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# Predictable Politics: Whether Undergraduate Students' College Majors Relate to their Sociopolitical Views at Olivet Nazarene University

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**PREDICTABLE POLITICS: WHETHER UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' COLLEGE MAJORS  
RELATE TO THEIR SOCIOPOLITICAL VIEWS AT OLIVET NAZARENE UNIVERSITY**

By

Joshua M. Dille

Honors Scholarship Project

Submitted to the Faculty of

Olivet Nazarene University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

GRADUATION WITH UNIVERSITY HONORS

May 2017

BACHELOR OF THE ARTS

in

Political Science

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Acknowledgements . . . . .	i
2. List of Tables . . . . .	iv
3. List of Figures . . . . .	v
4. Abstract . . . . .	vi
5. Introduction . . . . .	1
6. Review of Literature . . . . .	1
7. Hypothesis . . . . .	6
8. Methods . . . . .	7
a. Participants . . . . .	7
b. Measures . . . . .	8
c. Procedure . . . . .	11
9. Results . . . . .	11
a. Self-Assessment Differences by Major. . . . .	11
i. Social Views . . . . .	11
ii. Economic Views . . . . .	13
iii. General Political Views . . . . .	14
b. Issue Differences by Major . . . . .	16
i. Abortion . . . . .	16
ii. Same-Sex Couples . . . . .	18
iii. Marijuana . . . . .	18

iv. Racial Discrimination . . . . .	19
v. Rich and Poor Gap . . . . .	20
vi. Government Healthcare . . . . .	21
vii. Business Regulation . . . . .	22
viii. Job and Living Standard . . . . .	23
10. Discussion . . . . .	25
a. Self-Assessment Questions . . . . .	25
b. Issue Questions . . . . .	29
11. Conclusion . . . . .	32
12. Works Cited . . . . .	34

## LIST OF TABLES

1.1-Self-Assessment Section Results . . . . .	16
1.2-Issue Section Results . . . . .	25

## LIST OF FIGURES

1.1-Self-Assessment on Social Views . . . . .	13
1.2-Self-Assessment on Economic Views . . . . .	14
1.3-Self-Assessment on General Views . . . . .	15
1.4-Abortion Issue Question . . . . .	17
1.5-Racial Discrimination Issue Question . . . . .	20
1.6-Rich and Poor Gap Issue Question . . . . .	21
1.7-Government Healthcare Issue Question . . . . .	22
1.8-Job and Living Standard Issue Question . . . . .	24

## ABSTRACT

This quantitative study determined the relationship between college students' ( $n = 1,277$ ) chosen major and their sociopolitical orientation. A campus-wide online survey distributed in September 2016 collected information about students' attitudes on various key issues, and the resulting data was analyzed in order to uncover patterns of sociopolitical orientation within specific groups of college majors. The results supported a statistically significant relationship between participants' academic majors and sociopolitical views. These findings were assessed through the self-selection and socialization hypotheses of John Holland's "Theory of Person-Environment Fit" as models for understanding the development of common sociopolitical ideas in groups of individuals who are pursuing similar career paths.

Keywords: Sociopolitical Views, College Majors, Socialization, Self-Selection, Person-Environment Fit, Undergraduate, Political Psychology, Survey, Olivet Nazarene University, Self-Assessment, Social Issues, Economic Issues



## INTRODUCTION

First introductions between students on a college or university campus often begin with a simple, fact-based question: "What is your major?" While many undergraduates may just be trying to make conversation through this query, loftier questions could be raised as a result: "What can one learn about a student based on their choice of college major?" followed with, "Compared to their peers in the same discipline, how alike are they?" It is a well-established phenomenon that most college students tend to become increasingly liberal-leaning the longer that they continue their academic careers, but to some degree, the extent of students' liberalization may vary based on their chosen academic discipline.<sup>1</sup> In other words, an individual's vocational choice can play a factor in helping researchers understand the sociopolitical views held by that individual. The purpose of this study is to distinguish the relationship between students' choice of college majors and their general political affiliations, forming patterns of sociopolitical orientation within academic disciplines at Olivet Nazarene University, a private Christian college.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Decades of research have been devoted to understanding the common demographics and transformations of sociopolitical views on college campuses, but little

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<sup>1</sup> Hastie, Brianne. "Cold Hearts and Bleeding Hearts: Disciplinary Differences in University Students' Sociopolitical Orientations," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 147, no. 3 (06, 2007): 211-41. Accessed January 12, 2017.

attention has been paid to the group orientations of disciplinary areas. One theory, “Person-Environment Fit”, has attempted to explore and explain the relationship between students’ career paths and their sociopolitical views.<sup>2</sup> Early research on this subject began when John L. Holland crafted his “Theory of Vocational Choice” to explain the psychology behind how different personalities and “personal orientations” could account for a person’s vocational choice.<sup>3</sup> Later researchers further developed a theory on “Person-Environment Fit” based on Holland’s work in this area, substantiating several of his core propositions. Specifically, Holland formulated two hypotheses that account for the distinctive patterns of sociopolitical views found in disparate fields of study: Self-Selection and Socialization.<sup>4</sup>

According to Hastie, Self-Selection occurs when “people choose disciplines whose views most closely match their own” while Socialization occurs when “people’s belief systems change to match their discipline’s”.<sup>5</sup> Socialization can be driven by normative influence (where one’s attitude progresses toward uniformity with that of others within the same discipline) and informational influences (where additional

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<sup>2</sup> Feldman, Kenneth A., Corinna A. Ethington, and John C. Smart. “A Further Investigation of Major Field and Person-Environment Fit: Sociological versus Psychological Interpretations of Holland’s Theory,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 72, no. 6 (Nov. - Dec., 2001): pp. 670-698. Accessed January 12, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Holland, John L. “Some Explorations of Theory of Vocational Choice,” *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied* 76, no. 26 (No. 545, 1962): American Psychological Association.

<sup>4</sup> Feldman, “A Further Investigation of Major Field and Person-Environment Fit: Sociological versus Psychological Interpretations of Holland’s Theory”.

