

Tips to help students choose the right major

As recent graduates can no doubt attest, the job market for young people can be difficult to navigate. Many recent graduates are still struggling to find full-time employment, and some might be wondering if they chose the right major.

Though choosing a major is about more than just finding a job, the financial burden of earning a college degree can't be ignored. According to the Project on Student Debt, 71 percent of college seniors who graduated in 2012 had student loan debt, with an average of \$29,400 per borrower. In fact, between 2008 and 2012, the average student loan debt at graduation increased an average of 6 percent each year. So while the right major should incorporate a student's interests, skills and strengths, it's also important to find a major that can help students earn a living after they walk across the stage and receive their diplomas.

The following are a handful of tips college students can employ to ensure they choose the right major.

* Don't jump into it. Some students might want to pick a major before they ever step foot on campus. While that strategy might work for some, it should only be employed by those students who are wholly certain a major is for them. Some students choose a major early on because they feel they may get a head start at navigating their way through a job market that recently endured exceptionally high levels of unemployment. But the pressure of finding a job should not be what drives students when choosing a major. Unless you're entirely certain that a particular course of study is for you, give yourself some leeway and wait to choose a major. The first year or two of college is a great time to expand your academic horizons so use that time to your advantage.

* Don't procrastinate. While rushing into a major is a mistake, it's also foolish to



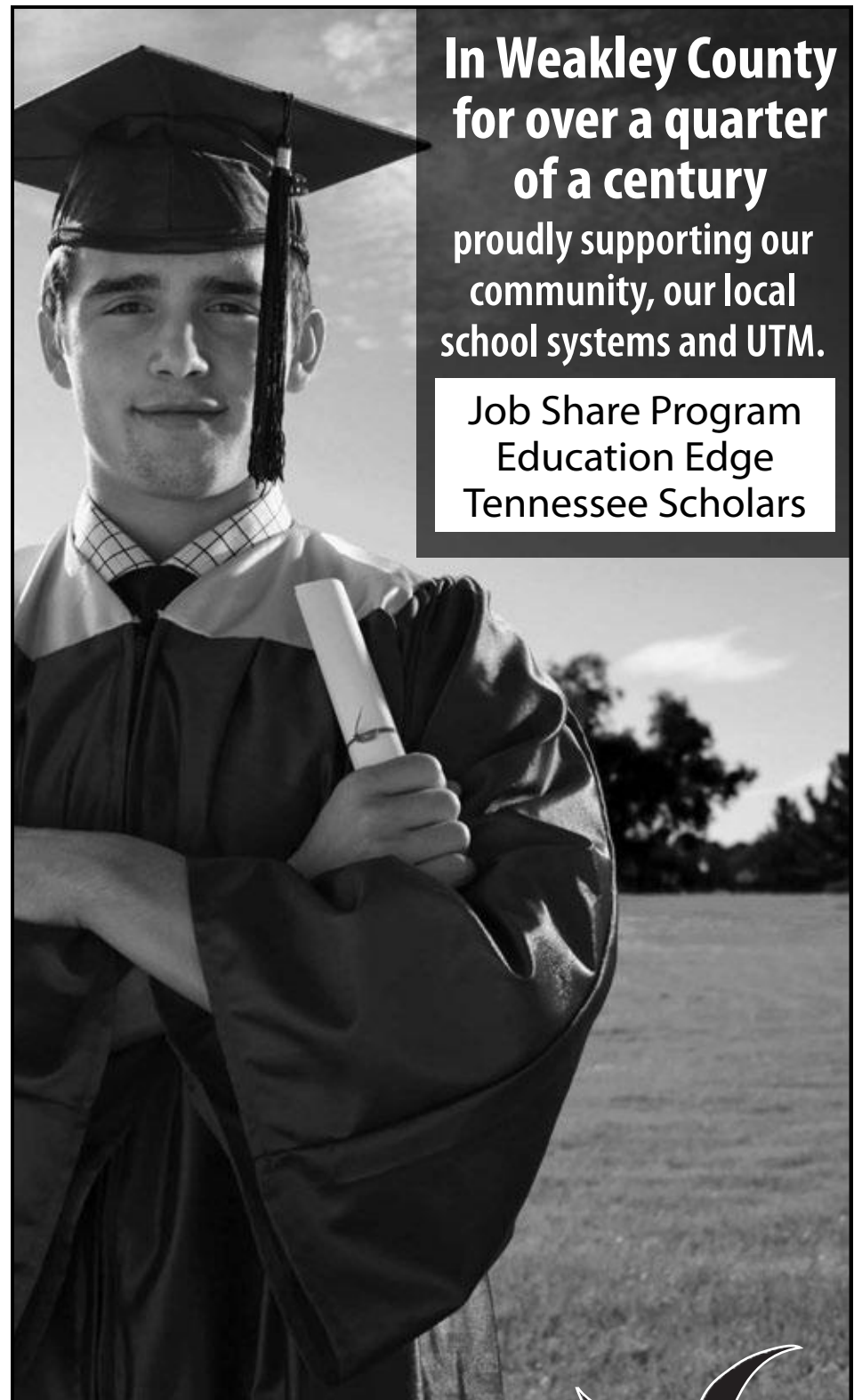
procrastinate with regard to choosing a course of study. According to The College Board's annual survey of colleges, the average tuition and fees at private nonprofit four-year colleges for the 2013-14 school year was \$30,094, while public four-year in-state tuition and fees averaged slightly less than \$9,000 for the same year. So no matter which type of college or university a student enrolls in, he or she will be making a significant financial commitment. Waiting too long to choose a course of study may find you paying for courses you ultimately won't need, increasing your already expensive tuition along the way.

* Use the resources at your disposal. Students undecided about a college major should make use of their schools' career development departments to help them get on the right path. Many such departments provide assessment tools to help students find a major that synthesizes their interests and skills with a field of study. In addition, the personnel within career development departments have dealt with hundreds, if not thousands, of previous

students who found themselves in similar situations, and that experience can prove invaluable to students who might feel lost with regard to choosing majors.

* Know the requirements if you have a specific career in mind. While many majors are not difficult to navigate, some fields of study have strict guidelines that students should be aware of almost immediately. For example, students hoping to attend medical school after graduation need to determine which courses they absolutely must take in order to qualify for medical school. In addition, students with such specific plans in mind often must choose their majors as early as possible so they can plan their curriculum in accordance with the standards they will need to meet to be considered for postgraduate work.

Choosing a major is a decision college students should not take lightly. But students who are unsure of what they want to study should approach the process of choosing a major with patience and an eye on finding a course of study that matches their interests with their skills.



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