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Jennifer Braverman

April 7, 2021

A Means to an End or the End in Itself? Exploring the College-to-Career Culture of
Undergraduate Students at Emory University

by

Jennifer Braverman

Tracy L. Scott
Adviser

Department of Sociology

Tracy L. Scott
Adviser

Timothy J. Dowd
Committee Member

Axel Presas
Committee Member

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Abstract

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This study aims to uncover how Emory University students navigate college-to-career culture: a peer-prestige system created and perpetuated through interaction on Emory's campus. My research questions are grounded in the theoretical framework of Amy Binder and her colleagues in a 2016 study of undergraduate career funneling at Stanford and Harvard, particularly her findings about socialization of undergraduates into elite jobs. My research seeks to understand how a different university context (Emory) influences students' own notion of prestigious majors and occupations and their own career paths. Emory's undergraduate context is shaped by two undergraduate units with unique institutional and cultural differences: the Emory College of Arts and Sciences and the Goizueta Business School. I focus on a comparison of students in these two units: I compare students in the Business School to those in the College of Arts & Sciences (non-STEM) to see how they experience college-to-career culture on campus and how this culture shapes their own academic and career path. To gather such data, I conducted in-depth interviews with 22 undergraduate students: 10 Business School students and 12 College students. I found that individuals across the College and Business School acknowledge a rigid major and career hierarchy placing non-STEM College majors and career choices as low status while medical and business pre-professional tracks and corresponding occupations reined high status. Many students describe this hierarchy as being due to the pre-professional nature of the school. However, there is a clear divide of students on the fairness of this hierarchy, creating a divide on campus and animosity between individuals in the College and Business School. Individuals in the College describe deliberately disregarding the peer-prestige system on campus and prioritize their own values while individuals in the Business School describe possessing work values that correspond with high status jobs. My findings are similar to the work of Binder et al (2016) in that students at Emory certainly create a hierarchy of worthy majors and jobs. However, the division on campus between majors that are considered to be high status and low status is not seen as clearly in other empirical works.

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I. Introduction

In 2018, the emergence of a massive college admissions scandal seemed to stun America. Investigations shed light on bribery occurring between wealthy families and elite colleges to assure that children would get into the college of their choice. I remember following the coverage of the scandal in the news and feeling similarly surprised to see popular stars Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman entering a courthouse and being convicted of federal crimes. The extreme monetary lengths these families went to secure admission to an elite college is surely remarkable. However, the fundamental notion of individuals seeking societal sanctioned success and achievement in the realm of higher education and beyond is far from new or astonishing.

In the Netflix documentary “Operation Varsity Blues: The College Admissions Scandal,” Jon Reider, a former Stanford admissions officer, explains: “over the last three or four decades, higher education has become a commodity... a product. It’s a goal in it of itself rather than the goal being to get an education.” As early as seventh grade, I remember my history teacher pleading with my class to cease worrying about the upcoming honors placement tests for high school. She told our class that we are more than a grade and our futures. At each stage of a students’ life, it is difficult to deny that working towards the stereotypically coined next “best” thing, be it high school, college, or securing a place in the job market, is ever present. As people rush to pass through each of life’s mile markers, it seems as though your value is based on your productivity and what you will become.

In my own experience at college, I have witnessed this phenomenon to the extreme. On the first day I arrived on campus, it felt as though people already arrived knowing what they wanted to do after college--as though their life was predetermined. As someone with no plan, I felt behind. In speaking with peers and classmates over the past four years, the sentiment is not

unique. I have had countless conversations regarding the feeling of being out of the norm in focusing on the now rather than the job hunt. While a wide breadth of research delves into similar topics of high school to college motivators and higher education admission, few studies focus on the college-to-career transition that is ever present today (Karabel 2005, Karen 1990, Mullen 2010, Stevens 2007, Stuber 2012). It is imperative to study this phenomenon, as it dictates not only how some individuals live for four years, but how those students approach their learning and careers. Throughout this research, I hope to gain knowledge on how individuals at Emory University navigate their student culture, their own path, and plans for the future. Specifically, I seek to answer the question of how students experience college-to-career culture at Emory University and how it shapes their own academic and career paths.

This study investigates how non-STEM undergraduate students at Emory University experience and navigate college-to-career issues on campus. Particularly, I compare students with majors in the Business School to those with majors in the College of Arts & Sciences (non-STEM) to see how they perceive and experience college-to-career culture on campus and how it shapes the navigation of their own academic and career path. This study is part of a larger study called “College-to-Career Culture among Undergraduates at a Liberal Arts University” with the principal investigator being Dr. Tract L. Scott, a sociologist and Senior Lecturer at Emory University. My research will contribute to this larger study that incorporates an encompassing, diverse array of student participants and academic departments at Emory University, each of whom have contributed to examination of the schools’ formation and presentation of student culture and college-to-career perceptions. While I am particularly interested in how this idea varies based on a students’ major, other contributors to this project investigate the role of double-majoring, socioeconomic status, and gender, among others, in college-to-career issues.

In this thesis, I will first provide a theoretical framework that shares the foundations of why the topic of college-to-career issues is worthy of studying in this context based on previous theory and research and specifically why the delineation of a students' major is crucial for variance in this dependent variable. I will cover a review of related empirical research that has bolstered my own interest in my study, covering topics about the importance of college for idea formation and learning and various career influences and pursuits among college students. I will specify the conceptualization and operationalization of the study's independent and dependent variables. Then, I will explain the method of my research, particularly relaying why utilizing qualitative data and my chosen site of Emory University and cases of interest (non-STEM undergraduate students) is crucial for exploring my research question. I will also delve into the details on how I collected and analyzed the data that I gathered through my interviews. Finally, I summarize the main results of my research, describing how undergraduates approach culture and college-to-career issues and the differences in the dependent variable by the school they belong to. I end with a discussion on the important implications of this study, limitations, and areas for future research to build upon these findings.

II. Theoretical Framework

Many scholars have similarly studied the broad areas of elite university culture, career and work values, and major and career choice in a college setting. Sociologists have studied demographic career influences, or they might study how individuals develop their beliefs throughout college. My study attempts to address one collegiate phenomenon in particular: college-to-career issues. This phrase is comprehensive and a college student's navigation of, influences on, and decision to pursue a specific career throughout their college experience. This includes theories on peer-to-peer interaction in the college setting, career funneling, individual

work values, student formation of a hierarchy of majors and occupations, and the importance of student culture on an individual at large. Based on scholars' past work, each of these topics have been proven to matter in college-to-career issues. Previous studies have concluded that the context of an individual is significant in influencing how one chooses a career to enter. Thus, I will build my analysis upon previous theories of parts of what, for the purpose of this study, I will call college-to-career culture with an emphasis on one study in particular that I plan to replicate.

Major as a Small Group Worthy of Studying

“Our sociological framework draws primarily from Gary Alan Fine’s theory on small groups and their importance for understanding individuals’ experiences in the larger social world (Fine 2012). Following Fine, we offer the following definitions of terms used in this proposal. Small Groups are: ‘aggregations of persons who recognize that they constitute a meaningful social unit, interact on that basis, and are committed to that social unit...Participants recognize that they have interests in common and share a history.’ (Fine 2012:21)” (Scott 2021:1).

“Every group has a unique culture, often referred to as a subculture, or in Fine’s terminology, an ‘idioculture.’ Idioculture is ‘A system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group...Members recognize that they share experiences.... group culture is historicized.’ (Fine 2012:36). Fine argues that small groups dominate the day-to-day lives of individuals, and thus, are highly influential in the lived experiences of people. Basically, small groups are the most immediate and often the most influential arenas through which we experience life.” (Scott 2021:1).

“More specifically, small groups socialize us to communal standards, shape our identities, provide us with meaning (culture), and mediate larger social structural realities. The

small group can be both blessing and curse. The small group can help us negotiate (accommodate or resist) larger social institutions, even as it also embodies the same structural qualities of those institutions, particularly the power dynamics of status hierarchies. In other words, even as small groups offer places of care/concern, they also often reproduce relationships of power similar to prevailing structures of society (e.g., status hierarchies based on gender, race, and socio-economic status, as well as hierarchies particular to the small group culture and values). (See Fine 2012:26-33.)” (Scott 2021:1)

For the purpose of this study, a student’s major is a small group worthy of studying. A major is incredibly influential on a student. Primarily, it represents the precise subject matter that a student will dedicate the majority of their collegiate experience to studying. The material itself presents important lessons and has profound influence on the students’ view of the world and their place in it. A student studying political science may very well view their goals in college and their potential career aspirations differently than a student studying accounting based on what they are learning in class. Outside of academia, the major is a place for students to informally learn and converse with other students and faculty who make up that department and have decided that this subject matter is worth studying. The culture in each major is necessarily different depending on who self-selects into each field, bringing in unique values and perceptions to each academic sphere. The socialization of students based on the unique individuals in each major will likely influence how they approach college-to-career issues as it certainly constitutes a small group. At Emory University, the particular separation of individuals who belong to the Goizueta Business School (the Business School, B School, or GBS) or the Emory University College of Arts and Sciences (the College or ECAS) is crucial in evaluating student culture and

college-to-career issues because each school represents a small group. I will further explain in the conceptualization section.

College-to-Career Issues

The main theoretical framework for this study is grounded in the work of Binder et al (2016). These scholars were interested in the persistent transition of college graduates from elite universities selectively entering into the most prestigious and high-paying occupations. Even when the particular occupations evolve over the years to include emerging fields such as investment banking and the technology sector, they observed high status students flocking to such sectors. In their study, they aimed to uncover why students at Harvard and Stanford Universities self-select into such careers and how particular student cultures and campus structures on their college campuses channel students into such high status jobs after graduating college. They coin this phenomenon as “career funneling.” According to Binder et al (2016), “the specific destinations out of elite universities may change over time, but the general process in which large numbers of graduates gravitate toward a narrow range of career choices has persisted,” (21). How career funneling is occurring in segments of Emory University is the main focus of this research project.

Studying how students discover and form opinions on the desirability of careers expands upon existing theories of learning, habitus, and cultural and institutional influence on individuals. Each of these areas of research are the foundation of Binder and her colleagues’ research. Bourdieu (1990 and 1996) coined the theory of habitus, proposing the idea that individuals learn culture from their relational and educational upbringing. Habitus situates an individual’s place in the world and in the case of a collegiate academia, “the fields of power found in college are constructed through the organizational realities in place there... which rank-order various careers

and inform students about the professions that are most appropriate for them,” (Binder et al 2016). Students learn the prestige of occupations through their own experiences and conversations with others in their particular social context. College students then arrive on campus with a set habitus: a cultural set of norms, interests, and practices, which is largely shaped by their own socioeconomic status. Because elite universities are mainly composed of individuals in middle- to high- classes, they hold particular and similar beliefs about prestigious careers based on their habitus, thus many will engage in the same activities, and academic courses, that reinforce it (Bourdieu 1990 and 1996).

More recently, scholars have expanded upon Bourdieu’s early work to include the institution’s influence on students’ dispositions. The new institutional theory posits that colleges do not simply cultivate and reproduce individuals of high status but have the power to breed individuals who seek a high status habitus (Kaufman and Feldman 2004, Khan 2011, Meyer 1977, Streib 2013). College campuses are a place of identity transformation and offer students coveted insight into the worthiness of particular careers. Contrastingly, such institutions possess the ability to push back against the high culture and set outlooks that individuals come into college possessing (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). Another camp of theorists emphasizes the particular localized culture of each college in developing notions of prestige on campus. This inhabited institutional theory suggests that institutions are capable of altering the views of individuals particularly through the social context of the institution itself (Clark 1972, Nunn 2014). Thus, each college may contain its own culture where certain fields are considered worthy to pursue depending on the university’s location, popular fields of study, and particular student body (Hallett 2010, Hallett and Ventresca 2006, Stevens 2015).

In their research, the scholars in Binder et al (2016) discovered that while initial individual outlooks on careers are significant, the educational institution plays a crucial role in shaping how students view the prestige of particular jobs. Individuals at college have countless opportunities to learn about fields they never knew existed and the high salaries and prestige associated with such occupations. This process is exacerbated through the recruitment processes occurring on campus that allows individuals to simply fall into prestigious occupational tracks because of their high prevalence at the school. Individuals largely develop their notion of high-status jobs after they are admitted into college, where their course study reaffirms the power of the educational institution in shaping the views of its student body. The culture is crucial in shaping the notion of prestigious occupations, which is the central focus of my study. The institution as a whole holds a great power in steering the individual into a certain career path. Thus, studying the culture at prestigious college campuses is crucial in determining how individuals construct notions around high ranking jobs and form their own ideas and values in their personal career paths.