<sup>5</sup> Hastie, Brianne. “Higher education and sociopolitical orientation: The role of social influence in the liberalization of students,” *European Journal Of Psychology Of Education* 22, no. 3 (September 2007): 259-274. Accessed January 12, 2017.

familiarity with a subject generates attitude change). Evidence for the Self-Selection hypothesis can be found in studies that measure differences in sociopolitical orientation based on major choice at the outset of college, without any marked changes over the course of the students' academic career. One such example is a study completed at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2003, where researchers found that students tend to choose majors that closely aligned with their prior egalitarian or non-egalitarian attitudes.<sup>6</sup> The study concluded that "the university setting is best conceptualized as an environment in which students are provided with the tools to follow their beliefs down corresponding career paths rather than a place in which students develop fundamentally new beliefs". Conversely, evidence for the Socialization hypothesis can be found in studies that discover differing changes in students' sociopolitical orientation over time based on their academic discipline, even if levels of sociopolitical orientation are comparable at the start of students' time at college. In a 3-year longitudinal study published in 1996, researchers compared social science and commerce students at the University of Ontario, finding "field-specific changes in attitudes" on sociopolitical issues, with social science students transitioning into more liberal attitudes and commerce students transitioning into more conservative attitudes.<sup>7</sup> They attributed these changes to the environmental effect of professors, courses, and

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<sup>6</sup> Sidanius, Jim, Colette Van Laar, Shana Levin, and Stacey Sinclair. "Social Hierarchy Maintenance and Assortment into Social Roles: A Social Dominance Perspective," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 6, no. 4 (2003): 333-52. Accessed January 21, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Guimond, Serge and Douglas L. Palmer. "The Political Socialization of Commerce and Social Science Students: Epistemic Authority and Attitude Change," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 26, no. 22 (1996). Accessed September 23, 2015.

peers that take similar positions on sociopolitical issues, providing support for the Socialization hypothesis.

Meanwhile, many experts believe that both Self-Selection and Socialization hypotheses can play a simultaneous role in students' attitude development related to major choice, based on the level of adjustment a student must undertake upon entering a college or university.<sup>8</sup> When this is the case, the socialization effect of a particular academic discipline enhances and reinforces the original sociopolitical views that were involved in the self-selection of a student's major choice. This combination of Self-Selection and Socialization factors is a process called Accentuation.<sup>9</sup>

"Predictable Politics" is closely related to Gage's study: "Choice of Major and Political Attitudes: A Study of University of Minnesota Students".<sup>10</sup> This was the only example of an undergraduate study which used a cross-sectional survey analysis to determine the relationship between students' college majors and a self-assessment of their own sociopolitical attitudes. It found statistically significant differences between major groups based on a self-assessment of economic views, but it did not find those differences in a self-assessment of social views. The business and IT/engineering groups

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<sup>8</sup> Bardi, Anat, Kathryn E. Buchanan, Robin Goodwin, and Letitia Slabu. "Value stability and change during self-chosen life transitions: Self-selection versus socialization effects," *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology* 106, no. 1 (January 2014): 131-147. Accessed September 25, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Hastie, "Higher education and sociopolitical orientation: The role of social influence in the liberalization of students".

<sup>10</sup> Gage, Rachel, Jennifer Zick, Kaylie Tully, and Elaina Simon. "Choice of Major and Political Attitudes: A Study of University of Minnesota Students," *Sentience: University of Minnesota Undergraduate Journal of Psychology* 3 (Spring 2010): accessed September 22, 2015.

of students at the University of Minnesota displayed higher levels of conservatism on average than the biological/environmental studies and the social studies groups for the economic views self-assessment. Studies conducted by Kenneth Feldman,<sup>11</sup> Serge Guimond,<sup>12</sup> Brianne Hastie,<sup>13</sup> Jim Sidanius,<sup>14</sup> and others also confirm the existence of differences on sociopolitical views between major groups by delving into more detail on issue-related questions, which will also be covered in this study. Hastie's study found statistically significant differences between groups of majors, while specifically naming social sciences and commerce students as "the most dissonant discipline groups", while finding "generally similar patterns for the remaining groups—psychology and others".<sup>15</sup> Overall, Hastie's study revealed left-wing, liberal values among the students she studied in small Australian universities.

Unlike the University of Minnesota study, "Predictable Politics" will survey students from a private university. Olivet Nazarene University is an evangelical Christian denominational university in the Wesleyan tradition, and it is a member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU). Olivet encourages faith integration and spiritual growth through chapel services as well as in the classrooms. Its motto is:

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<sup>11</sup> Feldman, "A Further Investigation of Major Field and Person-Environment Fit: Sociological versus Psychological Interpretations of Holland's Theory".

<sup>12</sup> Guimond, "The Political Socialization of Commerce and Social Science Students: Epistemic Authority and Attitude Change".

<sup>13</sup> Hastie, "Cold Hearts and Bleeding Hearts: Disciplinary Differences in University Students' Sociopolitical Orientations".

<sup>14</sup> Sidanius, "Social Hierarchy Maintenance and Assortment into Social Roles: A Social Dominance Perspective".

<sup>15</sup> Hastie, "Cold Hearts and Bleeding Hearts: Disciplinary Differences in University Students' Sociopolitical Orientations".

“Education with a Christian Purpose”.<sup>16</sup> A 2010 study of Spring Arbor University (also a member of the CCCU) students found that today’s Christian evangelical students, even while becoming more socially conscious than previous generations, continue to vote based on their conservative values.<sup>17</sup> With this characteristic in mind, one of the questions that this study explores is whether the religious community of Olivet will be reflected in the survey results when compared to similar studies performed at secular universities.

#### HYPOTHESIS

I predicted that patterns of sociopolitical orientation would form among groups of students sharing the same college major. Finding statistically significant differences between majors ( $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ) would constitute a rejection of the null hypothesis, meaning that the relationship between major choice and sociopolitical orientation is not a result of random chance. In accordance with prior research by Gage and Hastie, I predicted that accounting, business administration, and engineering students would favor the most conservative ideological responses to the survey, on average, compared to art, nursing, psychology, and social work students who would have the most liberal

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<sup>16</sup> “Education with a Christian Purpose,” *2015-2016 Catalog*, Olivet Nazarene University. Accessed January 22, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Norwood, Jeremy S. "A Glimpse of the New Conservatism: Social Attitudes of Undergraduate Students at an Evangelical Christian College." Order No. 1493370, Michigan State University, 2010. Accessed March 29, 2017.

ideological responses.<sup>18 19</sup> I hypothesized that the sociopolitical views of the other majors analyzed would land somewhere in between those groups, showing significant differences, but not at the “most dissonant” ends.

I also predicted that the survey results would show greater conservatism in sociopolitical positions than one would find at a secular campus, based on prior research at Olivet Nazarene University performed by Claborn.<sup>20</sup> Even though the current survey did not offer any specific questions on religion, participants’ individual faith and/or the atmosphere of evangelical Christian faith at Olivet Nazarene University was likely to influence the participants’ responses in a generally conservative direction.

## METHODS

### Participants

The “ONU Political Views Survey” received 1267 responses from undergraduate students currently attending Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais Illinois, whose ages ranged from 16 to 56 ( $M = 20.15$  years,  $SD = 3.00$  years,  $Mdn = 20$  years). White individuals formed a tremendous majority at 89% of the respondents, while Hispanic and Black individuals were 7% and 5% respectively, Asian individuals were 3%, and American Indian/Alaskan and Pacific Islanders were 1% each.

