

## Community College Advisors Sought for PAID Role in Advising Project

### MyCCMajors: A Different Approach to Helping Students Find a Course of Study

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#### **Abstract**

*The National Science Foundation funded development of an advisement resource, MyCCMajors, to help students find appropriate courses of study. The online program emulates experienced advisors' interviews to make expert suggestions. The project began with a focus on community colleges, but it also works well for transfer and bachelor level programs. Community College advisors are sought for a paid role in the project. Contact Fritz Grupe for information at 775-813-7407 [fhgrupe@gmail.com](mailto:fhgrupe@gmail.com) <http://mycommunitycollegemajor.com>*

Numerous pressures underscore the need for upgrading advisement resources. Counselor positions at both the high school and college levels are being eliminated even as caseloads increase and a movement toward a completion agenda grows. Community college, college and high school counseling and career specialists may not be available in a timely fashion, and many students fall to seek an advisor. With these pressures as a backdrop, the National Science Foundation funded a uniquely conceived computer program to support advisors.

NSF funded MyCCMajors for \$840,000 over a three-year effort. It is a 15-minute, online program that emulates advisors' interviews. MyCCMajors uses human advisor knowledge to improve advisement. Advisors and campuses are invited to try this very novel program that draws on the expanding utilization of algorithms and technology to produce expert-based outcomes. Funding is available to compensate advisors assisting in testing and further development.

#### **A Knowledge-Based Systems (KBS) Approach**

MyCCMajors addresses the advisement process with a KBS (sometimes called an expert system) using advisor knowledge to solve problems requiring higher order human intelligence. KBSs represent expertise in the form of generalized computer rules. They integrate human "know-how" to reason through a problem, using as much knowledge as is at hand and that is appropriate.

Townsend Communications, the recipient of this prestigious NSF grant, previously developed and implemented a KBS, MyMajors, which effectively advises undecided students regarding 4-year college majors. MyMajors is linked to by over 2,000 high school guidance departments, university advisement centers and other organizations. Eighty percent of the 250,000 students completing the on-line MyMajors interview last year indicated that they either had no major in mind or had only some idea. Seventy-four percent of the students accepted the first recommendations of MyMajors as making very good or some sense. Townsend's experience with MyMajors assisted in developing MyCCMajors.

The development team, includes Dr. Fritz Grupe as Principal Investigator and MyMajors developer and Dr. Rich Feller, past President of NCDA and Distinguished Teaching Scholar of Counseling and Career

Development at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, as a consultant to the project. A variety of campuses were represented by paid and volunteer advisors. The effort identified initial questions advisors felt were important and answers that determined how they assessed a student's background in order to make recommendations. We assembled a rule base, and techniques for evaluating students' answers with respect to the courses of study for which the system recommends.

MyCCMajors continues to improve and add features that make it unique. The interview is equivalent to around one hour of interviewing. Ninety percent of advisors and students alike strongly agree or agree that MyCCMajors asks the kinds of questions that advisors ask. This includes advisors who disagreed because the questions presented were more than they have time to ask. They agreed that MyCCMajors suggests reasonable career clusters and programs of study and is easy/fast (+/- 16 minutes) to use. It collects information advisors often don't have time to obtain or evaluate. And it creates assessment data useful in providing deeper advising with counselors when they meet with advisees.

R&D is on-going to create a polished interview and to move to "excellent" suggestions. The program already makes useful suggestions beyond those related to the career clusters and disciplines. MyCCMajors is becoming an effective supplement to existing advisement resources.

### **In a Nutshell**

MyCCMajors is different from other advisement products currently in use.

1. *It is a resource for the advisor*, and can be used independently by students with/without access to an advisor.
2. It is *not a personality test* or an interest inventory that matches user values and preferences with occupational groups.
3. It *suggests career clusters*. No other program uses this increasingly nationally recognized approach.
4. It *suggests recognizable college programs* in the career clusters.
5. It is *tailored to the specific offerings of a campus* using individual campus program titles and campus web pages to describe the major. For each course of study title, when appropriate, a transfer degree version, a non-transfer degree version and a certificate version for each title are available (e.g. RN Nursing (Transfer), LPN (Associate degree) CNA (Certificate)). It recommends for over 1,200 programs.
6. It *requires no special staff training*. It is usable by admissions officers for recruitment and advisement, peer counselors, orientation leaders, instructors of college success courses, and high school and community outreach counselors.
7. It *accounts for student disabilities* so programs of study that are impacted by physical immobility, fine motor skill issues, and other disabilities are acknowledged in deference to programs where a student is likely to be successful.
8. *Transfer-oriented students and four-year campuses benefit* also. Although the project began with a focus on community colleges and their certificate and non-transfer programs, the program works equally well for transfer and bachelor level programs.
9. Unique rules in the program trigger a variety of other helpful suggestions regarding the number of credits/units a student should take, whether the student's needs are consistent with the type of degree sought, whether part time attendance makes it difficult, if not impossible, to complete some curriculums and whether the student understands that not wanting to complete general education requirements eliminates the completion of transfer or non-transfer degree.

## **Is Your Campus Interested in Using and Helping Develop MyCCMajors? (No cost involved)**

The team is interested in finding additional campuses to test the program with students and to provide feedback. Most testing is “action research” that informs the program’s improvements and accuracy. Later we will conduct more formal longitudinal research. Advisors are paid for their time. Commensurate with the degree of involvement of a campus active at this stage, the campus can qualify for extended free usage of MyCCMajors and MyMajors. **We are not seeking institutional funding.**

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