Binder et al (2016) discovers that students must first actively create a culture that promotes a coveted reputation of a career before the mass group of individuals enter the career. This notion is the foundation of why major choice is a crucial variable in my studying the variation in college-to-career issues. The institution of higher education is large and complex and encompasses many diverse cultures within it dependent on the particular context the student encounters. Specifically, students' formations of worthy and prestigious careers likely depend on their classes, peers, and in particular their area of study. Even though students arrive from vastly different upbringings and enter college with varying opinions on careers, they are heavily influenced by the saturation of opinions directly surrounding them. This mechanism most likely

depends on their place in their academic environment and their major in particular. At Emory University, there are clear delineations in coursework in the Business School and the College. Thus, my study focuses on how a students' major, particularly whether their major is housed in the College versus the Business School, influences how they approach college-to-career issues.

While my study replicates the main area of focus addressed in Binder et al (2016), it poses two key distinctions from their work. Primarily, the sample in the Binder et al (2016) study focuses on two of the most widely known, highly regarded institutions in the world. These institutions are almost unparalleled in ranking and potential job prospects. The findings in the study may be very particular to these two cases. In my study, I have chosen to investigate college-to-career funneling in the case of a top twenty-five college: Emory University (US News College Rankings 2020-2021). At this institution, prestige of the degree is apparent but uncertainty and awareness of Emory's exclusion from the top twenty universities is likely to abound as well. "We define Emory as a "next-tier" elite university for three main reasons: 1) it is not included in common classifications of the Ivy-Plus schools and is not as highly selective as these schools; 2) it falls within the next group of highly selective, liberal arts focused, residential-based, financial aid-offering universities in common classification schemes; 3) it offers an undergraduate business degree, which is seen as less prestigious by the top-tier. (See Binder, Davis, and Bloom 2016, pages 20, 23-24)." (Scott 2021: 2).

Differently than my study, Binder et al (2016) focuses on how formal campus structures, such as on-campus recruiting events or career programming, in particular socialize students into jobs. While their interviews touch upon certain campus cultural influences, this is not the main focus or mechanism of interest of their study. For the purpose of my study, I am looking specifically on how peer interaction, student perceptions, and the particular culture at Emory

University created by and perpetuated by its student body work to create a unique college-to-career culture. Particularly, I am interested in how undergraduate culture and conversations, students' notions of the status hierarchy of jobs, and student career aspirations and values play into their experience in college and intended career plans. This focuses on how students learn and convey information on majors and intended career paths to others, creating a sort of hierarchy of academic programs and jobs. I aim to explore how context of the specific university matters in addressing how majors and careers are regarded and pursued. I necessarily chose to focus on the particular culture and student perceptions at Emory University influence career funneling instead of formal structural influences.

III. Empirical Work

As previously stated, many scholars have delved into areas and conducted research on topics relevant to college-to-career issues. Scholars have researched the importance of college as a place of learning and transformation, influences on a college students' own path, and career pursuits on college campuses. This breadth of research is of interest to my topic and will inform how I approach my own research, and thus I will briefly outline relevant studies in the following pages.

College as Idea and Identity Formation

A key component to my research question is how the particular environment of an elite university shapes how an individual approaches college-to-career issues. This necessarily depends upon the idea that college influences the thoughts and outcomes of its students. A breadth of research has addressed the importance of college on the student (Binder and Wood

2013, Graham and Cockriel 1996, Hassan 2008, Murphy et al 2010, Simula-Scott 2021, Terenzini et al 1994).

The scholars Graham and Cockriel (1996), Hassan (2008), and Terenzini et al (1994) conducted studies exhibiting the crucial effect of college on an individual's overall learning and cognitive and social growth. When a student arrives at college, it is likely the first lengthy period of time they have spent away from their parents. Students use this opportunity to discover a newfound freedom away from their parents. They have the ability to choose how they spend their time, the courses they take, and the peers they interact with. This creates an incubator for forming their own notions on complex opinions regarding their identity and academic path.

The process of students first developing such ideas “is a highly interrelated, web-like series of family, interpersonal, academic, and organizational pulls and pushes that shape student learning (broadly conceived) and persistence,” (Terenzini et al 1994: 62). Their particular outlook depends on their professors, peers, and student activities they join, among other factors (Terenzini et al 1994). This informs my research question particularly regarding the need to focus on how an individual's own story influences their academic and collegiate experiences.

While students certainly gain technical and critical thinking skills related to their academia, they also develop confidence and self-discipline (Hassan 2008). Scholars Graham and Cockriel (1996) articulate this point with their finding, “students gave the college experience rather high marks in going beyond just intellectual development by contributing to their personal and social growth. According to the students' perceptions, the college experience affects an array of social and personal areas and in several areas, it makes greater than moderate contributions to this growth,” (13). At college, students learn more than simply academic concepts, but how to make long term goals for themselves, including the formation of career aspirations (Hassan

2008). College presents students the opportunity “to explore a ‘new self,’ to try on a different ‘persona’... for some... the transition required a redefinition of self and value,” (Terenzini et al 1994). Thus, even when students arrive at college with preconceived notions, the particular setting allows students to form new notions on a wide range of subjects. This notion is crucial in studying how students form their ideas around college-to-career issues in the specific environment of the university.

Socialization on Campus

Once students arrive at college, they rely on others to learn the norms and expectations of their new environment. This socialization process is conveyed by both peers and faculty, creating a specific student culture on campus (Binder 2016, Simula-Scott 2021, Terenzini 1994). Students are faced with uncharted territory and are searching for belonging within their new home. While they are excited to form new opinions, students are searching for acceptance from their community as to whether they are on the right path. Terenzini et al (1994) explains that

“validation is empowering, confirming, and supportive. It is a series of in- and out-of-class experiences with family, peers, faculty members, and staff through which students come to feel accepted in their new community, receive confirming signals that they can be successful in college and are worthy of a place there, have their previous work and life experiences recognized as legitimate forms of knowledge and learning, have their contributions in class recognized as valuable,” (66).

Although scholars have shown that students explore new ideas and meanings in college, they are also searching for the “confirming signals” that their new notions are fitting in with the dominant ideas in student and campus culture. This notion emphasizes the importance of students’ strong adherence to the norms on campus and can inform my research question regarding the pursuit of particular majors and careers based on a campus-created hierarchy. These theories also

emphasize the need to focus on how the culture (including the peer and faculty interaction) work to create meaning and hierarchies around college-to-career issues.

This socialization of students that happens on campus is greatly applicable to the realm of college-to-career issues. The social interaction that occurs between students works to inform and reaffirm students' own notions about what is expected of them regarding their own academic path. The main objective of college is to learn and prepare for the future after graduation. The conversations that students have with their friends matter and work to construct expectations of themselves in the working world based on hierarchies of occupations that students create and perpetuate among themselves. Kaufman and Feldman (2004) exemplify this notion of impression management with respect to career funneling on campus:

“the student points to the importance of her social group in reinforcing both her identity as a future professional and the self-presentations that will allow her to successfully enact and achieve such an identity. Through social interactions, this student and her friends have created a social reality of the occupations to which they aspire as well as constructed a corresponding felt identity that has already become somewhat embedded,” (478).

Through informal conversations on campus, students discuss careers in a way that signals the status and desirability of particular paths over others. This likely persuades students into pursuing such career paths to fit into the mold of what their peers are striving for. Students look to others to validate their own goals and achievements academically. Students have ample opportunity to discuss such topics and create academic and career hierarchies in the classroom but also at career events on campus or in informal spaces such as the library or dining halls. Additionally, Kaufman and Feldman (2004) share how a students' academic and career choices are central to their identity on campus. Students take careful consideration when choosing their future professions as it represents more than a job, but an indication of who they are as a person.

This research emphasizes the importance of context and one's own personal interests in the process of career funneling in the College environment.

Students Own Path: Major and Career Aspirations

Each college student possesses their own unique motivators in their decision process regarding their academic major. This is a crucial decision for students, as it not only decides their dedication to a particular course of study, but the peers they learn alongside, professors they meet, and potential career paths they can pursue. Researchers studying this question have learned that “personal interest, future career ambitions, and a desire to make a positive impact in the world” are some of the many factors that contribute to students' decisions on what field of which to dedicate years of study (Ubagharaji 2008: A20).

Scholars have also discovered that a students' demographic factors and familial influences play a key role in the development of one's major and occupational choices in college. Particularly, students face unique internal and external pressures depending on their gender, race, and socioeconomic status (Caldera et al 2003, Harrison 1969, Hui and Lent 2018, Kalin 2014, Luzzo 1993, Morgan 2001, Place and Payne 1996). While my research question does not specifically investigate such independent variables, it is important to address the breadth of research on this area, specifically due to these studies' findings on the College setting, one's own context, and career development. Similarly to my research, Kalin (2014) conducts qualitative, in-depth interviews of Emory University. In this study, she is interested in the role of gender in career aspirations. In her study, she focuses on how the “importance of social environment and cultural expectations or norms... [demonstrating] that work aspirations cannot be considered in a vacuum. Instead, they must be incorporated into the larger expectations of an individual's life.” Kalin discovers that students face uncertainty in their career aspirations, but females embrace

such ambiguity and flexibility more than the male students in her study. Additionally, while females in her study mentioned the importance of interpersonal work values and a social work environment more than male participants, most participants in both groups mentioned personal interest in their work when discussing work aspirations. This research informs possible points of analysis on my own research questions regarding the personal motivational factors of individuals influencing their career paths.

According to one theorist, collegiate education is viewed not “as a public investment in a wider social good... [but rather] as an investment individuals make in themselves and their futures,” (Denver 2002: 256). While students are unique in their ambitions and goals in college, more recently, a students’ major and career aspirations are inextricably linked. Individuals are looking beyond the typical four years they spend at a university, but towards years to come in the rest of their lives. Thus, students’ majors are often treated not only as areas of interest, but as avenues for a job (Black and Schofield 2018, Denver 2002, Henderson et al 2007, Liao and Chang-Ho 2015, Piotrowski and Cox 2004, Porter and Umbach 2006, Ubagharaji 2008, and Xu 2013). Liao and Chang-Ho Ji (2015) found that Taiwanese students select a major based on their personal interest in the subject and expectation to enter that field in the future, they are more committed to learning and feel happier with their decision overall. Xu (2013) complicates this notion by discovering that individuals who choose an occupation closely related to their major oftentimes depend on the potential status, compensation, and satisfaction of the intended job itself.

Students’ career aspirations often depend on the major they have chosen in the first place (Black and Schofield 2018, Denver 2002, Henderson et al 2007, Piotrowski and Cox 2004). Piotrowski and Cox polled 150 Business School students and discovered that when asked about

the most important factor for obtaining either a graduate degree or a job following their undergraduate education, the most frequent responses were “to improve job opportunities” and “increase potential income” (715). Out of their sample, only nine individuals mentioned that their motivation for their future plans is “love of the field.” Of these students surveyed, passion and interest in their work was no match for monetary motivators. Contrastingly, research by Maryanne Denver (2002) delved into occupational goals of women and gender studies majors and found that for the overwhelming majority of the sample, interest in the subject was the most prominent motivator in choosing the field and pursuing a relevant career path. She also discovered that women and gender studies students admitted having anxiety about potential career prospects and job security. One student exemplifies this in expressing, “I don’t know where this will take me” (2002). These feelings may be due to the reality of parents and especially peers viewing the subject as unmarketable and not a real major, as Denver found in her study. Despite this ridicule and uncertainty about the future, the students in her study were confident in their chosen major and proud of what they are learning. Thus, students' experiences in their own collegiate path and views of the purpose of their majors seem to depend on the majors themselves and own inherent values.

IV. Conceptualization and Research Questions

Concept of “Major Group” (Independent Variable)

At Emory, there are distinctly different contexts around “major groups”, both in terms of structural units (GBS and ECAS) as well as divisional disciplines (humanities, social sciences, STEM within ECAS). Particularly, there are clear structural differences and delineation in the undergraduate curriculum between GBS and ECAS. Emory has a total undergraduate student population of 7,118 (US News College Rankings 2020-2021). According to the Emory College

website, 5,600 students are housed in the College. Contrastingly, the Goizueta Business School Admissions website reports that 800 students pursue degrees in the Business School. Students attend different classes with different professors, converse with different students, participate in different clubs and student governments, and receive different resources based on whether they major in the College or Business School (BBA Academic Curriculum 2021).

The College also houses three major disciplinary divisions: the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences and Math (STEM). Major departments such as biology, chemistry, and physics are dominated by pre-medical students, and ECAS has formal structures to support pre-medical students (Pre-Health Mentoring Office: PHMO). The majors and PHMO provide pre-medical curriculum, formal advising, and clearly articulated career paths for pre-medical students. College students who are not pre-med have no similar structural supports. I focus on non-pre-med students. Thus, to avoid combining students studying the social sciences and humanities with pre-medical students, I restricted my sample to individuals in the College who are non-STEM majors.