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<sup>18</sup> Gage, “Choice of Major and Political Attitudes: A Study of University of Minnesota Students”.

<sup>19</sup> Hastie, “Cold Hearts and Bleeding Hearts: Disciplinary Differences in University Students' Sociopolitical Orientations”.

<sup>20</sup> Claborn, “If You Can't Join 'Em, Don't : Untangling Attitudes on Social, Economic and Foreign Issues by Graphing Them,” Faculty Scholarship Paper 3 – Political Science, *Olivet Nazarene University*, 2015.

The most common college majors represented in the survey responses had 10% or fewer of the total responses. The 12 majors with the highest number of responses were chosen for analysis, in order that the results would not be disproportionately skewed in a certain direction because of the limited number of respondents in the majority of the majors offered at Olivet. Engineering was the largest sample of the majors ( $n = 128$ ), followed by Nursing ( $n = 119$ ), Business Administration ( $n = 68$ ), Biology ( $n = 63$ ), Elementary Education ( $n = 58$ ), Psychology ( $n = 57$ ), Social Work ( $n = 55$ ), Criminal Justice ( $n = 34$ ), Art ( $n = 32$ ), Communication Studies ( $n = 31$ ), Accounting ( $n = 29$ ), and Exercise Science ( $n = 28$ ). All together, these 12 majors constitute 702 of the 1267 survey responses, meaning that only about 55% of the total survey respondents were analyzed.

Of the respondents, 61% were female, while 39% were male. Freshmen comprised 26% of the respondents, 19% were sophomores, 28% were juniors, and 27% were seniors. A major bulk of the respondents indicated that they were registered to vote in their home state (77%), 19% were not registered to vote, 4% did not know if they were registered, and 1% were not citizens of the United States of America.

## **Measures**

The online survey consisted of three sections, each of which had its own page on the survey website. The first section asked students to provide background information, such as age, gender, major, year in school, ethnicity, and voter registration status. The participants did not know that the results of the survey would be analyzed for the



purpose of comparing their answers to those of different academic majors. The second and third sections of the survey measured participants' sociopolitical orientation, using previously validated survey questions from similar studies, with written permission from the authors.

The second section called for a self-assessment of participants' ideologies, asking "How would you score yourself politically?" Answers were provided via a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 was labeled "Liberal" and 5 was labeled "Conservative". The three self-assessment questions proceeded by asking:

1. "Which point on this scale best describes your political views when it comes to social issues—issues like same-sex marriage and abortion?"
2. "Which point on this scale best describes your political views when it comes to economic issues—things like taxes and the economy?"
3. "Which point on this scale best describes your political views generally?"

These particular self-assessment survey questions originated from a multidimensional study completed by Samara Klar in 2014.<sup>21</sup>

The third section asked respondents to respond to a series of opinion statements about several key social and economic issues. Responses to these prompts were also measured on a Likert scale, labeled: 1 (disagree strongly), 2 (disagree somewhat), 3 (I don't know), 4 (agree somewhat), and 5 (agree strongly). Abortion, same-sex marriage,

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<sup>21</sup> Klar, Samara. "A Multidimensional Study of Ideological Preferences and Priorities among the American Public." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 78, no. Special Issue (2014).

marijuana legalization, and racial discrimination were covered under the social issue questions, and income inequality, government-funded medical insurance, business regulation, and government services were covered under the economic issue questions. The issue questions did not cover every political issue of the United States through the survey, but were intended to explore a sampling of different social and economic issues that might matter to college students. These prompts were also previously validated by other researchers in separate studies:

1. "A woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice."<sup>22</sup>
2. "Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status."<sup>23</sup>
3. "Marijuana should be legalized."<sup>24</sup>
4. "Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America."<sup>25</sup>
5. "Government should lessen the gap between rich and poor."<sup>26</sup>
6. "There should be a government insurance plan that would cover all medical and hospital expenses for everyone."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Feldman, Stanley, and Christopher Johnston. "Understanding the Determinants of Political Ideology: Implications of Structural Complexity." *Political Psychology* 35, no. 3 (2013).

<sup>23</sup> "2015 College Senior Survey." *Higher Education Research Institute*. University of California, Los Angeles, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Claborn, David, and Tobias, Lindsey. "If You Can't Join 'Em, Don't : Untangling Attitudes on Social, Economic and Foreign Issues by Graphing Them".

<sup>27</sup> Feldman, Stanley, and Christopher Johnston. "Understanding the Determinants of Political Ideology: Implications of Structural Complexity".

7. "Government regulation of business does more harm than good."<sup>28</sup>
8. "The government should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living."<sup>29</sup>

## **Procedure**

A link to the "ONU Political Views Survey" was emailed to the entire undergraduate student body at Olivet on September 26, 2016, lasting for two weeks. As an incentive to complete the voluntary "ONU Political Views Survey", participants were entered into a drawing for a fifty dollar gift card. Participants were informed that the survey was collecting research on the political views of ONU undergraduate students, and that the individual answers would be completely anonymous. The rate of response was 42% of the undergraduate students currently attending Olivet Nazarene University.

## **RESULTS**

### **Self-Assessment Differences by Major**

#### **Social Views**

Several One-Way ANOVA tests were conducted to assess the differences between the major groups on the three self-assessment questions (social, economic, and general views). These tests determine if the mean ratings are equal across the

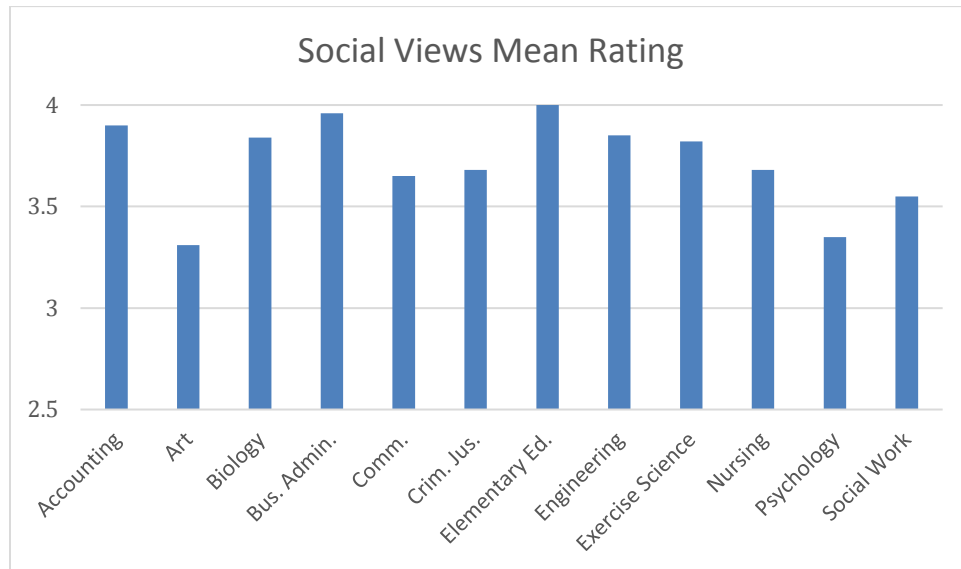
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<sup>28</sup> "American Values Survey." *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. June 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Feldman, Stanley, and Christopher Johnston. "Understanding the Determinants of Political Ideology: Implications of Structural Complexity".

