

# The Current Situation of Learning and Life of Students Changing Majors in Universities under the Multi-Campus University Mode and Existing Problems – Taking Students Changing Majors in Sichuan Agricultural University as a Case Study

Yu Li<sup>1</sup> & Weibin Li<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Student Work Department, Sichuan Agricultural University, Chengdu, China

<sup>2</sup> College of resources and environment, Sichuan Agricultural University, Chengdu, China

Correspondence: Yu Li, The Student Work Department, Sichuan Agricultural University, No. 211, Huimin Road, Wen jiang region ,Chengdu 611130, China. Tel: 86-182-0288-0056. E-mail: liyuxtw@163.com

Received: January 22, 2013 Accepted: February 16, 2013 Online Published: March 25, 2013

doi:10.5539/hes.v3n2p96

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/hes.v3n2p96>

*This paper is supported by instructor job innovation research and support plan project in Sichuan Agricultural University “Study on Existing Problems in Major Changing in Sichuan Agricultural University and Countermeasures”.*

## Abstract

This paper makes a survey on the subjects of undergraduates changing majors in Sichuan Agricultural University who entered the university respectively in 2009, 2010 and 2011 and comes to a basic conclusion on the learning and life condition of students changing majors, that is, good overall adaptation yet low excellence rate; difficulty in taking a course and too heavy pressure in learning; relatively too disperse accommodation and bad sense of belonging in class; a series of problems in unblocked information acquisition, especially prominent problems existing in students who change majors in different campuses.

**Keywords:** changing majors, current condition of learning and life, cross-campus

As the event of 244 university students in Fudan University were approved to change majors in 2003 went the air, changing majors among university students in the recent years has increasingly become a common phenomenon. The system of changing majors among undergraduates has, indeed, provided an opportunity of re-selecting an appropriate major after they get familiar with the majors in the university. This has well satisfied students' interest and their requirements based on such elements of employment and personal development, so it has received general popularity among university students (Ge, 2003). Nevertheless, it has been seldom researched by existing studies what kind of problems exist in the adaptation of learning and life of students changing majors when they are faced up with a brand-new and strange environment after they change their majors.

## 1. Purpose and Method of the Survey

This study takes students changing majors in Sichuan Agricultural University as the survey object and makes an overall survey on the condition of learning, life and growth of students before and after they change their majors. The object of the questionnaire survey was mainly undergraduates changing majors in Sichuan Agricultural University who entered the university respectively in 2009, 2010 and 2011. According to a defined proportion, a stratified sampling was taken from all campuses, grades and colleges and schools and 370 questionnaires were sent out, among which 353 questionnaires were taken back and 340 questionnaires were effective, with an efficiency rate of 91.9%.

The questionnaire for students changing majors was classified into three parts. The first part was a summary of the basic information, including gender, grade, political status, whether students changing majors hold a position as the student cadre, the source of birth and colleges and schools before and after they change their majors. The second part was confirmation of majors after college entrance examination, relevant preparation prior to changing of majors, the source of information acquisition of majors, information about the backdrop of the

motive for changing majors and information about the learning and life condition of students changing majors, including their school performance, scientific and research social activity performance, participation of students changing majors in school collective activities and the psychological condition of these students, as well as information about their getting along with their roommates. The third part was open-ended questions, which mainly talked about difficulties of students changing majors in their life and their suggestions and requirements for the existing system of changing majors in the university.

## 2. An Analysis of the Survey Result

### 2.1 The Existing System of Changing Majors Is Not Yet Perfect

The current system of changing majors only works out stipulations for conditions and procedures necessary for students to change majors (Teaching Affairs Office of Beijing Normal University, 2006). It fails to make any specific stipulation on how to resolve the following issues: the courses to be taken by students after they change their majors, the conflict between the time of taking the new course and making up the missed course, affirmation of courses in cross-campus changing majors and credit hours, relatively disperse accommodation and unsmooth information exchange. It is learnt through the interview that different campuses and different colleges and schools have different means of dealing with such issues encountered in changing majors. The result of a survey on students changing majors showed that, there were 73.4% of students thought “the university had no preferential policy for students changing majors to take a course and lacked flexible handling”, and there were 62.4% of students thought “in terms of affirmation of the credit hour and changing of the courses”, the university and the colleges failed to take full account of the subsequent problems of students after they changed majors and to make full preparations.

### 2.2 An Analysis of the Learning and Psychological Condition of Students Changing Majors

2.2.1 The Result of a Survey on Students Changing Majors Showed that, Applying to Change Their Majors Was Determined by the Degree of Interest in the Majors among 61% of Students Changing Majors

Including “inconsistency between majors and interest”, “more interested in the new major”, “inconsistency between the major and occupational planning”, and so on. There were 19% of students who changed majors because their former major wasn’t consistent with their personality and capacity and there were 9.2% of students who changed majors because of the employment prospect of the major. Thus, it can be seen that the reason of correlation with the interest in the major has the greatest influence in changing majors.