Concept of “College-to-Career Culture” (Dependent Variable)

I define “undergraduate college-to-career culture” as the values, beliefs, and discourse around college-to-career issues among undergraduate students (see Scott Proposal). The values, beliefs, and discourse often center on particular jobs and careers and the majors that are perceived to be connected to the particular jobs/careers. These perceptions and experiences are unique to the small group context of undergraduates, even as they may be influenced by larger institutional structure and culture.

This definition is grounded in the work of both Amy Binder (Binder et al 2016) and Gary Alan Fine (Fine 2012). Binder et al delineate how organizational structures and culture unique to

a university's local campus context may influence student's notions of prestige as it relates to career path. As Binder finds, this culture is characterized by a peer prestige system that equates prestige to particular career paths. I build on this research by focusing more specifically on a smaller group of actors: undergraduates and their own student culture. Thus, my definition is also based on the work of Fine, who finds that small group context is most influential for individual's actions and choices (Fine 2012).

Specifically, I investigate how undergraduates who inhabit the local campus context perceive and experience college-to-career issues, creating a peer prestige system (college-to-career culture) that then shapes their own academic and career path.

Based on these conceptualizations of my independent and dependent variables, my research questions are as follows:

Using the cases of non-STEM College majors and Business School majors:

RQ 1a. What are these students' perceptions of college-to-career culture at Emory University?

RQ 1b. How does a major group influence these students' perceptions of college-to-career culture at Emory University?

DV1: College-to-career culture (specifically undergraduates' perceptions of that culture)

IV1: Students' major group (non-STEM College or Business School)

RQ 2. How does a students' major group influence these students' own college-to-career paths?

RQ 3. How does college-to-career culture influence these students' own career paths?

DV2: Undergraduates' own career path (choices)

IV1: Students' major group (non-STEM College or Business School)

IV2: College-to-career culture (based on students' major group)

V. Methods

Research Design

In order to gather a myriad of perceptions on the student culture and college-to-career issues at Emory University, I execute a qualitative approach of in-depth interviews. My research question is descriptive in nature and requires personal beliefs, opinions, and stories to convey the nuance of a students' own path and their conversations with others surrounding perceptions of majors and careers. Student culture, a students' path, and college-to-career issues are complex in nature. Thus, I needed a research design that would allow me to tailor each question and probe for details and illustrations based on the information I was gathering and the participant I was conversing with in real time. The method of semi-structured, qualitative interviews allows the researcher to rigorously and extensively gain the opinions of the subjects due to the open-ended nature of the questions (Babbie 2007). It also allows the researcher to clarify and ask follow-up questions in order to really encourage the participant to reflect on his or her experiences in a way that the method of a survey or experiment would not be able to. Interviews let the participant convey tone and emotion while also fostering a genuine human connection between the interviewer and the participant (Babbie 2007). While the subject matter covered in my research isn't sensitive in nature, it is personal and can be emotional due to the intimate link between one's interests and career plans and their own identity. Thus, it was crucial to form a warm and receptive environment through interviewing to foster trust and openness in my interviews.

Site and Sample

I conducted my in-depth interviews with undergraduate students at Emory University. Emory University is an elite school that provides students the options of entering into multiple

pre-professional tracks and possesses multiple career centers on campus. Thus, it is safe to assume that the school breeds students into a diverse variety of elite occupations. As previously mentioned in the theoretical framework, studying college-to-career issues at Emory University offers a unique and crucial environment for the field of study. Previous research has been conducted about student culture and work aspirations at the very top universities such as Harvard and Stanford (Binder et al 2016). However, studying how students navigate these issues at a highly competitive, secondary tier school provides an entirely new context and culture. Thus, because Emory University is ranked 21 by US News College Rankings 2020-2021, it is the ideal site to conduct my research.

As previously mentioned in my conceptualization, the unit of analysis for my study is the individual and my sample consists of undergraduate students at Emory University pursuing either a major(s) solely in the Business School or solely in the College (non-STEM). In the Business School, I interviewed students of all concentrations. I did not include students who were double majoring in both the College and the Business School. Each participant was 18-22 years old and enrolled full-time at Emory University at the time of their interview. I chose to interview only students enrolled as juniors or seniors because individuals in their first and second years of college are just beginning their experience and most likely do not have the concrete grasp on student culture as older students. Additionally, as my study is focused on college-to-career issues, upperclassmen are more likely to have an idea of their life after graduation than individuals just entering college.

Sample Selection and Recruitment

To gather participants for this study, I utilized convenience sampling. Due to the nature of my research question, gathering a representative sample that is indicative of the demographics

on the whole of Emory University was not necessary. However, I made an effort to invite a wide variety of students to participate in my interviews. My primary goal in this study was to gain perspective on student culture and college-to-career issues from individuals in the Business School and the College. Thus, as random sampling was not required for my research questions, I conducted convenience sampling to gather volunteers for my study. Although I cannot generalize my results to all of Emory, my data will illuminate how individuals have encountered career funneling at Emory University, which is informative and crucial to explore.

I contacted roughly 60 undergraduate students via either email or text. Out of those individuals who I invited to my study, 24 agreed to participate. Thus, my response rate was 40%. I utilized data from 22 of these individuals after learning that one participant was pre-medical, and another participant was double majoring in the College and Business School during the interviews. To gather my sample, I utilized the online networking site LinkedIn. This website allows individuals to search through Emory College of Arts and Sciences and Emory Goizueta Business School's pages which include a list of students who indicated their attendance at each school and their year of graduation. This allowed me to compile a list of students to recruit based on their major and their year in school. Then, I sent out participation invitations to such individuals. In the event I already had their phone number and contact information, I utilized this method of communication. If not, I searched for their Emory email and sent the invitation to participate in this communication method.

As previously mentioned, my sample is not representative of Emory University as a whole. My study consists of ten Business students and twelve students in the College, each of whom are at least eighteen years old. The majors within each school range widely from finance and marketing in the Business School to women and gender studies and international relations in

the College. Of the twenty-two individuals in my study, ten identified as male and twelve identified as female and 88% of participants identified as white, non-Hispanic. About 60% of participants matriculated from a public high school before attending Emory. The students in this study vary widely in where they grew up around the United States and Canada. To reiterate, while I attempted to include a diverse group of students in my analysis, due to the nature of convenience sampling, I did not gather a sample representative of Emory University's economic, racial, and geographic student body.

Data Collection

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted each interview online via zoom. This allowed me to see the participant, thus simulating an in-person interview, while following with CDC guidance on safety measures in this pandemic. Each interview was conducted confidentially in my room at home in Atlanta, Georgia. In my recruitment text or email to my participants, I attached a demographic survey, IRB consent form and project description, a zoom link to my personal meeting room, and a link to a Doodle poll for individuals to sign up for an interview time. I also sent participants a demographic survey which they completed and returned to me via email or text. My interviews were conducted from March 2020-January 2021. At the initiation of each interview, I gave a brief project description and participants gave their verbal consent. Each interview lasted from 40 minutes to an hour and a half, with the majority of interviews concluding in about an hour. With zoom technology I was able to record each interview through the platform. Throughout the interview, I would take notes on questions that were confusing or points to clarify before we concluded. After each interview was recorded, zoom would email me a copy of a basic transcript of the recording. I de-identified each transcript and gave each transcript a pseudonym to keep confidentiality and remove potential bias. Then, I

imported each transcript into InqScribe, which is the tool that I utilized to transcribe my interviews.

My interview guide reflects the complexity and multiple facets of my dependent variable in this study. Over the duration of a year, the interview guide expanded to clarify questions and better probe on college-to-career issues. I began each interview asking about the students' background information. Then, I asked each interviewee to describe their path at Emory, particularly focusing on their academic and career story. The participant took me through their major, internships, career guidance, and plans for after graduation. I probed for the reasoning underlying their decisions and possible internal and external influences or pressures. I also inquired into their notions on the prestige and status of majors and occupations. Then, I moved into the section on Emory's context. I asked interviewees about conversations around career topics they've encountered on campus and Emory's student culture in general. I asked about the distinctions between major groups in their opinions. I catered questions to each participant based on their responses in real time. Overall, I aimed to gather their own experiences and views on college-to-career culture at Emory University.

Data Analysis

To code and analyze my data, I utilized a qualitative software analysis program: MAXQDA 2020. I created an initial code list grounded in the major sections of my interview guide: undergraduate culture, status hierarchy, and own story (Miles and Huberman 1994:58). Under the undergraduate culture, I included codes on conversations around careers, Emory reputation, and subcultures. Under the status hierarchy I included structural factors, pre professional low and high, career job low and high, liberal arts, pre-med, and BBA. Under my own story I included the code career path. While I was listening to and later transcribing each

interview, I noticed that specific topics continuously emerged from multiple interviews. I exercised deductive analysis in expanding my initial code list while I was transcribing the data (Miles and Huberman 1994:58). I began to notice that general success, financial goals, and personal interests and values were prevalent when individuals would explain their own stories and motivations on campus. I added money and certainty under the undergraduate culture code and success under the status hierarchy. I also began to categorize individuals' motivations based on how they approach their major and work. I added subcodes on major and work as means to an end or purely ends in themselves in the section on a students' own story. Additionally in this section, I included a particular subcode of work meaning and values. Utilizing these codes, I imported my transcriptions into MAXQDA and coded each interview for relevant themes.

VI. Findings

Pseudonym	School	Year	Major in College
Liam	Business	2021 (Senior)	Strategy & Management Consulting, Business & Society
Olivia	College	2020 (Senior)	International Studies
Noah	College	2022 (Junior)	History and Economics
Ava	Business	2021 (Senior)	Finance and Marketing
Oliver	Business	2021 (Senior)	Finance
Sophia	College	2022 (Junior)	Political Science
John	College	2021 (Senior)	History and German Studies
Isabella	College	2022 (Junior)	History
Eli	Business	2022 (Junior)	Finance

Mason	Business	2022 (Junior)	Information Systems & Operation Management (ISOM)
James	Business	2021 (Senior)	Finance, ISOM, and Health Innovations
Amelia	College	2022 (Junior)	Film & Media Management and Creative Writing
Mia	College	2021 (Senior)	Human Health
Ben	College	2022 (Junior)	History and Creative Writing
Harper	College	2022 (Junior)	Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Evelyn	College	2021 (Senior)	Sociology and Creative Writing
Lucas	Business	2021 (Senior)	ISOM and Marketing
Abigail	Business	2021 (Senior)	Strategic Management and Marketing
Charlotte	College	2022 (Junior)	Art History and Economics
Emily	College	2021 (Senior)	Film & Media Studies
Henry	Business	2021 (Senior)	Finance and Marketing
Luna	Business	2021 (Senior)	Finance

Figure 1: Overview of Participant Characteristics

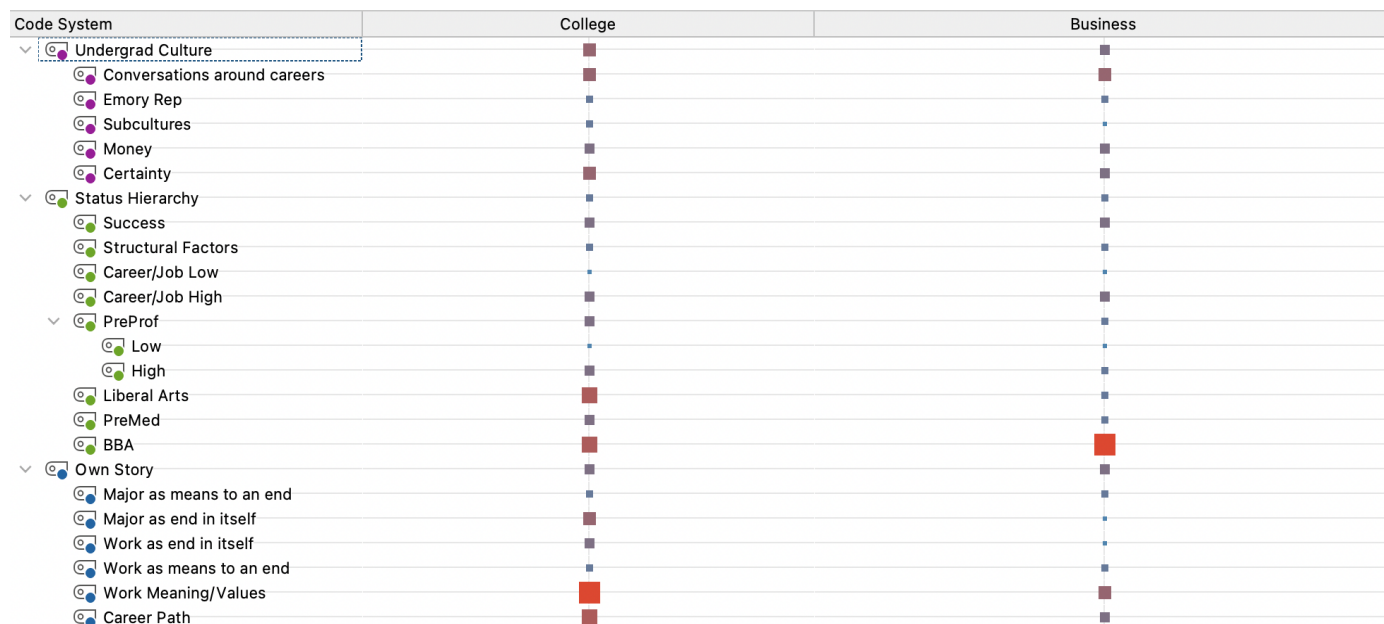


Figure 2: Code Matrix Frequency of Code

RQ 1a. What are these students' perceptions of college-to-career culture at Emory University?