majors with regard to each question. When it came to the self-assessment of views on social issues, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was 3.74 ( $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 1.301$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale (1=liberal; 5=conservative). However, the results revealed no statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=1.496$ ,  $p=0.128$ , since  $p > 0.05$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices did not differ significantly on this question: Accounting ( $M = 3.9$ ,  $SD = 1.398$ ,  $N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.401$ ,  $N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 1.260$ ,  $N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 1.239$ ,  $N = 68$ ), Communication Studies ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.305$ ,  $N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.430$ ,  $N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.170$ ,  $N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 1.286$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Exercise Science ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.156$ ,  $N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.365$ ,  $N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.246$ ,  $N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 1.303$ ,  $N = 55$ ).

**Figure 1.1-Self-Assessment on Social Views (5=conservative, 1=liberal)**

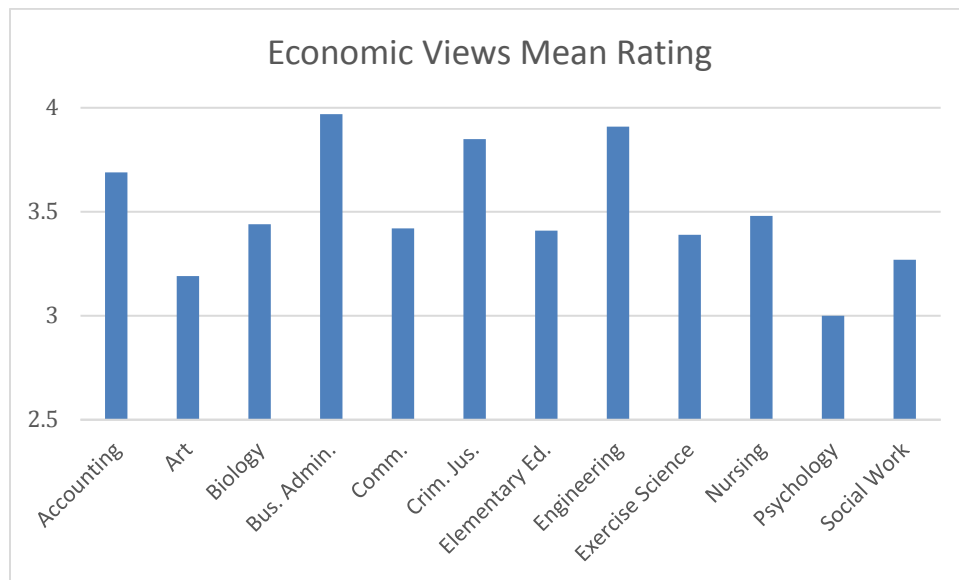


### Economic Views

When it came to the self-assessment of views on economic issues, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was 3.55 ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 1.068$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale. Unlike the social issues, the self-assessments of views on economic issues showed a statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=5.200$ ,  $p=0.001$ , since  $p < 0.05$ . The responses to this particular question lacked equality of variances, so I also ran a Welch's ANOVA that confirmed the significant difference in mean ratings between the majors  $F(11, 690)=5.188$ ,  $p=0.001$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices differed significantly on this question: Accounting ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 1.198$ ,  $N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.148$ ,  $N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = 0.980$ ,  $N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 0.897$ ,  $N = 68$ ), Communication

Studies ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.958$ ,  $N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 1.048$ ,  $N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.060$ ,  $N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 0.926$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Exercise Science ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 0.994$ ,  $N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.119$ ,  $N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.239$ ,  $N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 0.932$ ,  $N = 55$ ).

**Figure 1.2-Self-Assessment on Economic Views (5=conservative, 1=liberal)**

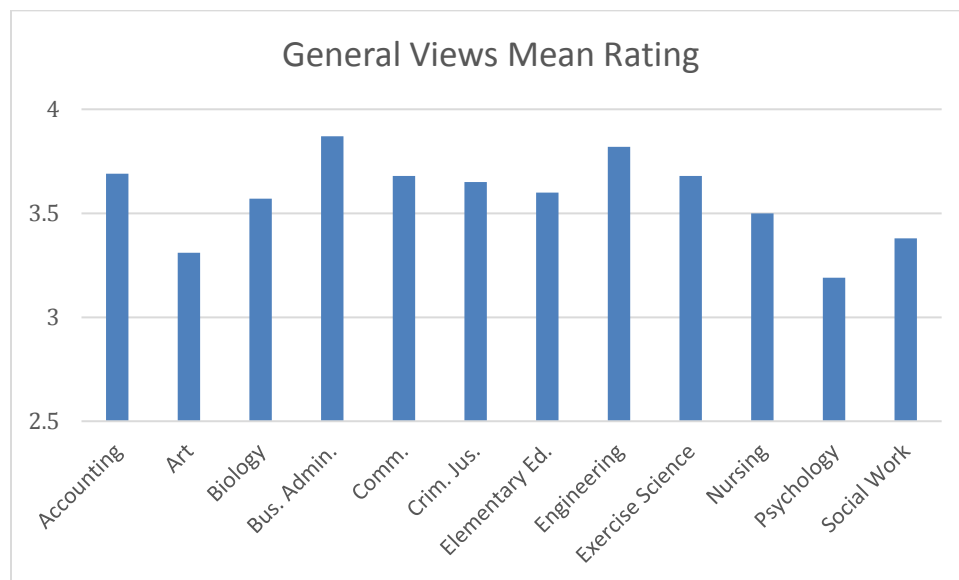


#### General Political Views

On the self-assessment of general political views, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was a 3.60 ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.086$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale. Similarly to the economic issues, the self-assessments of general political views revealed

a statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=2.181$ ,  $p=0.014$ , since  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices differed significantly on this question: Accounting ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 1.105$ ,  $N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.203$ ,  $N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 0.946$ ,  $N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 1.021$ ,  $N = 68$ ), Communication Studies ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.077$ ,  $N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.041$ ,  $N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.075$ ,  $N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 0.083$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Exercise Science ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 0.124$ ,  $N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.134$ ,  $N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.125$ ,  $N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 0.991$ ,  $N = 55$ ).

