Would you rather be a patient of a doctor who is fully invested in his or her discipline, or be a patient of a doctor who is in the field primarily for the prestige and salary?

According to a select group of administrators here at Hudson Valley Community College, the doctor who is genuinely passionate about his or her profession was hopefully a student who chose his or her science major based on personal inspiration and dedication.

For instance, Amanda McDonell a sophomore majoring in biological sciences here was inspired to study due to her illness since childhood.

“I chose my major because I have epilepsy,” said McDonell. From the age of five she has been a patient, she said this contributed to her interest in the human brain and how it works.

McDonell aspires to be a genetic counselor. Her decision was fueled by a personal interest backed by the statistics of that particular job market.

McDonell said, “I know I have a great chance of getting a good job after majoring in biological sciences, but I know that’s just one of the benefits of this major.”
According to Brian Vlieg, Department Chairperson for Individual Studies, Liberal Arts and Learning Skills, a college cannot reinvent their students. A student, like McDonell, is more successful when the major is supported by a personal motivation.

“Colleges can’t force and jam a person into interests; that’s hazardous and reckless,” said Vlieg.

The enticement of a lucrative career based on the latest media trend is an all too common mistake made by college students.

‘Media often depicts science related jobs as unrealistically glamorous”, Vlieg said.

Chris Billy, Instructional Coordinator, Forensic and Investigative Science at West Virginia University said, “Television forensic science is frequently misrepresented, faculty incorrect and glamorized for television ratings purposes.”

According to Vlieg’s observations, college students see what is in the media and base their courses on what’s popular. This in turn leads to students changing their major midterm to liberal arts after facing the reality. It’s the reality that their preconceived image from the media is distorted and does not meet their expectations.

To resolve this dilemma, Vlieg believes students should ideally identify their strengths and incorporate them into their major of choice.

“We have to critically look at this; do we, as a society, want to depend on someone who excels in something they’re not naturally good at?” Vlieg said.
Vlieg suggests to help avoid mediocre professionals in fields we depend on, society should encourage personal interest development. He also suggests students should see a career advisor to help discover their true passion.

Career counselor, Annie Garwood, advises about 20 students each week helping them discover what program and major they might want to choose based on their personality.

Garwood said, “Students who come to meet with me are usually worried about making the wrong decision when it comes to choosing their major.”

A career advisor will provide tools to help students narrow down their choices of majors by providing personality assessment tests. One such test Garwood favors is the Interest Inventory Test. The test helps unsure students identify career possibilities they otherwise may not have considered. The results of the test are based on interest codes generated by the student’s answers.

“Students should choose a major that best fits them, if it’s not a good fit, it’s not a good option,” said Garwood.

To put it in perspective, Garwood explained if a student majors in something that is not a good fit for them, that’s four years bearing it but then forty years living it.

When students are on the fence about whether they should change their course of study after discovering that it’s not what they expected Garwood suggests self-reflection.

“Garwood said, “Reflect on what the program would really mean to you; even make the cliché pros and cons list to identify all the factors
These factors include where you may want to live and even the risks of the job, according to Garwood.

Garwood does admit that it’s beneficial for a student after weighing the factors to discover their true interest is a particular science.

“Having a two-year degree in a science most likely gets you a decent paying job while a two-year liberal arts degree usually needs to be expanded on to receive a well-paying job,” said Garwood.

Another deciding factor that influences students is the opinion of their parents, according to Rebecca Maroncelli, admissions counselor of 25 years. In her experience students who depend solely on parental recommendation end up doing themselves a disfavor.

Maroncelli said, “Many parents accompany their teenagers when they come in for an appointment and dominate the interview; ‘the helicopter parents.’”

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, the definition of a helicopter parent is, “a parent who is overly involved in the life of his or her child.”

These parents want to make sure their kids major in something that ensures prosperity, said Maroncelli. This can often lead to a choice that is not the students but the parents. Maroncelli suggests a more effective way for parents to support their child is to encourage them to find their own way and to be fired up about their interest and choice.

“Talking to an admissions counselor will expand a student’s world by opening them up to new options they may never have considered,” said Maroncelli.
Not meeting with an admissions counselor could be detrimental, wasting a student’s valuable time and money, according to Maroncelli. She suggests immersing one’s self in their found passion by trying a related part time job and getting the feel of things.

In McDonnel’s case her decision to pursue genetic counseling was supported but not influenced by her parents. This support from her parents has worked in her favor.

“Since I like my classes I willingly study the subject matter and enjoy it,” said McDonnel.

Even through the demands of her chosen major she is driven by her own personal commitment which makes it that much more rewarding.

Students are more likely to succeed in their chosen field if they are personally invested according to Vlieg, Garwood, and Maroncelli. A student can be successful, prosperous, happy, and fulfilled in any major; they just have to find their passion. Finding your passion involves taking into consideration many influences. These include your personality, personal experience, personal interest, advice from friends and family, and admission and career counseling.

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