Status Hierarchy of Majors

When I asked these students about the status hierarchy of majors at Emory, the vast majority of individuals categorized Emory into three groups: the College non-STEM (humanities and social sciences), the College pre-medicine (pre-med), and the Business School. The overwhelming pattern evident across both the Business School and the College students was to rank majors that are stereotypically pre-med (hard sciences) and the majors in the Business School as higher in prestige than individuals majoring in the College non-STEM. It is important to emphasize that even though many students possess a notion of what a pre-medicine major is, there is no major that is technically pre-medicine at Emory. The pre-medical track is a set of courses that must be taken in order to apply to medical school, not a specific major. One student in the College summarized the evident stratification of the different major groups by presenting them as levels in the architectural structure of the Emory Woodruff Library:

You have the people on the bottom floor of the library who are often [in the] B school and who are there to socialize and talk about their weekend plans... Then next you have the stacks which often has a lot of pre-med because they're just grinding and grinding and grinding to get stuff done by themselves... And then I guess you have like the middle to the third floor and the reading room... I find that I see my other history and art history majors are there and we like sit and if I like reading something really interesting and [a friend] is there with me at the end of the table with me I'll be like 'Oh my God you have to read this line' and she doesn't know anything about art but she cares enough about out like the idea of something interesting that she'll read it... [I] see other people excited by what they're reading on that floor, whereas you just don't see people happy on other ones.

-Charlotte

Many respondents acknowledge that the popularity of a major group contributed to its status at Emory, which is why they may label pre-med and business as prestigious. According to participants, the vast majority of Emory students pursue pre-med or pre-business tracks. The strength of the undergraduate program was often mentioned alongside the number of students each respondent knew who were studying that field. Liam describes how even during his arrival at Emory, everyone seemed to already be pre-med. Harper adds: "I didn't really understand how big the B school and the pre-med programs were... when I was coming to college, I was like there's a college and all of the majors are pretty equally represented... Whereas at Emory it definitely feels like the B school was really large and the pre-med track looms really large." Mia describes how the conversations on campus around academics are often oversaturated by pre-med and business individuals, which contributes to their dominance on campus. She recounts that when individuals in those popular major groups had large exams approaching, the student body would seem more stressed overall. She has seen students filling the library the week of a QTM (quantitative theory and methods) or ISOM (information systems and operation management) test and these major groups seem to dominate the conversations on campus. The general campus chatter would focus on the upcoming test and this made it seem like everyone was a part of those conversations and taking those classes. To her, this prominent awareness of the Business School and pre-med students affords those groups more "clout."

A majors' perceived competitiveness and rigor also contributed to the students' assignments of status to each field. In discussing the prestige of the business majors, Mason describes that his family would think highly of him declaring a major in organization management and information systems because "it just sounds good," but likely not film and media studies because "they might not be as impressed." In declaring the best majors, Henry also mentioned the "business and medicine majors" being at the top due to their programs' prestigious reputations in dominant culture outside of Emory. Emily, a student in the College, recounts that she learned quickly that the students who are labeled as working the hardest were pursuing the pre-med track or a business degree. While she acknowledges that she does not agree with this assumption, she emphasizes that there is a prominent stereotype that the most difficult majors are pre-med and business. According to her, in turn leads to their elitism in the student body and the perception that those students are more successful in general. Emily also recounts that popular meme pages on Facebook would portray these stereotypes as well that contribute to those students feeling above everyone else. Many students in the College express similar acknowledgements that the general hierarchy on campus assigns pre-med and business students the highest status, but also emphasized their dislike of this categorization.

The overwhelming majority of students across both major groups I interviewed label majors in the College, excluding the pre-medical track and STEM majors at large, as lowest in ranking. When students talked about the low-status nature of certain majors, they often refer to the College as a whole, but only gave examples of majors in the humanities and social sciences. This notion was driven and widely accepted by students I spoke with in the Business School. Many Business School students associate the College majors' low practicality with their low status as well. One student illustrates this notion:

I honestly can't help but laugh a little at people who are like 1800 Spanish history majors... the way I grew up my dad would think I was joking on the phone if I told him that... You pretty much know you're not gonna be able to support yourself with that and like expect your parents to just like put all this money into you... I feel like the least I can do is put it towards something that is practical and useful. -Eli

For many Business School students, it is almost impossible to entangle a majors' applicability to the job market in their opinion with the standing of the major itself, which will be examined in greater detail in the following sections. Eli goes on to describe that professors in the College often perpetuate ideas of obtaining outlandish jobs for individuals majoring in the College. He notes that such professors are in "la la land" believing that "you'll get the job digging up ancient tombs in Mesopotamia like you will be the one person to get that job as an anthropologist." Abigail echoes this notion, delineating between the reputation of women, gender, and sexuality studies and the Business School based on their relevance to the job market. Henry adds that English and history are likewise not "useful and frowned upon."

Many college students I spoke with agree that the general notion of college majors ranks them as the lowest in status, but they personally disagree with this positioning. Harper acknowledges that many individuals perceive her major, women, gender, and sexuality studies, as a "fake major." She notes that many people have told her she will be unemployed in the duration of her twenties due to her major. Harper recounts that people will outright laugh when she tells them her major. Ben and Isabella agree with this sentiment, adding in the fields of history and African American studies to the low status position as well. Isabella, a college student, notes that she only feels embarrassed or judged when talking about her major to individuals majoring in the Business School. Emily adds students in the College might feel the need to justify their major choice because other individuals perceive the College as the easiest path to take. She conveys:

Overall, I think Emory college is kind of regarded as just you know, it's like the base school at Emory. And then if you want to take a step up, you would go to the school where you would choose a track or something like that... I think it's like there's a culture around that-- that you could have done more. But you couldn't. That's not what I feel like.

-Emily

Overall, students that I spoke with in both the Business School and the College often intertwine the major with the perceived career path, which lead to a seemingly universal and set status hierarchy.

Status Hierarchy of Occupations

Many students across both major groups acknowledged that the general status hierarchy of occupations places high paying jobs at the top. Individuals overwhelmingly assigned this status to businesspeople and doctors, as well as some lawyers and politicians. Students in the Business School categorized the realm of business as prestigious due to the reality of making large sums of money at a relatively young age. According to Abigail and Liam, this monetary success translates into prestige. Henry relays that professors in the Business School assist in perpetuating the culture of valuing jobs based on their salary:

In the B school, Andrea something-- the administrative people--I guess they were the first ones to say it to me. It was the first time I'd ever heard it, but there's like big 4 ... PWC, EY, Baine, and something else-- there's four companies and those are like the four big consulting firms or whatever. And so they always talk about getting a job like a big four and like this is like what you want to do, like, get a job that pays. **-Henry**

Students in the College generally agree that jobs that pay high salaries are assigned a high reputation on Emory's campus, specifically regarding medicine and business (Noah, Ben, Isabella, Emily). John, a student in the college, in sharing his plan on applying for the Fulbright Fellowship, shares that his stipend would be \$800 a month which is nothing relative to his friend working at a consulting company. He shares that this increased salary affords individuals in those occupations' stability, which is inherently desirable.

Students often described viewing fields that are more cutthroat as higher in status. This helps to explain why students in both the College and Business School place medicine and business at the top of the peer prestige system. Emily explains that if something is “sought after from my peers and people I’m surrounded by, I think having that element would make it be regarded as more prestigious.” Students describe an apparent difficulty to find a job in business, which contributes to Emory’s students often regarding this field in particular as coveted.

Students in both the College and Business School mention that the status hierarchy is upheld by peers, professors, and familial influences. John acknowledges that this assignment of prestige is often perpetuated by the culture of the Business School, saying that he never knew how popular investment banking and consulting firms were before coming to Emory. Emily concurs with this sentiment, stating that “people who are in the B school and then get a business job at one of the big companies are the ones you always hear about... a lot of people regard those kinds of jobs as higher or more significant than others... and then pre-med and just people going to med school.” The constant chatter around individuals pursuing and entering these fields helps to uphold their status and worthiness. Students hear about their peers choosing to enter these fields, and this popularity and constant attention add to the perception that these are the worthiest fields. Other students mention the influence of parents in how students view successful jobs. Emily and Mia mention that growing up, parents socialize their children into believing that stereotypically popular occupations such as medicine and business are successful. Throughout the varying mechanisms students learn that high paying jobs are esteemed, the pattern is clear: money and prestige are interchangeable.

While students openly discussed the positioning of high-status occupations due to their prestige and money, very few individuals in either major group that I spoke with mentioned

which careers are low status. Students express the clear aspect of the peer prestige system to be medicine and business were popular and distinguished careers. In the few instances that individuals I spoke with mention low status careers, it is in comparison to a high-status occupation. Mason gives the example: “if you’re a person outside of Emory talking to... four students--ones working at a bank, one’s a lawyer, one’s a doctor, one’s an English major let’s say and a journalist and they’re writing in a magazine, I do think that the person... would put the journalist below the other three.” Liam describes the occupation of nursing being looked at as less than a doctor. Similarly, Eli describes human resources and “back-office” work being below surgeons and investment banking. In many of the conversations I had with individuals, participants were hesitant to outright rank majors and careers. Instead, individuals often utilized terms such as popularity and practicality to describe the peer prestige system. In the following sections, I will further explain.

RQ 1b. How does a major group influence these students’ perceptions of college-to-career culture at Emory University?

Two Different Emory’s

Due to the rigor and ranking of Emory University, it is no surprise that students form their academic to career paths with deliberation and drive, oftentimes looking far ahead into their future when making decisions about their majors and occupational pursuits at present. Noah describes how he faced a drastically different reality of college than what he anticipated:

I think it’s not what it is in the movies we all know that we kind of all had that moment where we realize like where you know what the Hollywood movie showing of college. It’s more difficult than that--it’s not just like walking around on a beautiful sunny campus and you know there is the person you fall in love with on the first day and you’re thriving and everything and then you just happened to get the first job you apply to and all that. It’s more complicated because it’s real life. **-Noah**

When describing their own path and student culture, many students recount positive experiences socially and academically in their time at Emory, while emphasizing the significant hard work exerted in their collegiate experiences and pressures, both internally and externally, to succeed. The overwhelming majority of their own stories and descriptions of Emory University were grounded in their experiences of being either the Business School or the College.

Students in each school reason this initial division in the student body as due to the nature of the academic path they chose. Henry describes his experience in the Business School as ultimately limiting his collegiate career academically and socially:

I feel like I was funneled into Business School classes. My freshman and sophomore year, like my freshman year I came in with a lot of AP credits and so I didn't have to take that many classes. So, I just took econ [economics] and my freshman seminar and like the few pre-register the Business School and I didn't really do anything else. **-Henry**

Because of the rigidity of the Business School path and the quantity of pre-requisites, once individuals opt into that path, they rarely interact with people in the College. This reality bleeds into the students' social lives as well, creating set groups of friends that students often describe as due to their majors. Mia agrees with this sentiment in claiming that the student culture as clicky. She cites that the warm and welcoming environment that she initially felt in her first few years at Emory quickly vanishes as soon as people settle into their own groups. She explains that once people are in their own bubble, it's difficult to branch out and meet new people: "and then when I do, I'm like wow where have you been I can't believe I didn't meet you until now like I forgot how big the Emory student body is... [your group is who] you go out with and you hang out with and who you study with." Once the student is funneled into their own path, it's difficult to mingle with the other school, which leads to antipathy.

Students overwhelmingly report the campus silos as a distinct rapture between the Business School and the College in particular. John feels that the two schools lack even basic

understanding or interest in the other. He describes his majors in History and German Studies as being central to his identity in college. It frustrates him when students in the Business School “don't know the difference between a project that I'm doing on the Bulgarian Jews in the 1800s verses you know mass incarceration now... it's just all the same history class [to them]... [but] I don't know the difference between like corporate law and you know business law or whatever.”