**Figure 1.3- Self-Assessment on General Views (5=conservative, 1=liberal)**



**Table 1.1-Self Assessment Section Results** (Highlight signifies significance)

Self-Assessment Section	p-value	Mean Rating (Across Majors)	Standard Deviation
Social Views	0.128	3.74	1.301
Economic Views	0.001	3.55	1.068
General Political Views	0.014	3.60	1.086

### Issue Differences by Major

#### Abortion

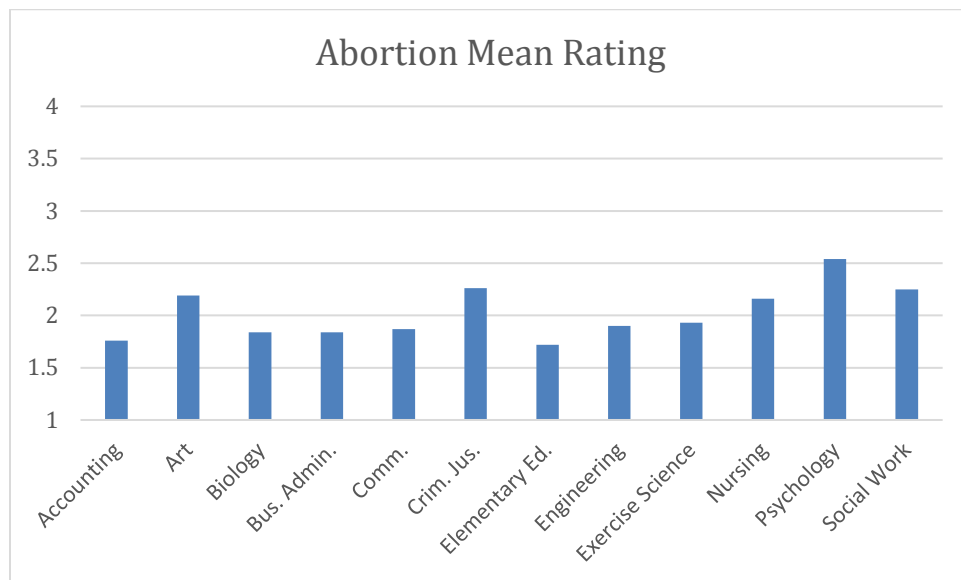
Survey Item: *“A woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.”*

A series of One-Way ANOVA tests were conducted to assess the differences between the major groups on the eight issue-related questions (abortion, same-sex couples, marijuana, etc.). These tests determine if the mean ratings are equal across the majors with regard to each issue question. On the abortion issue question, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was 2.02 ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = 1.297$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale (1=disagree strongly; 5=agree strongly). The results on the abortion issue revealed a statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=2.091$ ,  $p=0.019$ , since  $p < 0.05$ . The responses to this particular question lacked equality of variances, so I also ran a Welch’s ANOVA that confirmed the significant difference in



mean ratings between the majors  $F(11, 690)=1.859, p=0.047$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices differed significantly on this question: Accounting ( $M = 1.76, SD = 1.185, N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 2.19, SD = 1.203, N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 1.84, SD = 1.208, N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M = 1.84, SD = 1.167, N = 68$ ), Communication Studies ( $M = 1.87, SD = 1.204, N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 2.26, SD = 1.504, N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M = 1.72, SD = 1.073, N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 1.9, SD = 1.216, N = 128$ ), Exercise Science ( $M = 1.93, SD = 1.215, N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 2.16, SD = 1.426, N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 2.54, SD = 1.548, N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 2.25, SD = 1.294, N = 55$ ).

**Figure 1.4-Abortion Issue Question (1=disagree, 5=agree)**



### Same-Sex Couples

*“Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status.”*

For the question pertaining to same-sex couples’ marital status, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was 2.73 ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 1.565$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale. The results did not reveal a statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=1.692$ ,  $p=0.071$ , since  $p > 0.05$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices had no significant difference on this question: Accounting ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 1.461$ ,  $N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 1.561$ ,  $N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.386$ ,  $N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.540$ ,  $N = 68$ ), Communication Studies ( $M = 2.68$ ,  $SD = 1.600$ ,  $N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 2.76$ ,  $SD = 1.810$ ,  $N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 1.608$ ,  $N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 1.533$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Exercise Science ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 1.503$ ,  $N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.597$ ,  $N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.497$ ,  $N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.610$ ,  $N = 55$ ).

### Marijuana Legalization

*“Marijuana should be legalized.”*

On the marijuana legalization issue, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was 2.60 ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.352$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale. The results did not point to a statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=1.351$ ,  $p=0.192$ , since  $p > 0.05$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices did not differ significantly on this question: Accounting ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 1.168$ ,  $N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 1.247$ ,  $N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = 1.393$ ,  $N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M =$

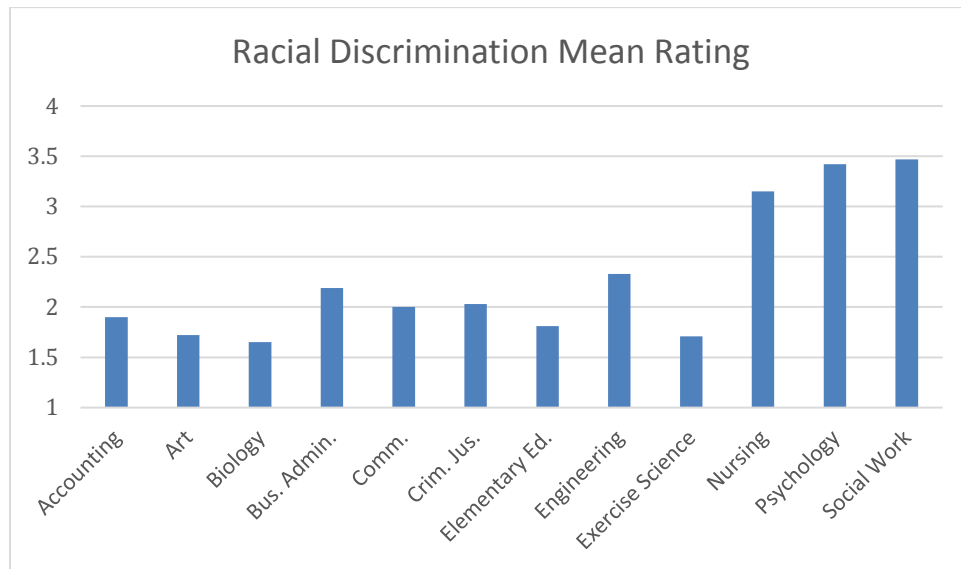
2.46,  $SD = 1.263$ ,  $N = 68$ ), Communication Studies ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = 1.496$ ,  $N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.244$ ,  $N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M = 2.36$ ,  $SD = 1.180$ ,  $N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 2.68$ ,  $SD = 1.479$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Exercise Science ( $M = 2.36$ ,  $SD = 1.254$ ,  $N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 1.356$ ,  $N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.387$ ,  $N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 1.345$ ,  $N = 55$ ).