2.2.2 After Students Changing Majors Take Courses in the New Majors, Most of Them Have a School Performance Higher than the Medium Level and the Phenomenon of Polarization in their Scientific Innovation and Social Activity Performance Is Obvious

From the analysis of data in the questionnaire survey, students whose school performance significantly increased after they changed their majors only accounted for 5%, 7students whose school performance was at a medium level accounted for 75% and students whose school performance somewhat fell behind accounted for 17%. That is to say, there was relatively a small number of students changing majors whose school performance was prominent and a large majority of students had a medium level of performance, as is shown in the following Figure 1.

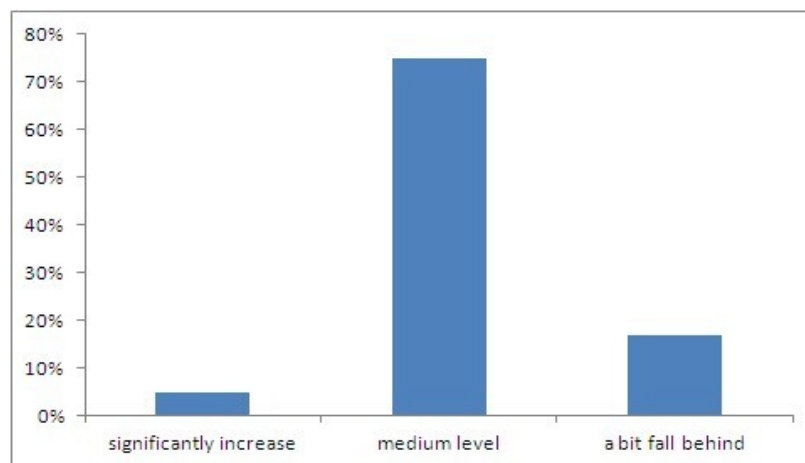


Figure 1. The condition of learning of students changing majors

In terms of scientific innovation, the questionnaire provided the four alternatives of “with a strong desire”, “like”, “general” and “no interest in participation”. The result of the questionnaire survey is shown as in the following figure (Figure 2).

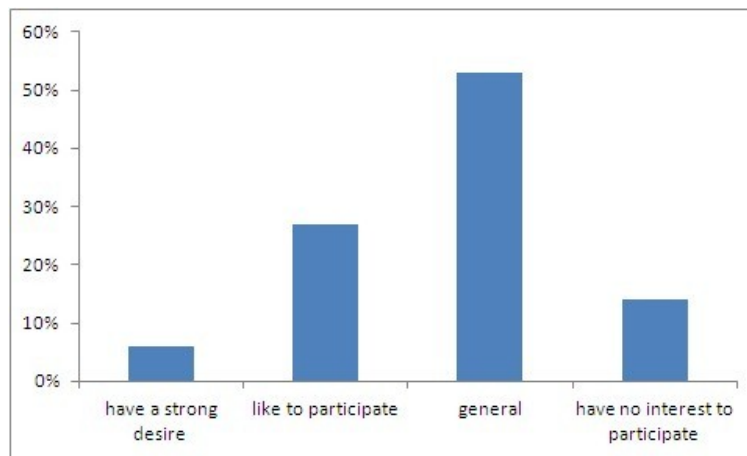


Figure 2. Scientific research interest of students changing majors

Students who “have a strong desire to participate in academic innovation” only accounted for 6%, students who “have no interest in participating in any scientific innovation activity” accounted for 14%, while a large majority of students had a general interest in scientific research.

In the survey on the social and practical activities of students changing majors, as is shown in Figure 3, there were 24% of students who positively participated in activities at any time. 46% of students participated occasionally, 18% of students expressed that they had the desire to participate but had no time, 10% of students said that they had no interest in participating such activity, and 2% of students never participated or were fed up with such activity.