The lack of care shown by each school in learning about the others' academics turns into unbridled aversion of the individuals in the other school in some instances. A student in the Business School majoring in finance, Eli, describes, “I think there's two kinds of Emory's kind of... people who are against the system and people who are in the system... the Business School is in the system and Greek life is in the system and if you're not people are like you know fuck Greek life fuck going down the business route, they're all scumbags.” Many students that I interviewed echo this sentiment, that there is not only a divide in the student body based on a students' major, but intense dislike of what students in the other school are choosing to study. This notion carries into disrespect of what the students in each school are planning on pursuing after matriculating from Emory as well. Students describe people in the other school as possessing vastly different values than their own.

Differences in Value Turn to Apathy

As displayed in the section above, there is a seemingly cohesive perception of the peer prestige system with regards to both majors and careers. Individuals in both the College and Business School describe the same ranking of business and medical pre-professional majors and careers as high status and college non-STEM majors as low status. However, many students in the College personally reject the overwhelming sentiment placing both their studies and career aspirations as low status. The students in the Business School and College describe possessing

distinct career values and experiences in their own college that dominate their view of the other major group and their own choices, which I will detail in the section below.

Many students I spoke with in the College took offense in the very purpose of the Business School degree. John explains the Business School degree as teaching them how to network and talk the talk whereas the College stays true to the purpose of a liberal arts education, teaching critical thinking skills and a niche within an academic field. Because of this, John expresses feeling disinterested in conversing with individuals in the Business School about their studies:

I had really great conversations about people's you know poli sci [political science]. majors and what they're working on... [my roommate] is doing his econ [economics] thesis and even though it is numbers heavy it requires a certain level of thinking and like the same kind of humanities lens that I feel like I can hold a conversation with, and you know be interested in... I have friends in the B school, but I'd really never talk to them about their classes you know. I don't really care. **-John**

College students described their Business School counterparts as learning for the sake of their careers rather than learning for the sake of learning the material, which is fundamentally different than their experiences in the College.

Students in the College describe the Business School students as being inherently individualistic. Both Isabella and Harper characterize students in the Business School as lacking social consciousness and an awareness of current news or pressing issues in their communities. College students describe Business School students' apathy towards the world as a symbiotic relationship with their motives behind choosing to major in the Business School in the first place. Charlotte describes the rationale for majoring in the Business School as self-focused because they want to: "fulfill like a dream life of buying lots of things and being able to like afford a lavish lifestyle and so it's what that major can provide for you in the future monetarily as opposed to intellectually and so it's very much a surface level interest in the field itself." Students

in the College oftentimes interchange business majors with careers in business due to their inherent association in their opinions. Harper illustrates this in saying:

The B school I simply don't respect like zero respect... the B school student body is what I perceive to be ignorant and subsequently apathetic towards the rest of the world... I feel like the mentality and a lot of the B school is no contribution to the community just this achievement of individual success...is not considering what I can do for others and more considering just straight up accumulation of capital. **-Harper**

My sample demonstrates that students in the College view students in the Business School negatively due to their personal values in the teaching style in the Business School and the careers that students in the Business School ultimately enter into.

Throughout the interviews, Business School students repeatedly emphasized their opinion that students pursuing a major in the College are not preparing themselves for the “real world.” Abigail, a student in the Business School majoring in strategic management and marketing, expresses that to her, studying a narrow field such as MESAS (Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies) is “scary.” She goes on to explain, “well you have to be really passionate about it. It’s one topic. You have to know that you want to do that. You don’t learn anything else in college. That’s all you’re taking.” Whereas many individuals I interviewed in the College express excitement over their niche fields of study, Abigail views it as impractical. Many students in the Business School that I spoke with agreed with this sentiment and felt that majoring in the College put those individuals at a disadvantage when entering the job market, and that’s ultimately the lens through which they viewed the College as a whole.

RQ 2. How does a students' major group influence these students' own college-to-career paths?

Business School Paths and Influences

Many students in the Business School describe their initial path into their majors as predetermined. Luna notes that exposure to her dad’s occupation in accounting persuaded her to

decide on her path to the Business School before arriving at Emory. Henry explains growing up with interest in business and creating products, which influenced him to enter Emory with this set path in mind. Likewise, Ava expresses: “I would say I was 75% sure I wanted to do business coming in.” She contemplated pursuing a pre-medical track but notes that “I had already come in with micro and macro credits from high school, so I already felt I was ahead of the game. I was going to apply early to the Business School and it just kind of made more sense for me to go on that path.” Abigail explains her decision in a major in business as being due to her uncertainty about a future career which led her to follow in her sisters’ footsteps to a business degree.

Other students recount their initial interest in majoring in the Business School as due to groupthink. Eli, Liam, and Mason recount how the majority of their peers were planning on going into the Business School, and this greatly influenced their own decision. Mason notes that he found himself on the business path due to a lack of passion in a particular subject and guidance from older friends. He describes his path:

We also had a family friend who lived down the street from me who was a senior when I was a senior in high school so my first freshman year, he had just graduated but he was in the Business School and family friends since forever and he said that's a great path to go. I knew I wasn't going to want to do med school so I explained that to him and he said doing the Business School was the best idea, so I became a business major. -**Mason**

Mason is one of the few Business School students that I spoke with who looked negatively on the philosophy prevalent in the Business School and his decision to enter the Business School. He describes others in the Business School as similar to himself in lacking interest in a particular subject and following what others were doing around them.

A prevalent pattern in the Business School students’ descriptions of their motivations to enter the Business School center around the practicality of the business majors themselves. Lucas, Liam, and Eli emphasize the ability to easily translate their business major into an occupation. Liam switched from political science to business during his second year of college.

He is interested in the realm of politics but feels that the political science major is too theoretical. Additionally, he notes that he was not performing as well as he would have liked in his classes in the College. He describes his decision to switch to the Business School: “the things I’m learning in my classes are still super applicable I think to everything [post-grad] and the reason I just chose it over every other major is I think honestly I was at the point in college where I was like I don’t know what else I want to do. This seems like it’s a really good program. It seems like it’s really easy and laid out for me.” He emphasizes that risk-aversion and the perceived universality of the major to a wide variety of fields was a major draw for him.

Other students acknowledge that there is external pressure to choose a major that is perceived as guaranteeing a job after graduation. Eli notes that in choosing a major, his dad made it subtly clear that certain majors were off the table. He states: “Yeah I mean like I’ll admit it I just am a very practical person, and in my brain, I can’t justify making my parents pay \$20,000 for me not walk out of here with something that’s going to provide me with a self-sustaining income.” The majority of students in the Business School who I spoke with emphasized this apparent sensibility or workability of the business major. To them, the ability to apply their major to the widest variety of jobs is crucial.

Inside the Business School, students describe the culture as intense and competitive. Students label their peers in the Business School as “snakes,” and individuals across academic departments mentioned this description. They describe the meaning behind this stereotype as illuminating how the culture in the Business School is seen to breed individuals to be ruthless in their academic pursuits. In describing this, Luna, a Business School student, shares:

You’re kind of just trying to do whatever you can to get ahead and [you] don’t really care about like--you’re able to put down others in order for you to do better. So, I think also what exacerbates that is in the B school, everything is graded on a curve. So, it literally is

if your peer does worse, you do better... so I think that makes it not like a welcoming environment. **-Luna**

Luna characterizes her peers in the Business School as aggressive individuals with big personalities. As mentioned in the previous section, Mason regrets his choice in majoring in the Business School. He speaks adamantly against the culture of rivalry rampant throughout the school, noting that this contributes to Business School students putting themselves above other students. He specifies: “I think the people in the Business School are terrible—terrible people... most people are extremely selfish and only care about themselves. They'll be really happy to screw you over whenever they can.” Mason adds an illustration of this culture, recounting a story where a peer deliberately refused to remind a friend about a homework assignment due so that it would help him with the curve of the assignment. Additionally, Mason shares that individuals in the Business School are largely focused on pure memorization and gaining knowledge solely for the test. He adds that these kinds of behaviors are due to the reality of getting ahead in the hopes of it helping them land a job.

The College Paths and Influences

Similar to students in the Business School, some students in the College describe arriving at college with a general idea of what major they would pursue. Sophia knew that she was interested in studying political science after devoting a significant amount of her high school career to volunteering for campaigns across her home state. Evelyn pre-determined her major choice in creative writing after growing up with a love of writing and reading. However, the majority of individuals I spoke with in the College emphasized their exploration of various fields throughout the College. While Noah arrived at Emory with a love of social sciences and humanities, he felt that he “had only seen the tip of the iceberg” and was excited to take a wide

variety of courses to help him decide on a major. Similarly, Harper explains that she came into college loving history, but wanted to keep her options open: “So I knew that I liked that but coming to Emory I was thinking okay I don't get locked down into anything I wanna try everything and so I took a psychology class my first semester and loved it just blew my mind and completely changed the way I thought about things I didn't really think about.” While she eventually settled on women, gender, and sexuality studies as her major, this illustrates the pattern many other college students described of trying out various interests before coming to a conclusion on their major.

Many students in the College focused on the role of professors and advisors in their path to choosing a major. John conveys that professors in the College have been incredibly helpful in deciding to combine his major in history with a double major in German studies. Particularly, his advisor has proven invaluable in helping him make major academic and career decisions, such as courses to pursue and whether or not to write an honor's thesis. Professors in their respective fields likewise inspired both Isabella and Charlotte to ultimately decide on their majors:

I just remember having some early conversations with him about like his work and you know just even you know just sort of the lifestyle of like being in academia and that influenced me a lot. Also, second semester freshman year I took two 300 level courses one of which was with [history professor] again and he just really really helped me with my writing... like my writing just got significantly better by second semester - **Isabella**

So, it [art history] was pretty dull in the beginning and then like wonder of wonders this like [art history professor] comes in and she does the contemporary art unit on modernism and abstraction and blew my mind completely like she got a standing ovation at the end of class from everyone. She was just a rock star. And so, I declared art history really basically because of her... So far, I've taken every class that the contemporary art teacher has taught at Emory and she's like my role model in life - **Charlotte**

Unlike the sample of students in the Business School, the connections students in the College made with their professors greatly impacted their own academic trajectory. To them, these

relationships allow them to find meaning in their majors and see a future after college based on their major.

In the College, the overwhelming majority of students sampled spoke highly of other individuals pursuing majors in the College. Isabella describes her peers in the humanities as in touch with the current political climate and empathetic towards events occurring around the world. She also speaks about how when she crosses paths with her peers in the College, she genuinely enjoys hearing about the happenings in their field, including their studies and honors theses. Isabella describes that she is fascinated in seeing “what they’re doing [academically]-- you know cool things that they learn or read about. It’s always fun and I will sort of share the history perspective when I’m in those conversations.” Harper speaks similarly about each major in the College, describing those studying women, gender, and sexuality studies, history, and political science as all different approaches with a common goal of helping others in their community.

One of the clearest patterns displayed by individuals in the College speaking about their major and atmosphere in the College is the passion apparent throughout each students’ own path. Emily switched halfway through her college career from pursuing the pre-medical track to a major in film and media studies and a minor in sociology. She describes that once she found these fields of study in the humanities and social sciences, she felt a drastic shift in her positivity and interest towards her classes: “I was literally only in film classes and sociology classes... and that was the best semester of my life... I love going to class now. Like, I started actually going to class and liking what I was learning.” Charlotte explains that pursuing a major in art history similarly brings her happiness and challenges her to think critically and form her own opinions instead of regurgitating the ideas of others. In one assignment in particular, she had to form a

thesis about a piece of abstract art from sitting in front of a painting at a museum for multiple hours. She explains:

It's called visual analysis. I ended up going back to the museum--I bought a membership after that day and went back I think like four or five times in the two weeks that we had like to write this three-page paper... It's the piece of writing I've written at Emory that I'm proud of--it was so good and it was like the most interesting thing to write and it was so satisfying to be able to decode a piece of abstract art... it was really empowering. - **Charlotte**

The vast majority of college students I spoke with share similar stories about finding special meaning in their diverse majors. In describing their academic paths, many students emphasize their experience finding a niche and purpose in their field to where their major transformed from a field of study to a genuine interest.

Personal Career Values in Major Groups Influence on Path

Business School students who I spoke with often emphasized the caliber and intensity of work they were planning to enter into. For example, Oliver plans on working in private equity at a firm in New York when graduating from Emory and Luna has a job in investment banking post-grad. They both describe the vigorous atmosphere of the fields as being attractive to them. Oliver explains: "There's a fair amount of people where they're just so intimidating but it's a turn on. There's a lot of people like that and I respect that energy because it's just bad ass. There's also a lot of smart people and I've always thought intellectual prowess is a sign of strength." Luna shares a similar appeal in her field of interest, stating that she enjoys being stressed and working hard because when she completes a task in a competitive environment, it feels like a bigger reward.

