

A major decision

by Andy Blitzer, staff writer

When adults used to ask high school seniors what their college major would be, the answer was often vague—a liberal arts degree with a major declared by junior year. But as college programs are becoming more streamlined to arm graduates with skills to match the high demands of today's job market, choosing the right college degree is more crucial than ever.

Bellaire High School college counselor, Marlene Rubin, advises students to look at Web sites showcasing hot careers when making college decisions. The Texas Work Force Commission (www.twc.state.tx.us) and the Occupational Outlook Handbook from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (www.bls.gov) may give students a glimpse into what job needs and salaries will be available in four years. Although Marlene stresses the importance of investing in majors that give graduates a better chance of landing a job, the idea of focusing on fields that students are passionate about is also a top priority.

"Other than my biology coursework, my interests in conservation really began when I was younger and attended several marine biology summer camps at A&M in Galveston," shares Bellaire High School graduate, Christine Mansfield, who is in her fourth year at UC Berkley studying conservation biology and cultural use of the environment. An extra semester's participation will allow her a course at a Berkley-owned research station on Moorea, an island by Tahiti.

Today's high school students are careful about choosing high school courses that assist in acceptance to special college programs. Megan Livingston, who's graduating from Stratford High School, says she's prepared for her biomedical engineering degree she'll pursue at Case Western Reserve University this fall by cramming any AP science class she could fit into her schedule. The recent press coverage of the first complete face reconstruction surgery can only mean a higher demand for engineered body parts in the future.

The fact that safer and more efficient flight and space exploration will continue to expand opens up an array of fields for students to follow. A preferred major for Hao Pan, graduating from Bellaire High School this year, is astrophysics at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Although Hao doesn't anticipate this degree "to be a walk in the park," he's always wanted to be a pilot, and studying at Embry-Riddle will give him a better chance of an internship at Kennedy Space Center

close by.

Even as a young child, Jessie Felix loved concocting recipes and preparing them, so upon entering Lamar High School, Jessie took all of the school's culinary courses offered. Today she attends the Culinary Arts Institute, hoping for acceptance to a four-month internship in Florida (one CIA applicant is being considered for an internship in the White House kitchen).

Although not considered a new degree, culinary arts is now considered equal to other academic degrees as it offers a choice of an associates or full four-year degree program. "CIA partners with other colleges in New York, such as Cornell and Vasser, where you can piggyback your CIA degree with one of their programs," says Jessie.

College coordinator at Carnegie Vanguard High School, Veronica Chapman, is seeing a rise in student interest in several areas. "Sound and audio engineering are becoming more popular, and students are asking about international studies for law and business more," she says.

Dean Arthur Warga of the Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston believes there is no definite degree path in international business. "All business today is international," he says. "My advice to students is to mix with the world. That doesn't necessarily mean study abroad. Choosing a college with

a large ethnic diversity is the best way you can get to know your future employees and customers."

Those kids who've been labeled computer geeks may have the last laugh in the future job market. Emerging media and communication options, even in the field of mobile phone programming, are popping up faster than high school counselors can keep up.

Savannah College of Art and Design offers degrees to prepare graduates for up-and-coming creative needs in the work force. One such degree, accessory design, a thriving part of the fashion industry, has already landed recent graduates jobs with top fashion designers. SCAD and several universities offer interactive design and game development—what could be more fun than getting paid to design video games in a booming market?

As students, counselors, and parents become savvier about the hot careers, the answers to questions about college plans may soon surprise you.