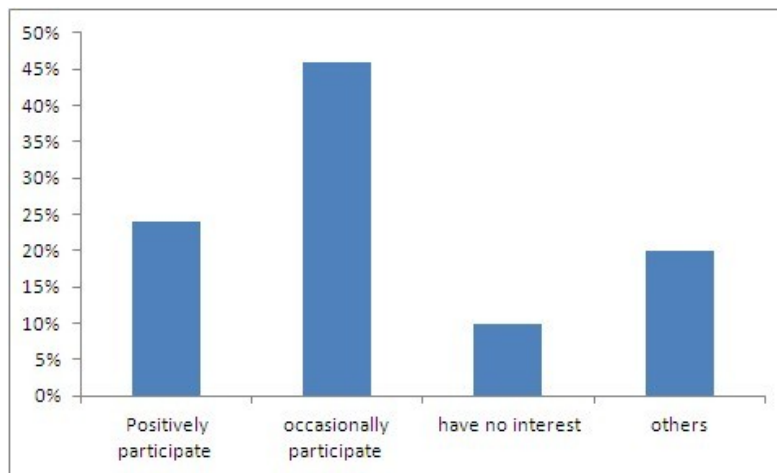


Figure 3. The condition of students changing majors in participation in social and practical activities

Thus, it can be seen that, the phenomenon of polarization is serious in the case of scientific innovation and social and practical activities for students changing majors. When students changing majors take up the new major, they usually have to, on one hand, learn the courses of the current year, and, on the other hand, make up the courses they have missed in the past one year, so their shoulder a heavy burden of learning. Furthermore, it requires a process for the students to adapt to their new majors, so it is unavoidable that this might affect their school performance and their scientific innovation and their performance in social practical activities. Nevertheless, there are some students changing majors whose scientific innovation and performance in social

activities is excellent and the rate of excellence is higher than that of students who haven't changed their majors. The possible reason is that these students changing majors, indeed, have strong capacity. First of all, considering the threshold for setting of major changing, generally the students who are able to successfully change their majors are basically excellent. Then, it is the common characteristics of students changing majors that they are able to self-consciously and independently think about what on earth their interest is, make a choice decidedly, accept new challenges with courage and confidence and struggle for their own dreams, which, in return, will greatly help them gain success in scientific innovation and social activities (Yi & Zhang, 2011).

### 2.2.3 When Faced up with New Learning and Life Environment, a Large Majority of Students Changing Majors Are Able to Hold a Positive Psychological Attitude

According to the statistical analysis, there are 28% of students changing majors who hold a positive and extremely optimistic attitude, 39% of students who are able to take a positive attitude in adapting to a new environment, 10% of students who have psychological pressure but are able to overcome and 2% of students who remain passive and pessimistic and feel great pressure. The possible reason is that these students have gone through re-selection of the majors and have higher enthusiasm in learning and life than the students who have not changed majors. Therefore, even if they are faced up with new learning and life pressure, they are able to hold a positive and healthy attitude.

### 2.3 Issues of Learning and Life among Students Changing Majors

#### 2.3.1 As for Students Who Change Majors in Different Campuses, There Still Exist a Lot of Acute Problems

62% of students who change majors in different campuses express that they encounter problems in "handling of students' identity card, one-card and household register" and 23% of these students mention they have difficulty in transfer of the position as a student cadre. 42% of these students say they are faced up with problems in affirmation of awards of excellence selection and 33% of students mention they have difficulty in taking courses of the new major.

#### 2.3.2 Much Limitation in Taking a Course Is a Relatively Sharp Contradiction Faced up by Students Changing Majors

In terms of taking a course, there are 69.1% of students changing majors express that "they have troubles in taking the courses of the new major and the phenomenon of conflicts between courses is a frequent occurrence." 61.2% of these students hold the view that "the existing management system of taking a course is to the disadvantage of students who change majors".

#### 2.3.3 In the Answer to the Open-Ended Question "What Kind of Difficulties You Are Confronted with in Learning and Life after You Change Your Major?"

There are 70-80% of students express that they have great pressure and difficulty in making up missed lessons of the new major. In the meantime, 60% of the students mention that they are lacking in smooth exchange and communication with their classrooms since their dormitories are too disperse and the newly organized class after changing majors has too weak cohesive force. In addition, the sense of belonging of students is fragile.

## 3. Discussion and Conclusion

### 3.1 Changing Majors Is Not "Catholicon"

The result of the questionnaire survey shows that, low interest in the former major is a primary reason for university students to change their majors. The sociologist Yang Dongping says, "Free choice is the right of students in changing majors, which symbolizes a kind of academic interest. And only in this way, can learning and research with high quality be possible." (Chen, 2007) Indeed, the opportunity for university students to change majors embodies our respect for university students' rights and freedom, facilitates well development of university students' personality and is also helpful for continuously improvement of higher education. Nonetheless, if rational guidance on students is deficient and freedom of learning is blindly emphasized, then students might be misled to believe that the only alternative and way out for them is to change majors if they have no interest in their majors or they fail to adapt to the learning environment. As a result, this might lead to a chaos situation that students flock to apply to change majors, which not only goes against management but also distorts the real meaning of changing majors. It is a must for university students to come to realize that, changing majors is neither catholicon nor "a life-saving straw" that can resolve issues including the academic issue of low interest in a major. Rather than evading problems by means of changing majors at every turn, it is better to seek for the source of the problems from the angle of students themselves to take temporary solutions and more effect a permanent cure (Liu, 2009).