#### Racial Discrimination

*“Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America.”*

On the racial discrimination question, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was 1.86 ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = 1.001$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=6.434$ ,  $p=0.001$ , since  $p < 0.05$ . The responses to this particular question lacked equality of variances, so I also ran a Welch’s ANOVA that confirmed the significant difference in mean ratings between the majors  $F(11, 690)=7.332$ ,  $p=0.001$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices differed significantly on this question: Accounting ( $M = 1.90$ ,  $SD = 0.939$ ,  $N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 1.72$ ,  $SD = 1.054$ ,  $N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SD = 0.600$ ,  $N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M = 2.19$ ,  $SD = 1.175$ ,  $N = 68$ ), Communication Studies ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 1.291$ ,  $N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = 1.029$ ,  $N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M = 1.81$ ,  $SD = 0.888$ ,  $N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = 1.123$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Exercise Science ( $M = 1.71$ ,  $SD = 1.013$ ,  $N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.338$ ,  $N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 1.281$ ,  $N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 1.034$ ,  $N = 55$ ).

**Figure 1.5-Racial Discrimination Issue Question (1=disagree, 5=agree)**



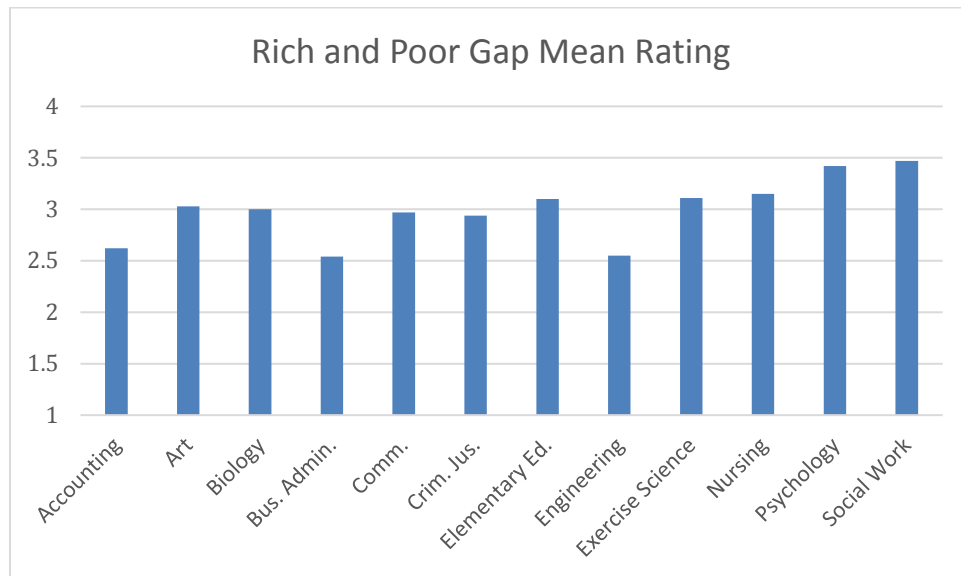
#### Rich and Poor Gap

*“Government should lessen the gap between rich and poor.”*

For the question pertaining to the gap between rich and poor, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was 2.96 ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.280$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale. The results of the ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=4.069$ ,  $p=0.001$ , since  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices differed significantly on this question: Accounting ( $M = 2.62$ ,  $SD = 1.265$ ,  $N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.150$ ,  $N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.320$ ,  $N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 1.354$ ,  $N = 68$ ), Communication Studies ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 1.140$ ,  $N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 1.229$ ,  $N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.135$ ,  $N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 1.254$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Exercise Science

( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 1.197$ ,  $N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.335$ ,  $N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 1.281$ ,  $N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 1.034$ ,  $N = 55$ ).

**Figure 1.6-Rich and Poor Gap Issue Question (1=disagree, 5=agree)**



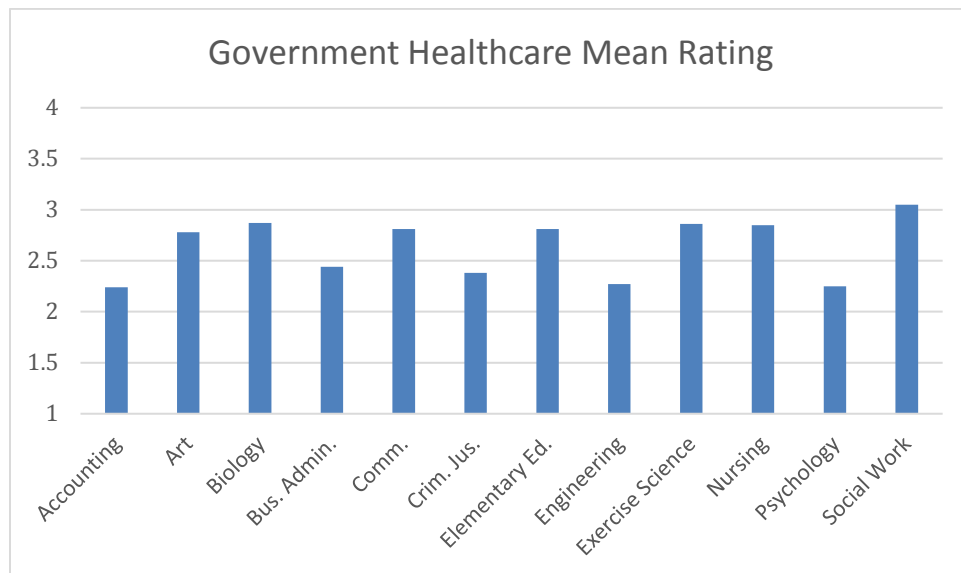
#### Government Healthcare

*“There should be a government insurance plan that would cover all medical and hospital expenses for everyone.”*

When it came to the government health insurance issue, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was 2.71 ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.335$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=4.048$ ,  $p=0.001$ , since  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices differed significantly on this question: Accounting ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 1.123$ ,  $N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 1.313$ ,  $N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 1.338$ ,  $N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M =$

2.44,  $SD = 1.386$ ,  $N = 68$ ), Communication Studies ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.223$ ,  $N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.280$ ,  $N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.249$ ,  $N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = 1.252$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Exercise Science ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 1.177$ ,  $N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.436$ ,  $N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 1.316$ ,  $N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.224$ ,  $N = 55$ ).

