

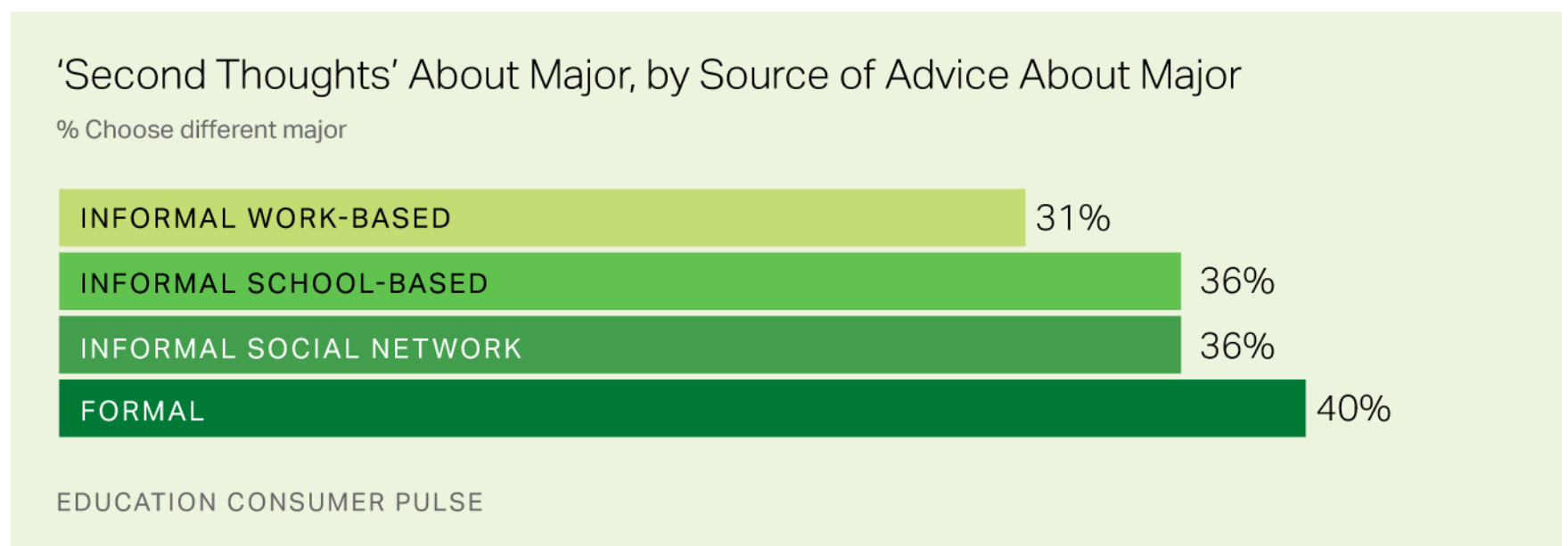
# Second Thoughts on College Major Linked to Source of Advice

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<http://news.gallup.com/poll/220091/second-thoughts-college-major-linked-source-advice.aspx>

by Zac Auter

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- About three in 10 college attendees (31%) who informally received advice about their major from employers, coworkers or experts in the field say they would choose another area of study if they could start over. By comparison, college attendees whose advice came from formal sources -- such as college and high school counselors and advice publications or websites -- are modestly more likely, at 40%, to say they would choose a different field of study.



More than one in three who received advice about their major from their informal *social* network -- friends, family and other contacts such as community leaders -- or their informal *school-based* network -- like faculty and staff -- say they would choose a different major.

These findings are based on 22,087 interviews with U.S. adults with either an associate degree, a bachelor's degree or some college but no degree. The interviews were conducted Jan. 2-Aug.13, 2017, as part of the [Education Consumer Pulse](#) survey. These results are part of two major reports released

by Strada Education Network and Gallup.

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The inaugural report, [\*On Second Thought: U.S. Adults Reflect on Their Education Decisions\*](#), found that 51% of adults with at least some postsecondary education would change one of three decisions about their education path. While 12% said they would pursue a different degree type, 28% would attend a different school and 36% would choose a different major.

The report released on Sept. 25 -- [\*Major Influence: Where Students Get Valued Advice on What to Study in College\*](#) -- explores the sources and helpfulness of the advice that college attendees received about their chosen field of study. The findings demonstrate an individual's informal social network is the most commonly cited source of advice about their field of study, though the guidance rated as most helpful comes from informal work-based sources -- the least commonly used category of advice.

Source of Advice Among U.S. Adults Who Have Attended at Least Some College

From what resources or people did you get advice about the major or field you were going to study?

	%
<b>Informal social network (e.g., family, friends, community leaders)</b>	55
<b>Formal (e.g., college and high school counselors, internet and print media)</b>	44
<b>Informal school-based (e.g., nonadviser staff/faculty at college, coach)</b>	32
<b>Informal work-based (e.g., employer, coworker, person with experience in the field, military)</b>	20
Figures are based on coding of open-ended responses into the four broad categories	
Education Consumer Pulse	

The results from both reports identify similar trends. Advice from formal sources -- such as high school and college counselors -- is rated least helpful and has the further consequence of resulting in the highest likelihood of second thoughts about an individual's chosen field of study. Informal work-

based sources of advice about a person's field of study are rated as most helpful. Those who received guidance from these sources are the least likely to say they would choose another field of study.

## **Implications**

The connection between sources of advice and "second thoughts" about college attendees' choice of major suggests the current model of advising students may need some change, including potentially diversifying advice on choosing a field of study.

The *Major Influence* report shows that the two least commonly used sources of advice -- guidance from informal work-based and informal school-based sources -- have been the most helpful. Vocational coursework, internships, apprenticeships or other workplace learning opportunities could broaden students' exposure to potential careers and skills. Likewise, consulting with a variety of knowledgeable staff and faculty at their schools could expand students' understanding of the options available to them.

*Learn more via the Education Consumer Pulse's reports: [On Second Thought: U.S. Adults Reflect on Their Education Decisions](#) and [Major Influence: Where Students Get Valued Advice on What to Study in College](#). Follow @GallupHigherEd and @StradaEducation on Twitter and use #EduPulse to join the conversation.*

## **Survey Methods**

Results are based on telephone surveys conducted Jan. 2-Aug. 13, 2017, with a random sample of 22,087 U.S. adults aged 18 to 65, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia who have an associate degree, a bachelor's degree or have attended some college but do not have a degree.

The Education Consumer Pulse sample includes national adults with a minimum quota of 70% cellphone respondents and 30% landline

respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using RDD methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member will have the next birthday.

Interviews are conducted in English and Spanish. Samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. The data are weighted to match national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets are based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the population aged 18 to 65 years who have an associate degree, a bachelor's degree or have attended some college but do not have a degree.

All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

For results based on 22,087 of those with either some college (no degree), an associate degree, or a bachelor's degree the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 0.9$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Learn more about how the [Education Consumer Pulse](#) works.