT ON PERSONALITY-MAJOR MATCH

“Personality-major match” has a significant impact on retention and graduation rate. It needs to be part of the national conversation, if efforts to increase college completion are to succeed. The research is compelling.

THE RESEARCH

Personality-major research is relatively recent and unknown. It was done primarily by scientists associated with ACT over the past ten years and has been published in technically-challenging, peer-reviewed scientific journals. It is based on the respected [Holland Theory of Career Choice](#).

This research was recently brought to the public's attention in the free, e-book download, [Choosing a College Major Based on Your Personality. What does the research say?](#) written by Career Key author, Dr. Lawrence K. Jones.

Here are two examples:

- In a 2006 study, researchers followed 80,574 students in 87 colleges over a five-year period. The results showed that good grades are related to having a major close to one's personality. ***Most impressively, they found that congruence predicted overall GPA after five years better than ACT scores.***
- Another study (2010) looked at the graduation rate for students in 15 four-year colleges and 13 two-year community colleges. They found that **higher levels of congruence lead to a greater likelihood of getting a timely degree.**

THE SOLUTION

1. *Colleges develop an effective system that fosters a good personality-major match -- when students and adults,*
 - Begin to explore colleges and college majors,
 - Apply for admission,
 - Enter college,
 - Enroll in "academic catch-up" classes,
 - Are progressing through their courses,
 - Change their major, if necessary, and
 - Transition to work or further college study.
2. *National and state leaders discuss how personality-college major match can best fit in their recommendations for improving college completion.*

TWO ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR A GOOD MATCH

1. *A valid, assessment of the six Holland personality types.*

A "valid" career test is one supported by peer-reviewed, scientific studies showing it truly assesses the Holland types. *Research shows that invalid career tests seriously mislead people.* [More . . .](#)

Students and colleges can only benefit from the findings of the personality-major research if they use a valid measure.

2. *A "valid" comprehensive list of college majors scientifically classified by Holland personality types.* Otherwise, students will be misdirected to incompatible majors.

The personality-major match research was done with a scientifically classified list of majors, and the findings can only be applied if one is used.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES TO BOOST GRADES EARNED AND TIMELY GRADUATION

1. Use a scientifically valid career test and personality-major matching system;
2. Provide in-service training to national, state, school, college leaders and policymakers on test validity and personality-major match;
3. Collaborate with middle and high schools in developing joint, seamless career guidance programs that help students (and their parents) match their personality to compatible majors and identify colleges that offer them;
4. Provide a means for prospective students to learn the great number and variety of college majors likely to fit them -- to ensure the best choice possible. Most people are acquainted with only a few of them;
5. Create a website that assesses students' personality, relates the results to careers and majors, gives them information about them, and shows them the schools and colleges that offer the majors and programs;
6. Display college majors according to the Holland types in catalogs and college websites, using a list of college majors that have been scientifically classified;
7. Review the impact of using USOE's 16 Career Clusters to organize curricula in schools and community colleges (they are not organized according to interests; [more . . .](#)) and their potential adverse effects on personality-major match; mitigate as needed;
8. Evaluate prospective and entering students' personality-major match to identify those who have chosen incompatible majors and provide assistance accordingly;
9. Organize students in "academic catch-up" classes according to Holland personality types, in order that they may build relationships and connections that are mutually beneficial, supporting one another both emotionally and academically through collaborative learning; and

10. Take steps to encourage the use of scientifically valid career guidance systems on the Internet and inform students, parents, and adults returning to school, of the hazards of using invalid ones (virtually all of the most popular ones for “choose a college major” use invalid career tests).

ABOUT THE CAREER KEY®

Career Key began in 1997 as a philanthropy to help youth and adults make good career and educational decisions, especially those who are low-income and underserved, and those in developing countries. This work continues. Later, a business arm was developed to complement these efforts. [More . . .](#)

Career Key has been the #1 Internet source for helping people choose careers and college majors since its beginning -- more than 30 million users. It was the first to offer a scientifically valid career test on the Internet, [The Career Key® test](#). The test and site are well known and respected in the professional career counseling and development community. It offers,

- A respected, valid career measure of Holland’s personality types. It takes about 10 minutes to complete, is suitable for middle school – adult students, and is the only valid career test that can be licensed for use on other websites.
- A crosswalk database, developed over a year of research and analysis, that relates the Holland personality types to occupations, USOE career clusters, career pathways, and college majors;
- Practical, high quality career guidance articles based on the best practices and science of the field – like, [Choose a College Major or Training Program](#).
- The e-book "[Match Up! Your Personality and College Majors](#)", released January, 2011. It is the only book or source that lists all majors and programs found in colleges in the U.S. and Canada organized by Holland personality type.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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