

# Explore Lehigh Evaluation

## 1/29/2026

How do we help first-year students make confident, informed major decisions?

Total Students

11

% Change From College Intention

90.91%

Total Students Retained

11

### Voices In This Dashboard

 [Student Perspectives](#)

 [Instructor Insights](#)

In Fall 2025, 11 students participated in the pilot Explore Lehigh program, including a semester-long course designed to transform how first-year students explore colleges and majors.

The cohort was unique: *"Almost all of them were overly qualified and ambitious and interesting. They were taking this because it was like an extra challenge and I could discover some other stuff."* These weren't lost students—they were high achievers seeking intentional exploration.

#### THREE PARALLEL COURSE COMPONENTS:

- Design Thinking Projects: Creative problem-solving exercises that exposed students to different majors through hands-on work
- College Exploration: Guest speakers from faculty, alumni, and professionals sharing authentic stories about their paths
- Designing Your Life: Structured reflection with CCPD on life goals beyond just career: *"Where do you want to live? Do you want a partner? Kids? All of these major choices that when I ask students, very often they've said, nobody's ever asked me that before."*

#### THE CULTURAL FOUNDATION:

From day one, the instructor established trust: *"I have a plan, but my plan is adaptable and I want to know why you're here."* Student feedback was incorporated directly into the syllabus, creating a learning environment where *"they were willing to share the good things and the bad things and the hard things."*

#### Student Impact in Their Own Words

*"I would highly recommend this class to everyone and if everyone could take it then they would all be so lucky because instead of just reading textbooks and studying definitions, you are actually thinking about your life and learning about yourself."*

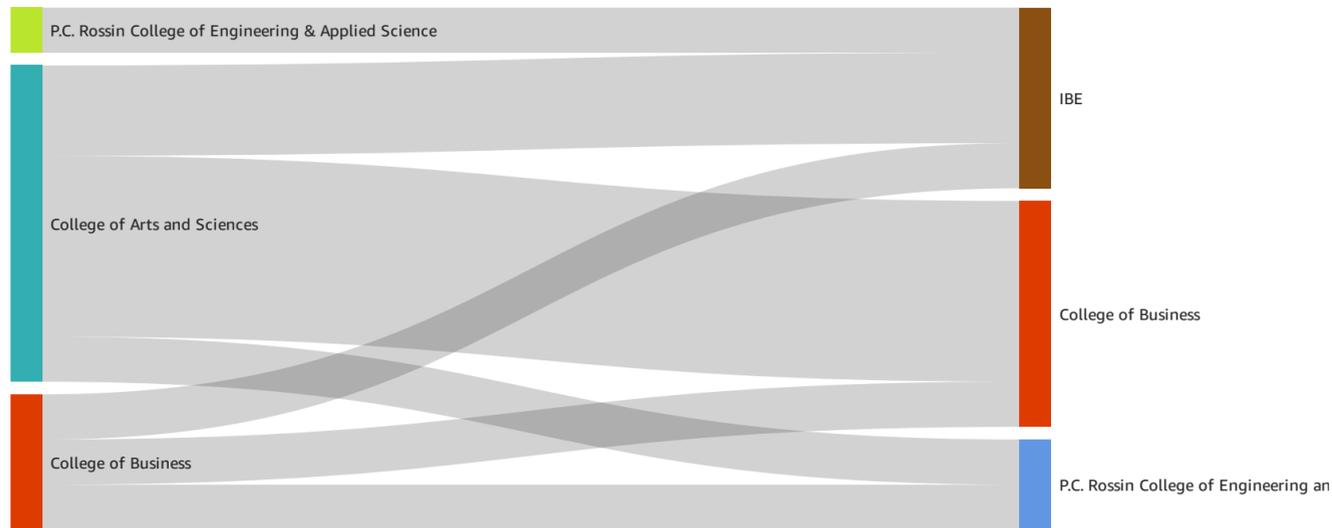
# Program Impact & Outcomes

The Sankey diagram tells one part of the story: students flowing from initial intentions to informed declarations.

What's striking is not just that 90% changed their major direction—it's the patterns within those changes. Five students (45%) ultimately declared for Business, including three who started with dramatically different interests. This convergence reveals something important about how students explore and what they discover about themselves.