**Figure 1.7-Government Healthcare Issue Question** (1=disagree, 5=agree)



#### Business Regulation

*“Government regulation of business does more harm than good.”*

On the business regulation question, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was 3.36 ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 0.997$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale. The results revealed no statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=1.229$ ,  $p=0.220$ . The responses to this particular question lacked equality of

variances, so I also ran a Welch's ANOVA which confirmed that there were no significant differences in mean ratings between the majors  $F(11, 690)=1.266$ ,  $p=0.247$ , since  $p > 0.05$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices did not differ significantly on this question: Accounting ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 1.227$ ,  $N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 0.946$ ,  $N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 0.979$ ,  $N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 1.029$ ,  $N = 68$ ), Communication Studies ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 0.844$ ,  $N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 0.960$ ,  $N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 0.836$ ,  $N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.122$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Exercise Science ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 1.062$ ,  $N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 0.882$ ,  $N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 0.996$ ,  $N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 0.989$ ,  $N = 55$ ).

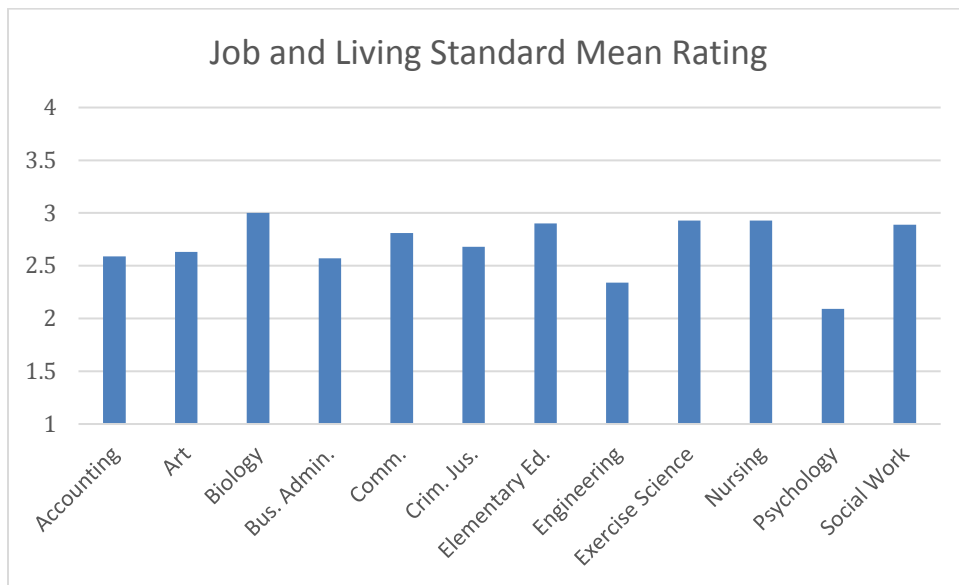
#### Job and Living Standard

*"The government should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living."*

On the issue of government-guaranteed jobs and a good standard of living, the mean rating for the 12 majors combined was 2.75 ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 1.203$ ,  $N = 702$ ) on the 5-point scale. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in mean ratings between the majors,  $F(11,690)=2.795$ ,  $p=0.001$ , since  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, the 12 major choices differed significantly on this question: Accounting ( $M = 2.59$ ,  $SD = 1.150$ ,  $N = 29$ ), Art ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.185$ ,  $N = 32$ ), Biology ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.164$ ,  $N = 63$ ), Business Administration ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 1.226$ ,  $N = 68$ ), Communication Studies ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.223$ ,  $N = 31$ ), Criminal Justice ( $M = 2.68$ ,  $SD = 1.065$ ,  $N = 34$ ), Elementary Education ( $M$

= 2.90,  $SD = 1.180$ ,  $N = 58$ ), Engineering ( $M = 2.34$ ,  $SD = 1.218$ ,  $N = 128$ ), Exercise Science ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.303$ ,  $N = 28$ ), Nursing ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.140$ ,  $N = 119$ ), Psychology ( $M = 2.09$ ,  $SD = 1.243$ ,  $N = 57$ ), Social Work ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.133$ ,  $N = 55$ ).

**Figure 1.8-Job and Living Standard Issue Question (1=disagree, 5=agree)**





**Table 1.2-Issue Section Results** (Highlights signify statistical significance)

Issue Question	p-value	Mean Rating (Across Majors)	Standard Deviation
Abortion	0.019	2.02	1.297
Same-Sex Couples	0.071	2.73	1.565
Marijuana Legalization	0.192	2.6	1.352
Racial Discrimination	0.001	1.86	1.001
Rich and Poor Gap	0.001	2.96	1.28
Government Healthcare	0.001	2.71	1.335
Business Regulation	0.22	3.36	0.997
Job and Living Standard	0.001	2.75	1.203

## DISCUSSION

### Self-Assessment Questions

As I predicted, patterns of sociopolitical orientation formed among students sharing the same college major. Although the differences between major groups were not statistically significant for the self-assessment on social issues, the differences between major groups were statistically significant for the self-assessments on economic issues and general political views. This may lead one to conclude that a

student's college major only relates to their economic and general political views but not to their social views. However, rejection of the null hypothesis for the social views self-assessment only means that no statistically significant relationship could be found in their self-assessment, without mentioning any specific social issues. Thus, a conclusion can only be drawn based on where students think they fall on social issues, without applying the question to the issues themselves. These results align with prior research completed at the University of Minnesota, because the self-assessment of social issues exhibited no statistically significant relationship, even though the self-assessment of economic views did.<sup>30</sup>

Confirming my hypothesis, accounting, business administration, and engineering students favored more conservative responses to the self-assessment questions than art, nursing, psychology, and social work students, specifically on the economic and general political issues. How does one explain this? Working through the self-selection theory, students who are studying accounting, business administration, and engineering may have chosen those majors in part because of preexisting conservative views. At the same time, students studying art, nursing, psychology, and social work may have chosen those majors in part because of preexisting liberal views. These views guided them toward career choices that align with their sociopolitical orientation, which is supported by Hastie's research.<sup>31</sup> A socialization perspective would suggest that studying

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<sup>30</sup> Gage, "Choice of Major and Political Attitudes: A Study of University of Minnesota Students".