A considerable difference between the individuals' work values in the College and in the Business School revolve around their view of making money. The overwhelming majority of

individuals I interviewed in the Business School cited money as one of their most prominent deciding factors in choosing their intended career plans:

And I think you just kind of know finance = money. Money = happiness... if you have money, you have opportunities, and more opportunities lend better to happier, people who live more comfortable lives... I'm going to make money and in order to support my two very expensive homes in the world (laughs) **-Oliver**

Eli: I mean like investment banking it's hard to deny the fact that your friend ___ probably made twenty K this past summer and that's just a lot of money that you couldn't really get anywhere else... It's like the most immediate way to try to continue the lifestyle if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yeah, what kind of lifestyle?

Eli: Just growing up with means. I don't want to pretend like I'm not privileged but some people it's even worse like they want to do this, this, or this [only]. But I feel like that kind of drives it.

Eli and Oliver are not unique in holding money as a main motivator in determining their future plans. Ava also shares Eli's hope to position his family in a monetarily similar manner as his upbringing. However, Liam and Luna describe that in some instances, they feel remorse for being money-driven in their choices. They acknowledge that they admire other individuals who value other things or are working to better their communities, but for them, seeking a monetarily successful job is more important.

As previously mentioned, students in the College acknowledge that Emory's student body generally perceives high paying occupations to be high status. However, they claim to personally reject entering a field purely for the monetary benefits. Mia, Isabella, Noah, and Charlotte all project that individuals who choose a job based on the salary often do not enjoy the work they are engaging in, and this in turn is a motivator for them to choose a job based on other values. Each one of them shared the opinion that love for the job outweighs monetary success, emphasizing values of happiness and fulfillment in their work. Other examples of College students prioritizing interest and passion include:

[I'm] looking at what is going to inspire me every day to get out of bed... the most important thing in what you do is doing what you love and nothing else comes after. - **Noah**

I want to be surrounded by ideas in some sort of way and like still be challenged and be learning new things all the time. So that is definitely influenced a ton because before I was like work isn't gonna fulfill me like I'll do other things that will fulfill me, and work would be just a job. I know I can't think like that anymore because it just means too much. -**Charlotte**

These students highlight that their work is the end in itself, rather than a means to an end financially. The enjoyment they have for their work is more important than the salary at the end of the day. They emphasize the role of satisfaction, stimulation, and engrossment in their intended work. To them, the notion of pure curiosity in their field of interest is more important than living a lifestyle of means. Contrastingly, some Business School students admit dismissing their own personal interests in the name of money. Henry, a Business School student, mentions that he mulled over an internship traveling around the country for sports marketing, but it would not have been as practical in his mind or beneficial for his future.

The College students that I spoke to often placed their own value on career plans within the realm of helping the communities around them. While they do not claim that this work value gives their intended occupation prestige, they often emphasize a personal disregard of the hierarchy in their own paths and choices. Oftentimes when college students describe their reasoning behind choosing a certain job, they would discuss how the job would benefit others. Emily shares that her dream job is working in late night television. When discussing the rationale behind this career choice, she notes that the fundamental goal of these shows is to bring people happiness and brighten their days. She explains: “especially just being an intern [in late night TV] during 2020 and COVID and the election and everything, being a part of something that makes people laugh and smile during a time that is really hard... [it makes] me feel really grateful.” Other students in the College share this sentiment that doing work that brings others

joy in turn makes them happy. One of Isabella's career aspirations include being a historian so that she can convey stories of individuals in history that have been forgotten or undervalued and share these with the world. Harper is uncertain about what she wants to pursue post-graduation. However, she is unwavering in her conviction to be loyal and of service to the people around her:

I simply don't know what I want to do-- like whether I would be doing research, whether I want to be writing, whether I want to be interviewing people, whether I want to be working in public policy stuff, whether I want to be working in advocacy group stuff... I just am not interested in becoming successful without having it benefit people... I have felt this sense of efficacy in the face of these huge systems and also there are a lot of like a really rough personal times I felt a much greater need to like makes the lives of the people around me **-Harper**

While she has not settled on a particular career path, Harper is determined to dedicate her career to bettering others. This is a sentiment driving many college students I spoke to throughout their career choices.

RQ 3. How does college-to-career culture influence these students' own career paths?

Constant Pressure

A common pattern throughout interviews with students across both major groups is the overwhelming sentiment that conversations around the future and job prospects are a constant stress and recurrent topic of conversation. According to the interviews, this seems to be mainly perpetuated by a culture of constant job hunting in the Business School, which then triggers the College students to be likewise career minded in their everyday lives. Individuals in the Business School describe an environment where the dominant mindset is to look towards the future. James explains that oftentimes, older students in the Business School will guide younger students in their job process as early as freshman year. Thus, early on in their college career, they often feel a sense of urgency to contemplate potential occupations. Liam agrees that Business School peers converse around the future all too often in his opinion:

People [need to] stop talking about what you're doing this summer like stop talking about like we get it... It's all you hear about all the time and who's working there, and it always becomes a little bit of a gossip thing. And I think that's sometimes fun for people to be like 'Oh they're working at this bank can you believe that'... [it] has really brought out the worst in people and really shown like (pause) shown people being really nasty for no reason to other people. **-Liam**

He adds that this culture of constantly referring to careers and other students' internships is also perpetuated by the Business School professors themselves. He describes that in the classroom, they situate their learning as for the purpose of their careers rather than emphasizing the material itself.

Students who I interviewed in the College concur that the culture of constant career-talk is oftentimes driven by the Business School. Both College and Business School students agree that this environment heightens during the typical business recruiting season which happens the end of sophomore year to the beginning of senior year. When College students talk about careers, some say that the environment around individuals who are likewise in the College is not anxiety provoking. Sophia and Emily both describe conversations they have had with friends outside of the Business School who learn about their interests out of genuine curiosity on the field rather than subconscious or overt competition. However, many college students I spoke to outline numerous encounters of taxing conversations between them and Business School students about the future:

Especially B. school students... they always ask you 'What do you want to do after school' or like 'What are you going to do after you graduate'... So, I think that the environment's very like less focused on learning and like more on like professional outlook at Emory **-Mia**

Like, I've just I've overheard a lot of things of people is talking about other like their classmates, or you know their peers and their B school classes like 'Oh like this person's going after this job. There's no way they're going to get it.' 'This person has this GPA,' like, first of all around how you know their GPA--I don't know. They just like tend to get so into other people's business... Honestly the only conversations I've been exposed to that are like that are about business and about the B school. **-Emily**

College students who I spoke to often talked about how the Business Schools' competitive environment could seep into how they approached conversations about careers. Across both major groups, it is apparent that discussing the future occurs repeatedly in formal and informal spaces.

Expectation to Have a Job Lined Up

Students in both the College and Business School admit feeling an immense pressure to have a set plan once they graduate Emory. In describing his time at college, James, a Business School student, characterized the end of his sophomore year and all of junior year in its entirety as "pretty rough" due to the ongoing recruitment process and pressure to succeed in finding a job. Similarly, Abigail describes that the Business School culture of anticipating the procurement of a job post-graduation is so intense that "you did something wrong if you don't have one... [because] in the Business School it's very normal to get it very early." According to Abigail, this creates anxiety for those students who have not secured a job and can feel like they are falling behind. In describing the process of how Henry acquired his job offer, he relayed:

Henry: Um, so I got really freaked out my that the beginning of my sophomore year, and like over the summer during freshman year and applied to a bunch of internships--

Interviewer: Why?

Henry: Kind of because like the people I was friends with like they were all applying to jobs and I felt like I had to rush and apply to jobs. And so, I pretty much like fired off much applications. And then a couple months later I had interviews for like internships after my junior year... [I] just went through the recruiting thing and then I took my offer just because like I didn't want to like pass up the opportunity, you know.

Many Business School students describe the norm as securing a job, and in the event they fail to have one lined up, it feels incredibly upsetting. This often causes internal competition within the Business School between those who lacked a plan and those without, pressuring individuals without a job to join the dominant culture in securing the most "practical" job option they could

find. Liam also emphasizes the aggressive career seeking environment in the Business School and includes that this could be perpetuated by external pressure as well. He explained:

I feel like 85% of people know [what they're doing]. I think or even if they don't know they act like they do because they feel like they're supposed to. And I think that is really difficult for the 15% of people who either don't know and are open about it or are really admitting they're not sure. I think it's really frustrating... I think at Emory there's so much pressure to not only have an internship but to have the appearance that you have it figured out. **-Liam**

Many students I spoke with in the College also emphasized a dominant culture of everyone knowing what they are doing post-graduation. Some individuals in the College framed their shortage of a job as freeing. Instead of viewing their indecision as a stressor, some students felt that it is exciting to possess limitless options. Emily outlines this outlook, noting that there is no point to worry about a job when the timeline for recruiting is different for all fields. In her view, there is a place for everyone in the job market: "I'm just kind of letting it fall into place for myself and cheering other people on too." In the same manner, Noah shares the notion that not having a career plan right now should not necessarily be disparaged. After completing his degree in history, he imagines himself in a wide variety of careers ranging from pursuing graduate degrees in law or Master of Public Policy to working in the nonprofit sector or in government. Noah reports: "All of them are just theoretical. I have no idea where life's going to take me like my philosophy is you know you can only know so much. Have an idea... and let life take you where it goes."

While some college students relish in their limitless opportunity, the majority of college students who I spoke with express an overwhelming sense of concern for their future. Some students acknowledge the reality that recruitment for jobs in the fields they are interested in have a smaller staff and less streamlined process than other jobs. Mia hopes to pursue a job in public health after graduating, and feels that regarding jobs, it is "frustrating because I can't materialize

that in front of me” due to the relatively late job seeking process that occurs in the field of public health. Sophia admits that she is similarly worried about the future due to the people that feel farther ahead of her in the job-seeking process.

Many students in the College report feeling as though everyone around them knows what they’re doing. This perception of others’ certainty with their futures creates comparison between people and led to some college students feeling that they are to blame for their lack of a job:

There is a tremendous anxiety now [because of] the fact that we are upperclassmen and don't have a plan... We thought that we would have it more figured out by now and we thought that we would be more exposed to the world by now and we just haven't been... [it is exacerbated] especially since the people in B school are like given constant recruiting and like do you have things lined up. **-Charlotte**

Harper: I would say a few times a week probably my friends and I will be like ‘Okay what are we doing, what's going on, what's happening.’

Interviewer: What are some of those conversations that you have with people?

Harper: Just a lot of panic, a lot of okay in a year and a half I’m done with college and I have to be doing something with my life... people are constantly trying to set themselves up to be in good shape after graduation... [and] it feels like I’m slacking like I feel like I am still slacking. I feel like I am the freaks and geeks sitting under the bleachers smoking cigarettes while everybody else is studying and I'm a graduate class.

Many students in the College shared similar sentiments of feeling immense anxiety over her lack of a set plan after graduation that many other college students echo. They describe seeing peers in the Business School acquiring jobs, and this puts pressure on them in turn. Harper also notes that because of this culture of stress, students are oftentimes “resume stacking” with any experience they can find. If she hears about a friend being accepted to a research project or building a relationship with a professor, she finds herself jealous of these opportunities and worried that she is not doing enough to prepare herself for the job searching process. When Harper landed an internship at the Democratic Party of Georgia, she notes her elation: “for a few days I was just floating [because] I had added two lines to my resume--I was like excited about the work I was going to be doing but I was really excited about the fact that I could like sleep at

night knowing that I had done something and that I had an increase and more qualifications on my resume.” Even though Harper later describes her genuine passion for politics and solving societal problems, the aspect of being accepted into that internship she was most proud of was situated in her potential job prospects. To Harper, Charlotte, and many other College students, the population that has it all figured out is students in the Business School.

What the Peer Prestige System Creates: A Pre-Professional Hellhole

In these interviews, students across both major groups discuss how their own path fit from college to their career within the Emory student culture and perceptions of the hierarchies of status assigned to majors and occupations. One theme dominating the data is the perception of the Emory college-to-career culture as being overwhelmingly pre-professional. This influenced how students in both the Business School and the College spoke about student culture, major groups, the status of both majors and careers, and the conversations they engaged in around campus. In defining pre-professional, many students describe the pre-business and pre-medicine tracks (in some rare instances, pre-law is mentioned). Mia mentions that pre-professional tracks grant students “transferable skills after you graduate and into the job world.” Many students across all major groups and in the College in particular have a negative outlook on pre-professional tracks. However, other students use the word pre-professional to describe an approach to college: learning for the sake of acquiring a job. Harper, a student majoring in the College, notes: “I love to refer to Emory as a pre professional hellhole. Because I was fed all this information about a liberal arts campus and a liberal arts edge when I came to this university and I came here, and the place is mother fucking overrun by the B school snakes and pre-meds.”