## Student College Journey: Initial Intentions -> Current Declarations

Explore Lehigh Students



## Business Convergence: A Surprising Pattern

36% of students (4 out of 11) declared for business despite initially applying to a different college—more than any other college. However, 75% of those students did attend the College of Business Welcome Event, so the shift was already starting to happen in the beginning of the semester. There were a few reasons that might explain this pattern:

- Guest speakers demonstrated business applications across diverse fields
- Students saw business as a flexible foundation

## The Misconception Explorer

Admitted: Arts and Sciences

Declared: Business

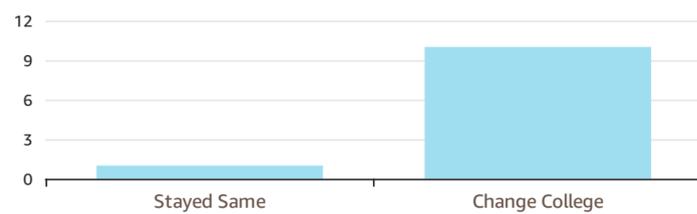
Initial Academic Concerns: Essay Writing

🗣️ "What helped me eliminate my path to psychology was during the college of arts and science panel the psychology professor told me that if I didn't like labs and research papers then I shouldn't do psychology."

📖 "He wanted to go into psychology originally, and he didn't really know what the work was actually like within that, and one of the faculty guests came in and ran from that department and really described kind of the rigor of the research and the type of work that's done in that major. And he said very openly, like, I hate writing papers and doing that kind of research-based work. ... He found, oh, wait, marketing is understanding how people think and operate and make decisions. And if you can understand that and you can provide marketing and whatnot. So he found the connection still with the psychology, but he cared much more about the application of learning how people think and operate and make choices and whatnot."

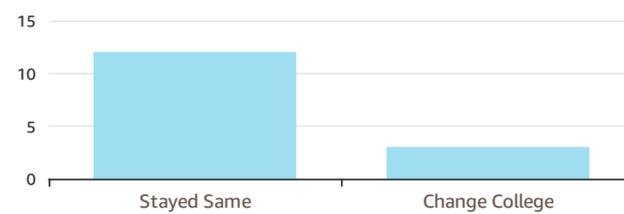
## College Declaration Changes

Explore Lehigh Students



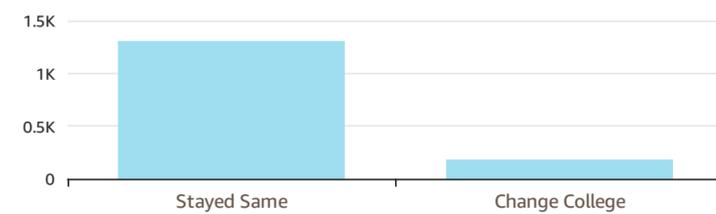
## Predicted College Declaration Changes

Comparison Group Students



## Predicted College Declaration Changes

All Other First-Years Students



## The Beyond College Explorer

Admitted: Arts and Sciences

Declared: Business

🗣️ "I also was nervous that I was behind everyone by not knowing my major but now I realized that I am ahead of everyone by really think and picturing what I want my future to look like."