### 3.2 Cultivating University Students' Professional Learning Interest

"If the university students have interest in learning, their pressure on study can be alleviated and even if the learning is difficult, they will find pleasure in it." (Jin, 2012) First of all, it is necessary to let the university students know about the significance of their majors to their own development and development of the society. It is suggested that after the newcomers of university students enter the university, the university changes "professional directors giving professional lectures" that is promoted recently to a public lecture and let students participate. In this way, students can know about the frontier trend and developmental direction of the majors they are interested in. At the time of broadening their scope of knowledge, the university should help them choose the major they are really interested in. Meanwhile, this also avoids students' blindness in applying for changing their majors. Then, different majors should conduct some activities that embody the features of the majors so as to attract students' interest and strengthen their confidence in the majors. A large majority of majors only arrange some public courses in the first semester for freshmen, so they have relatively fewer professional courses. After the students finish their courses in the first semester, they still know little about their majors, so it is difficult for them to have interest in their majors. Thus, it is quite necessary to cultivate university students' interest in professional learning by all kinds of means.

In the meantime, the university should strengthen the vigor in university students' occupational lifetime education and through direction, enable students to have relatively objective and rational cognition in themselves and a planning on their occupation in the future. Occupational lifetime planning means that an individual determines the direction, time and plan for his action in order to realize his lifelong ideal occupational target and makes relative efforts. That is to say, an individual makes an analysis, conclusion and testing on the subjective and objective elements that determine his occupational career, confirms a struggle target, chooses an occupation that is able to realize this career target, compiles a corresponding action plan for the job, education and training, makes rational arrangement for the time, sequence and direction of each procedure and attempts to realize organic combination of "what I want to do" and "what I am able to do". (Xing, 2007) Lifetime occupational education helps students to know themselves comprehensively by means of an analysis of their own conditions and select a lifetime occupation that suits with their own development, which helps to improve students' self-education and the initiative of self-management.

### 3.3 Taking a Course

After the students changing majors take up the new majors, they also need to make up all the courses they have missed in addition to finishing the study task of the current semester. Generally speaking, the time and energy required for making up missed lessons is within the endurance scope of students changing majors and can be resolved by adding study time and personal efforts. However, once the courses learnt at the current semester come into conflicts with the courses made up, it is not an issue that can be resolved by personal efforts. The anxiety and worry caused thereby has direct effects on the learning and psychological condition of students who change majors.

The current system of changing majors merely guarantees students' re-selection of their majors and fails to provide any rational institutional arrangement for subsequent problems such as taking a course, so it can be said that the organizational system correlated with changing majors is not yet perfect. Therefore, the selectivity of students changing majors in terms of taking a course is limited, which, in turn, generates a series of decisions and contradictions.

### 3.4 Cross-Campus Changing Majors Deserves Deep Thinking

In multi-campus universities, the students who change majors in different campuses generally have weak capacity in adapting to the new learning and life environment and have relatively prominent problems in affirmation of excellence selection, recommendation to be admitted to the Party and transfer of the position as a student cadre. Since the students changing majors in different campuses are faced up with a new learning and life environment, and have no target or friend to turn to, this leads to great psychological pressure (Xu & Tang, 2011). In addition, they have to face a series of difficulties in learning, so their problems are relatively acute.

## References

- Chen, Y. (2007). An Analysis of Advantages and Disadvantages of Changing Majors by University Students and Countermeasures. *Document Literature*, 2007(5), 77-78.
- Ge, X., et al. (2003). Memo of Anniversary for Major Changing in Fudan University. *Fudan Youth*, 2003(9), 4.
- Jin, J. (2012). Research on motivation and influencing factors of major changing in university students. *Jiangsu science & Technology information*.

- Liu, H. (2009). Study on the Current Condition of Class Construction in Universities and Countermeasures. *Science & Technology Information*, 35, 949.
- Teaching Affairs Office of Beijing Normal University. (2006, February). Management Method for Quadratic Selection of Majors among Undergraduates in Beijing Normal University.
- Xing, D. (2007). Emphasizing and Strengthening Higher Vocational College Students' Occupational Career Education. *Exploration and Research of Vocational Education*, 3.
- Xu, L., & Tang, C. (2011). The relationship among interest, tendency, and behavior of major changing in university students. *Psychological research*.
- Yi, B., & Zhang, M. (2011). The situation, problems, and countermeasures of medical major changing in local universities. *Journal of higher education*.