Students indicate that the dominance of pre-professional tracks often dictate the status hierarchy of both majors and jobs. In many instances, students outright blur the lines between

majors and students' intended jobs in that major. As previously mentioned, both pre-medical and pre-business tracks are considered to be high status at Emory in both the College and Business School major groups. Students note that this is oftentimes because of the certainty that these tracks grant students after leaving graduation:

I mean the clear reward—this is what you hear from your friends—is that if you do this path this marketing, consulting, information systems, finance then you will have a job by the time you graduate. I know that's like everyone's biggest stress... Emory prepares you well for that and has a very high placement rate because of the way they push the schedule onto you in a step-by-step process to be pre-professional. **-Mason**

I think like Emory is so focused on what you're going to do next, and I think the reason the pre-professional tracks are so popular and have so much clout is because like yes you work hard as long as you work hard and do all the things you get-- [but] Emory provides you with the next step. Yeah you finish orgo (organic chemistry), therefore you go onto the next class and then you finish bio-chem and by that time you've taken the MCAT... Same with B school: you have these recruiting events and as long as you go to those and follow the protocol, they promise you to go to a certain spot. I think people choose these paths not necessarily because they want to [when] coming into college but because it's super comforting the fact that as long as you work hard you will get to that point. **-Mia**

Students describe a culture of such immense stress revolving around the future after graduation, that engaging in a pre-professional track seems to guarantee students' a plan and alleviates the anxiety. Emily mentions that when she switched from the pre-medical track with an undecided major to a major in film and media studies without the pre-medical track, she felt scared and lost at first. She was elated to have a predetermined schedule as a pre-medical student, but once she shed the track, she had to make decisions on her own. Emily notes that now she is “very happy with it and you're not any less of a student not to be on a track in school. But I think there's just a culture that students themselves have created around that.”

As previously mentioned, students commonly referred to the humanities and social science majors in the College, minus the pre-medical track, as possessing the lowest status. It is not surprising to note that individuals who are engaging in pre-professional tracks are oftentimes not pursuing humanities and social science majors in the College. Oftentimes, they are in the

Business School or have a major in STEM, which students label as high status. Mason and Ava both note that because programs that are pre-professional land students' jobs, students automatically assume that the program is higher status. Ben echoes this notion, saying that students in the Business School are pretty much set, and this is a main motivator for students to enter into the Business School in the first place. He goes on to explain that students in the College who are not pursuing the pre-medical track have their options wide open, which comes with flexibility but also the fear of impracticality.

The prevalence of pre-professional tracks not only influences the majors and careers that individuals choose as well as the worth that students place on fields of study and other occupations, but it creates a stark contrast in the purpose of college and careers in the minds of the students. Students across the College and Business School acknowledge that specifically due to the pre-professional nature of Emory, individuals create a culture of constantly looking to the next best thing. Noah explains how students are so motivated by achieving their goals and getting the best GPA possible to get the internship, that they aren't satisfied in the present. Mason goes so far as to say that "the reason people came to Emory is that it is a very known school that is very good and because you have heard you can get a job after it." Students describe a college-to-career culture that is so concentrated on getting a job that they forget to enjoy being a college student and engaging in a liberal arts curriculum. Individuals who I spoke with more often than not associated this mindset with students in the Business School and pursuing the pre-medical track. Mason, a student in the Business School, describes:

A lot of them actually enjoy their learning more in those courses [in the College] as opposed to the Business School and they're not focused on what they're gonna do with it, they're focused on learning and gaining the knowledge from great professors and great programs and I think that's a pretty big difference. I know that my friends who are doing double majors in the Business School and the College--they strongly prefer going to their classes in the College for their--one of them put it to me as their passion, one's passion

was doing English but because everyone else is in the Business School and like it's the way to like have a job after the Business School. **-Mason**

It is apparent that students' projected worthiness of majors often is associated with this student culture emphasis on certainty and career placement. Although students delineate between non-STEM college students and the pre-professional students, individuals often generalized this culture of pre-professionalism and fear of the future to the general student body. Individuals pursuing pre-med and pre-business majors describe feeling pressure to fit in with the norm of their school in seeking and landing a practical, high status job. Individuals in the College describe feeling immense anxiety due to their perception of everyone else having it figured. According to students, this fear of uncertainty and dominance of pre-professionalism seems to dominate student life. Examples include:

Emory is such a professional hub of everyone [being] so focused on what they want to do with their life...I have this friend who took the year off from Emory and his biggest complaint was that Emory is so pre-professional- no one is here for learning's sake. This is a checkbox for them. People know what they want to do—they're just getting their bachelor's degree and getting out. **-Liam**

A lot of Emory students come here to get a degree for a job instead of a degree for education and learning. And I think that was crazy to me for a while but now I'm kind of like expecting it. So, I think these conversations happened enough for me to realize that. Like I mentioned at the beginning, I expected college to be an intensive learning experience in terms of learning whatever I wanted, but I realized very quickly that here at Emory people learn so they can learn what it takes to get the job that they want. **-Mia**

VII. Implications and Discussion

While my sample size is not representative of all of Emory, the results from the Business School and College students who I spoke with share apparent similarities to the theoretical framework set forth by previous scholars. In regard to the independent variable, my sample differed greatly in its responses regarding the College-to-career culture at Emory based on whether the individual is majoring in the College or the Business School. This is consistent with

the findings of Fine 2012, which claim that small groups, such as majors, shed light on particular social units that are based on the context of each unique group. Among the individuals who I interviewed, this small group, belonging to one overarching institution, greatly affects their outlook on college and beyond.

Regarding the empirical work I reviewed, my sample shares patterns of the importance of the college setting in idea formation and guiding students to particular careers. Some individuals that I spoke with arrived at Emory with a pre-determined major and career path. However, the majority individuals in the Business School mentioned the influence of their peers in deciding not only to enter the Business School, but to pursue careers popular in the Business School as well. The informal conversations these students had with older mentors and friends their age greatly influenced how they viewed their options regarding majors and occupations. Peers and dominant notions around campus were crucial in plaguing non-STEM College majors as less practical than the Business School, thus persuading Business School individuals to pursue the latter path. While students I spoke with in the College did not mention friends as motivators in their paths, many referred to professors and advisors as inspiring them to choose their major. It is clear that among my sample, many students came into college with a relatively open mind about the specifics of their college careers and paid attention to academic, peer, and overall interpersonal motivations that guided their own path from college-to-career. This is consistent with the findings from Binder et al (2016), Graham and Cockriel (1996), Hassan (2008), and Terenzini et al (1994) who posit that college is a unique environment allowing individuals to grow their own ideas and opinions based on their environment.

Similarly to the research conducted by Binder (2013), Kaufman and Feldman (2004), Terenzini (1994), students in my sample mention that fitting in the norm in college is a

significant influencer to their college-to-career path. Kaufman and Feldman (2004) convey how students' identities on campus are closely linked to their major and career choices. To the students who I spoke with, their major certainly connected to not only their sense of self but their ideas of student culture on campus. Individuals in both the Business School and college emphasized how siloed the university is, and how individuals more often than not create fixed groups within the College or within the Business School, and rarely overlap academically and socially. They describe vastly different realities of academic environments and conversations around careers depending on whether they are majoring in the Business School or the College. Additionally, many students in both the College and Business School generalized each other's personalities, values, and goals based on their major group. Many students in the College who I spoke with looked down upon individuals who chose to enter into the Business School and vice versa. Individuals based general assumptions on their peers in the other school simply on their major due to the radical differences they perceived in how they approach education and beyond.

My study is grounded in the work of Binder et al (2016), who posed that career funneling is apparent on campus and works to create and perpetuate the hierarchy of jobs that students find desirable. In this study, we see that among the participants across both the Business School and college certainly created a similar and rigid hierarchy of both majors and jobs: business and medicine were deemed high status pre-professionally and occupationally, whereas non-STEM majors in the College and seemingly the jobs they pursue were looked at as less prestigious. However, it is interesting to note that many students felt clear about high status jobs, they often did not mention low status jobs. This possibly means that students default most other careers besides the select few they named to be low status. Another explanation could be that due to other jobs' unpopularity at Emory, students forget or lack the knowledge of other career paths.

Regardless, it is apparent that a peer prestige system was created by individuals at Emory and perpetuated throughout the student body. Individuals in the Business School who I spoke with often agreed with the perceived hierarchy and pursued majors and jobs accordingly.

Similarly to the findings of Binder et al (2016), Terenzini (1994), and Kaufman and Feldman (2004), students on campus who I spoke to were greatly influenced by this hierarchy and culture on campus of worthy and unworthy majors and jobs. Terenzini (1994) describes how students long to learn and fit within the norm of student culture on campus. As previously mentioned, Business School students that I spoke with described influences by peers to join the Business School due to its perceived practicality and universality. They also mentioned intense pressure to secure a job quickly, describing a tense environment that created an expectation to successfully recruit a high-status job before graduating. Contrastingly, while College students are overwhelmingly interested in their major of choice, many college students who I interviewed described a sense of anxiety due to their lack of following the hierarchy in their own major and career aspirations. Students in the College acknowledged the perception of their major as being impractical, easy, and not worth the tuition and they admit feeling worried and affected by the perceived hierarchies of majors and jobs. This notion influences the peer prestige system and is more in line with scholars who have focused on personal interest in choosing a career in college (Ubagharaji 2008, Denver 2002). Thus, across both major groups, it seems as though individuals are plagued with feelings of adhering to the peer prestige system (consistent with the Denver 2002 study).

My findings among the College students seem to illuminate patterns that are not touched on in Binder et al (2016). As previously mentioned, many college students acknowledged that the hierarchy exists and their majors and intended career plans are looked at as lower than others.

However, they often describe disregarding the hierarchy in their own path. Many College students explained their dislike of the perceptions at large and blatant aim to defy them in pursuing their majors and careers based on other factors. These factors that seemed to be bigger motivators included students' own passions and interests and overall goals of helping the community around them. Many College students emphasized the importance of loving their job, rather than pursuing prestige and money. Contrastingly, many Business School students who I spoke with mentioned money and intensity to be a main career value of their own. These career values align with the occupations they labeled as high status; thus, it is not surprising that they would choose this path in line with the hierarchy. This is consistent with the findings of Piotrowski and Cox 2004.

The apparent difference in how students in the Business School and College approached their own paths based on the perceived hierarchies of majors and jobs led to students in the Business School often treating their major as a means to an end and a way to obtain a job. In talking about their own path, very few Business students mentioned passion for their academics or professors. Contrastingly, many students in the College expressed sentiments of treating their major as the end in itself: learning and mastering a subject of personal interest. Many students in the College I spoke with described candid joy for their field of interest. The former frame of mind, associated with the Business School, is consistent with theorists who pose that individuals often choose a major with their intended career in mind (Ubagharaji 2008, Liao and Chang-Ho 2015, Porter and Umbach 2006, Denver 2002, Henderson et al 2007, Xu 2013, Black and Schofield 2018, Piotrowski and Cox 2004). It is apparent that within my sample, context matters, and major groups within my sample often dictated students' entire collegiate experiences, from college-to-career.

A major pattern among my participants that is not overwhelmingly prevalent in previous research is the notion that certainty was labeled a status good in the college-to-career culture. The hierarchy of majors and jobs described by my sample of both the College and Business School align with stereotypical notions of prestige depending on the monetary success of ones' salary. However, students in both the Business School and the College included that high status majors and jobs are often positioned as such specifically due to the notion that they are secure and certain, thus alleviating stress in the present. Students lamented how pre-professional majors are coveted at Emory because of the idea that it will grant you a job, even if the job fails to align with one's interests or grant them personal satisfaction. Students mentioned that practicality of a major and profession is often correlated with its high position in the status hierarchy. This may be due to the notion of Emory University being elite, but still out of the top 20 range (US News College Rankings 2020-2021). The coveted nature of being pre-professional often provoked students in the College to worry that their degree would not assist them in searching for a job. It de-valued their very educational degree. This finding is significant, as the pre-professional nature of Emory University seemed to dominate students' academic lives, goals, and future aspirations. Additionally, the anxiety around career certainty greatly affected how students approached the very worthiness of studying a particular field of interest and choosing an occupation, which has the potential of greatly narrowing students' interests and careers post-graduation.

There are a number of limitations to consider when reviewing this study. Primarily, the sample of my study is not demographically representative to Emory as a whole. While my main goal was to gather a plethora of data from individuals in the Business School and the College, my sample skews harshly white and middle-upper class. This lack of diversity both racially and socioeconomically could emphasize the difference between my sample and Emory as a whole in

viewing college-to-career culture and their perception of the hierarchies of majors and occupations. It is imperative to not generalize my sample to Emory as a whole because of this. Additionally, a possible limitation of my study is the number of participants in my sample. Due to time restrictions and the chaotic nature of the pandemic, it was difficult to gather a sufficient number of participants. While I believe 22 individuals is a sample big enough to see clear patterns in the data, a larger sample can only bolster these conclusions. Another possible limitation is my method of gathering participants: convenience sampling. By not utilizing random sampling, subconscious bias or individuals could have influenced the individuals who I invited to participate in this study. Utilizing the method of LinkedIn to find possible study participants narrows my study to university students who utilize LinkedIn, which could skew to middle- and upper-class students.