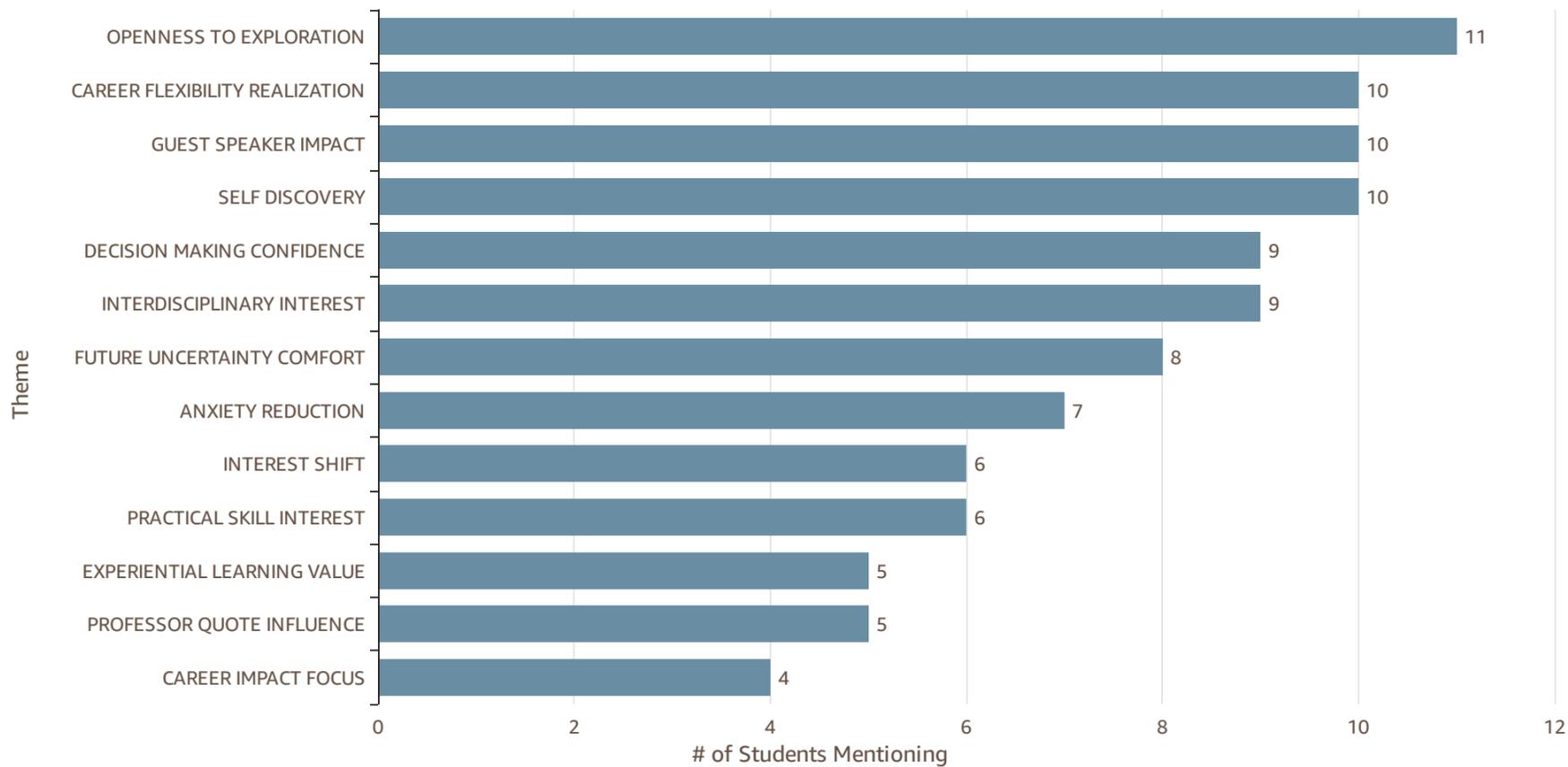
📖 "[Student] did a really good job throughout the semester of kind of zooming out to the life perspective stuff. She really latched on to some of Karen's work and a bunch of the conversations we had around, what do you want your life to look like, beyond just your career, beyond just, your major. And so she had very clear, like, I want to live in New York City because it's very close with our family and our family's in New York City, and I want this type of, partner and I want kids and I want, so she had a very clear vision of that. And so she kind of worked backwards."

# What Made the Difference?

To capture authentic student insights about their college exploration journey, we used **Riffbot**, an AI-powered reflection platform that engages students in conversational reflection rather than traditional surveys. Students were prompted with the opening question: *'Think back to the first day of class and your initial sense of direction regarding your college choice. How, if at all, has that sense of direction changed after completing this course? What did you learn from this process, especially if the course helped you eliminate a path you once considered?'*

The AI reflection bot then engaged students in dynamic, follow-up conversations, asking clarifying questions, probing deeper into their responses, and encouraging them to articulate their thinking. Students averaged **10.6 conversational turns** with Riffbot, demonstrating meaningful engagement with the reflection process. This conversational approach allowed students to explore their thoughts more deeply than a static questionnaire would permit, revealing nuanced insights about their decision-making journey.

## Most Helpful Course Aspects



## The Top Factors

Students consistently rated **guest speakers** as a valuable element:

- 🎓 "Hearing real professionals talk about their paths showed me there's no one 'right' way to build a career."
- 🎓 "The speakers made abstract majors feel real and accessible."

While also appreciating that the class encouraged an **openness for future exploration**, both within Lehigh's academic offerings and in understanding the **flexible career paths** available to them:

- 🎓 "I know that if I take the path of bioengineering, it is just a broad pathway to follow while I continue to explore my options."
- 🎓 "However, one of the big takeaways I got from this course is that my major does NOT dictate the rest of my life. This took a lot of the pressure away from my decision."

## The Creative Explorer

**Pre-Application Interest: Business**

**Admitted: Arts and Sciences**

**Secondary Interest: Art**

**Declared: Business**

🎓 "Having guest speakers and listening to their experiences was definitely the most useful part of this class. Hearing real examples of faculty is very eye opening and somewhat relieving. Most of the guest speakers preached that they were also unsure what they want'd to do at our age, but they figured it out."

📖 "He's interested in like music and wanting to pursue all sorts of other things beyond. ... But there's not an arts and business. If there was an integrated degree in business and arts. I could see him falling into that where he could do business and music or business and creative things, but less of the business and engineering. And because there isn't a business and arts, you know, degree, I think business is the appropriate choice for him."