<sup>31</sup> Hastie, "Cold Hearts and Bleeding Hearts: Disciplinary Differences in University Students' Sociopolitical Orientations".

accounting, business administration, and engineering brought students into contact with more economic problems, developing experience with these concepts and prompting increased conservatism in regard to those questions, which is supported by Guimond's research.<sup>32</sup> Alternatively, studying art, nursing, psychology, and social work may have brought students into contact with professors and classroom material that prompted increased liberalism. However, the current study is limited by its cross-sectional nature; it cannot accurately measure the extent of socialization changes to these students' attitudes, as opposed to self-selection factors, without a longitudinal study. It is possible that a mix of both self-selection and socialization factors are present within the data, resulting in an accentuation effect.<sup>33</sup>

Across the 12 majors analyzed by my survey, all displayed higher levels of conservatism than their public university undergraduate peers at the University of Minnesota on the same self-assessment survey questions. The mean rating for the self-assessment on social issues among the Olivet students was 3.74 out of 5 ( $N = 702$ ), compared to a mean rating of 1.94 out of 5 ( $N = 88$ ) among University of Minnesota students. The mean rating for the self-assessment on economic issues among the Olivet students was 3.55 out of 5 ( $N = 702$ ), compared to a mean rating of 2.54 out of 5 ( $N = 88$ ) among University of Minnesota students. These drastic differences between private and public universities can be explained utilizing both self-selection and socialization

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<sup>32</sup> Guimond, "The Political Socialization of Commerce and Social Science Students: Epistemic Authority and Attitude Change".

<sup>33</sup> Hastie, "Cold Hearts and Bleeding Hearts: Disciplinary Differences in University Students' Sociopolitical Orientations".

theories. Olivet is well known for taking conservative stances on the interpretation of scripture and its application to everyday life choices. Many students may have chosen Olivet because it aligns with their sociopolitical or religious views, leading to a student body that identifies as more conservative than their public university counterparts at the University of Minnesota. Alternatively, many of these Olivet students may have adapted to a faith-based community that seeks to integrate religious beliefs with academics and community life, leading to a different kind of socialization than would occur at a public university with no religious affiliations, because of the disparate environments to which they are exposed. Within these hypotheses, there is plenty of room for the consideration of other demographic factors' effect on sociopolitical orientation, because the self-selection and socialization hypotheses seek only to explain the phenomenon of person-environment fit.

One limitation to basing one's conclusions on the self-assessment questions is that no operational definition of economic or social issues was provided, aside from examples of what it might include. It is a possibility that participants' interpretations of the self-assessment questions varied from person to person, leading to vastly different answer choices. The data from the issue questions were more reliable because the questions are less open to interpretation, but they did not provide information on the overall political views of the participants.

## Issue Questions

Just like the previously mentioned studies that test for the relationship between students' college majors and their sociopolitical views, Olivet students exhibit statistically significant differences between college majors. There was no significant relationship between college majors and the responses to the same-sex couples, marijuana legalization, or business regulation issues. However, the responses to the abortion, racial discrimination, rich and poor gap, government healthcare, and job and living standard issues displayed significant differences based on the students' major choice. Five of the eight issue-based questions featured statistically significant differences, which will be discussed below in greater detail.

On average, accounting, business administration, and engineering students favored lower scaled responses to the abortion question than art, nursing, psychology, and social work students. This indicates higher levels of opposition to abortion among the accounting, business administration, and engineering groups than their peers in the other disciplines. The differences between majors on this question were statistically significant, even though the self-assessment on social views found no significant differences. Despite the lack of a consensus within majors on their overall position on social issues, the abortion issue uniquely pulled the majors into groups categorized by their different sociopolitical views. Because abortion is one of the most prominent social issues found in contemporary politics, participants are likely to have more clearly-articulated views on the subject when compared to social issues as a whole, which

covers a wide variety of topics. Therefore, the results are more conclusive that there is a relationship between students' major and their views on this issue.

More statistically significant differences between majors appeared for the question on racial discrimination. On average, accounting, business administration, and engineering students favored lower scaled responses than nursing, psychology, and social work students but favored higher responses than art students. This indicates that the nursing, psychology, and social work majors do not see racial discrimination as being as much of a current problem in American society than accounting, business administration, engineering, and especially art students, who disagreed with the statement. These results are somewhat unexpected, since several of the majors that previously trended more liberal indicated that racial discrimination was no longer a major problem, which is not a commonly-held liberal position. Art students, which have also previously trended more liberal, fell more in line with the hypothesis on this question. One possible experimental error could be that students misunderstood the wording of the question. They were asked to agree or disagree with a "no" statement, leading to a possible double-negative implication. However, this question does not fall neatly along normal liberal-conservative political lines, so these results do not necessarily conflict with the liberal and conservative trends that have formed among the major groups.

Responses to the question on the Rich and Poor Gap also yielded statistically significant results. Accounting, business administration, and engineering majors displayed more opposition to government intervention to lessen the gap between rich

and poor than the art, nursing, psychology, and social work majors. In fact, all of the other majors analyzed besides accounting, business administration, and engineering tended toward favoring government intervention to lessen the gap between the rich and poor.

Responses to the question about the government's role in healthcare and in guaranteeing a job and living standard were statistically significant, showing almost identical patterns among the major groups. For both questions, accounting, business administration, and engineering majors indicated the most disagreement with these kinds of government intervention, along with psychology majors. Nursing, social work, biology, elementary education, and exercise science majors exhibited much more support for government intervention in both of these areas. In this case, psychology majors aligned more with their peers in accounting, business administration, and engineering, rather than with the art, nursing, and social work students. This is an anomaly that did not appear in any of the other answer sets, which is made all the more surprising because the same psychology students also favored the lowest level of conservatism on the self-assessment of economic views. Predictably, the accounting, business administration, and engineering groups maintained a more conservative limited-government approach for the issue questions related to economics, which is consistent with Hastie's research.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hastie, "Cold Hearts and Bleeding Hearts: Disciplinary Differences in University Students' Sociopolitical Orientations".

## CONCLUSION

These results support a statistically significant relationship between participants' academic disciplines and sociopolitical views, contributing to the collection of research backing Holland's theory of Person-Environment Fit. Both the self-selection and socialization hypotheses are possible explanations for the common sociopolitical views found within major groups, even though neither can be fully reinforced without a longitudinal study. This study confirms the existence of patterns of political thought among certain major choices, even at a private evangelical Christian school like Olivet Nazarene University. Even though the responses of the Olivet student body may be more conservative as a whole compared to public colleges like the University of Minnesota, this study has shown that statistically significant differences between majors can be shown in separate instances, even in a generally more conservative environment such as a denominational private university. One limitation of the present study is that only 12 majors were chosen for further analysis. Even though a sufficient test size was guaranteed by evaluating the 12 largest majors in the overall sample, this meant that a majority of the majors at Olivet were not represented in the study.

Further research into this topic should investigate the "Why?" question. What are the fundamental values that lead students to choose a certain major, and how do they influence students' political orientation? Harkening back to Holland's theory, do people make life decisions based on their values (self-selection) or do their values conform to their life decisions (socialization)? Researchers should test the relative strengths of these hypotheses by utilizing both longitudinal and cross-sectional data



collection methods, as well as identifying personality traits and beliefs that influence this relationship through more comprehensive, wide-ranging studies.

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