There is a plethora of research that could be done on the topic of college-to-career issues. A larger study including demographic influences, accounting for race, gender, and socioeconomic status, would provide a broader picture of whether the trends found within my sample apply to the Emory college (non-STEM) and Business School as a whole. The study could expand to include STEM students as well. It would also be interesting to conduct a study where the independent variable is whether or not the student possesses concrete career plans entering college and see how this varies the college-to-career culture and students' own path. This would help to explain the importance of the peer-prestige system in already set paths. Additionally, a study on how other 'second tier' elite institutions' experience college-to-career culture on campus, answering the question: is this phenomenon apparent in students at Emory University or other similar universities across America. Because the specific topic of college-to-career culture is still emerging, there are diverse channels for scholars to study.

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IX. Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Attributes

Pseudonym	School	Age	Year in College	Major in College	Gender	Race/ethnicity	Nationality
Liam	Business	22	2021 (Senior)	Strategic Management, Business and Society	Male	White	Eastern European
Olivia	College	22	2020 (Senior)	International Studies	Female	White	American
Noah	College	21	2022 (Junior)	History and Economics	Male	White, Jewish	Canadian
Ava	Business	21	2021 (Senior)	Finance and Marketing	Female	White	Eastern European
Oliver	Business	22	2021 (Senior)	Finance	Male	Hispanic	American
Sophia	College	20	2022 (Junior)	Political Science	Female	White	American
John	College	22	2021 (Senior)	History and German Studies	Male	White, Jewish	American
Isabella	College	20	2022 (Junior)	History	Female	White	American
Eli	Business	20	2022 (Junior)	Finance	Male	White	American
Charlotte	College	20	2022 (Junior)	Art History and Economics	Female	White	American
James	Business	21	2021 (Senior)	Finance, ISOM, and Health Innovations	Male	White	American
Amelia	College	20	2022 (Junior)	Film and Media Management and Creative Writing	Female	Asian (Chinese)	American
Mia	College	21	2021 (Senior)	Human Health	Female	Asian (Chinese)	American
Ben	College	21	2022 (Junior)	History and Creative Writing	Male	White	American
Harper	College	20	2022 (Junior)	Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies	Female	White	American
Evelyn	College	22	2021 (Senior)	Sociology and Creative Writing	Female	White	European
Lucas	Business	21	2021 (Senior)	ISOM and Marketing	Male	White	American
Abigail	Business	21	2021 (Senior)	Strategic Management and Marketing	Female	White	American
Mason	Business	21	2022 (Junior)	ISOM	Male	White	American
Emily	College	21	2021 (Senior)	Media Studies	Female	White	American
Henry	Business	21	2021 (Senior)	Finance and Marketing	Male	White	American
Luna	Business	21	2021 (Senior)	Finance	Female	White	American

Pseudonym	High School	Location of HS	Parent #1	P #1 Highest Degree	P #1 Occupation	Parent #2	P #2 Highest Degree	P #2 Occupation	Siblings
Liam	Public	Chicago, IL, USA	Mother	JD	Director of Communications	Father	JD	Lawyer	1
Olivia	Private	Seattle, WA, USA	Mother	MD	Therapist	Father	Bachelor's	Consultant	1
Noah	Private	Toronto, Ontario, Canada	Father	Bachelor's	Marketing	Mother	Medical Degree	Doctor	2
Ava	Public	Old Tappan, NJ, US	Mother	Trade School	Homemaker	Father	Master's	Sales Manager	2
Oliver	Private	Denver, CO, USA	Mother	Some High School	Consultant	Father	Master's	Pilot	3
Sophia	Public	Sarasota, FL, USA	Mother	High School	Construction Superintendent	Father	High School	Small Business Owner	0
John	Public	Columbus, Ohio, USA	Mother	PhD	Historian	Father	PhD	Public Health Researcher	1
Isabella	Public	Lincolnshire, IL, USA	Mother	JD	Attorney	Father	Bachelor's	Finance	1
Eli	Public	Paradise Valley, AZ, USA	Mother	Master's	CPA	Father	MD	Chief Medical Officer	3
Charlotte	Private	Atlanta, GA, USA	Mother	PhD	Professor	Father	PhD	Professor	1
James	Private	College Park, Georgia, USA	Father	PhD	Higher Education	Mother	Master's	Homemaker	1
Amelia	Public	San Ramon, California, USA	Mother	Masters	Software Engineer	Father	PhD	Software Engineer	1
Mia	Public	Syosset, NY, United States	Father	Masters	Data Manager	Mother	MD	Homemaker	2
Ben	Public	Chamblee, GA, USA	Mother	Bachelor's	Fundraising	Father	Bachelor's	Supply Chain Management	1
Harper	Public	Athens, GA, USA	Father	JD	Preacher	Mother	Bachelor's	School Secretary	1
Evelyn	Private	Greensboro, NC, USA	Mother	Professional Degree	Lawyer	Father	Bachelor's	Funeral Director	2
Lucas	Public	Franklin, MA, USA	Mother	Bachelor's	Administration	Father	Bachelor's	Sales	2
Abigail	Private	Baltimore, MD, USA	Mother	JD	Lawyer	Father	JD	Lawyer	1
Mason	Public	Westport, CT, USA	Mother	Bachelor's Degree	Travel Advisor	Father	Bachelor's	Stock Trader	1
Emily	Private	Dallas, TX, USA	Mother	JD	Lawyer	Father	Master's	Consultant	2
Henry	Private	Asheville, NC, USA	Mother	MD	Doctor	Father	Master's	Consultant	1
Luna	Public	Millburn, NJ, US	Mother	CPA	Accountant	Father	Bachelor's	Foreign Exchange Trader	1

Appendix B: Project Summary

Study No.: IRB00116236 Emory University Document Approved On: 11/27/2019

You Are Being Asked to Be in a Research Study

Concise presentation of key concepts

You are being asked to be in a research study. A research study is designed to answer a scientific question. If you agree to be in the study you will be one of 120 people who are being studied, at Emory.

Why is this study being done?

This study is being done to answer the question: What is the undergraduate culture around college-to-career issues at Emory? You are being asked to be in this research study because you are an undergraduate student at Emory University.

Do you have to be in the study?

It is your decision to be part of this research study. You do not have to be in it. Before you make your decision, you should take time to learn about the study.

What do I have to do if I choose to participate in this study?

If you are eligible and want to be part of the study, you will participate for one study visit. The researchers will ask you to do the following: an in-depth interview. All of the procedures will be paid for by the study.

How is this study going to help you?

If you are in the study, you will be helping the researchers answer the study question.

What are the risks or discomforts I should know about before making a decision?

The study will take time. All studies have some risks. Some risks are relatively small, like being bored or losing time. Some are more serious – for this study, these include possible breach of confidentiality. A full list of expected risks, their frequency and severity are in the “What are the possible risks and discomforts?” section of this document.

Alternatives to Joining This Study

Since this is not a treatment study, the alternative is not to participate.

Costs

You will not have to pay for any of the study procedures.

What Should I Do Next?

Read this form, or have it read to you. Make sure the study staff explains the study to you. Ask questions (e.g., about exact time commitment, about unfamiliar words, more details on specific procedures, etc.). Take time to consider this and talk about it with your family and friends.

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Study No.: IRB00116236 Emory University Document Approved On: 11/27/2019

Emory University

Consent to be a Research Subject

Title: College to Career Culture among Undergraduates at a Liberal Arts University

Principal Investigator: Tracy L. Scott, Department of Sociology, Emory College of Arts and Sciences

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form is designed to tell you everything you need to think about before you decide to consent (agree) to be in the study or not to be in the study. **It is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later on and withdraw from the research study. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. Your participation is completely voluntary and will not affect your studies at Emory in any way.**

Before making your decision:

- Please carefully read this form or have it read to you
- Please ask questions about anything that is not clear

You can take a copy of this consent form, to keep. Feel free to take your time thinking about whether you would like to participate. By agreeing to this consent you will not give up any legal rights.

Study Overview

The purpose of this study is to better understand experiences of student life, particularly students' thoughts and experiences about college-to-career issues on campus; this includes your thoughts about your own path (major and/or career plans) as well as your experiences with the way these issues are presented and talked about on campus. We are seeking volunteers from a wide variety of majors and with various involvement (or not) in different student groups.

Procedures

You will be participating in an in-depth interview in which you will be asked about your thoughts and experiences around career issues in college. This interview will last about 1 to 2 hours. With your permission, the interview will be taped using a digital audio recorder. The interview will be conducted by the Principal Investigator or one of the study Co-Investigators, and you may choose the interviewer of your preference. The interview will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you and in a place of your choosing or in a private room in the Sociology department (Tarbutton Hall) at Emory University.

Risks and Discomforts

The only foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study are the recall of uncomfortable experiences of your life at Emory during the interview, the loss of time while doing the interview, and the possible loss of confidentiality if records are lost or accessed without permission.

Benefits

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about undergraduate life as it relates to career paths and aspirations. The study results may be used to help others in the future.

Compensation

You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

Confidentiality

We will give you a pseudonym or number in the study and use this to identify your interview. Your name will not be attached to any notes, transcripts, or digital files. All audio files will be kept on password protected computers and will be destroyed as soon as the digital recording is transcribed. One of the study team members will transcribe all audio files and all personally identifiable information will be deleted from the transcriptions. The de-identified transcript files will be kept in two locations: on the Principal Investigator's computer hard drive, which is password protected, and in an Emory Box folder that will be restricted to study staff only and also password protected

All the information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence. Access to the data files will be limited to study personnel. Certain offices and people other than the researchers may look at study records. Government agencies and Emory employees overseeing proper study conduct may look at your study records. These offices include the Office for Human Research Protections, the Emory Institutional Review Board, the Emory Office of Compliance. Emory will keep any research records we create private to the extent we are required to do so by law. A

pseudonym or study number rather than your name will be used on study records wherever possible. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

Storing and Sharing your Information

De-identified data from this study (data that has been stripped of all information that can identify you), may be placed into public databases where, in addition to having no direct identifiers, researchers will need to sign data use agreements before accessing the data. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before your information is shared. This will ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, it is extremely unlikely that anyone would be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Your data from this study may be useful for other research being done by investigators at Emory or elsewhere. To help further science, we may provide your deidentified data to other researchers. If we do, we will not include any information that could identify you. If your data are labeled with your study ID, we will not allow the other investigators to link that ID to your identifiable information.

Withdrawal from the Study

You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty.

Contact Information

Contact Dr. Tracy Scott by phone at (404) 727-7515 or by email at tscott@emory.edu:

- if you have any questions about this study or your part in it,
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research

Contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at 404-712-0720 or 877-503-9797 or irb@emory.edu:

- if you have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.
- You may also let the IRB know about your experience as a research participant through our Research Participant Survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6ZDMW75>.

Verbal Consent and Authorization

Do you agree to be in this study? If so, please indicate by saying “yes” for the audio recording now. By agreeing, you will not give up any of your legal rights. We will give you a copy of this Consent Information Sheet to keep.

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Background (also send Demographic Survey before interview and have them fill out)

Before we start, I'm going to first ask you about your background, your experience at Emory, and your career plans. I know that things likely have changed for you in the past few months. I have allocated time during this interview to address the changes to your life, your college experience, and your career path in the world of COVID-19.

First, I'd like to get some background information [additional questions to Demo Survey]:

- Where did you grow up?
- What kind of household – e.g., parents?
- What is your parent(s) occupation(s)?

I would also like to hear about **how you decided to come to Emory**. Tell me about that process.

How did you hear about Emory? Why did you decide on Emory?

Emory Academic Story

Now, what I would like you to do is **tell me the story of your time at Emory, focusing on your academic/career story** [*OR use whatever wording works better here*].

- There are no right or wrong answers or ways to do this. This is your story, and I want to hear **what has been most important to you in helping shape your path along the college-to-career pipeline**.
- I'll follow up and ask you more questions as we go along.

1.1. Choosing Your Major

So, **tell me about how you chose your major**. Start at the beginning: **WHAT** did you **think when you started Emory**? **HOW** did those ideas change?

Alternative Questions/Probes

- **What were you thinking college life would be like** when you started? **How has it been different?**
- What were you **thinking about majors and how has the reality been different?**

Have you chosen a major(s)? If yes, which one(s)?

IF YES: Tell me about how you chose your major. When did you decide? How did you decide?

- What were **key factors/reasons** that went into your decision?

- Were there any **key people** who influenced your decision (parents, faculty, other students, other staff at Emory)? Who and how?
- Any **key classes or events/programs** that influenced your decision? What and how?

IF NO: How you are going about choosing a major? What steps are you taking in this process?

- Do you have any ideas about what you might like to pursue? What are they?
- What issues are you having with choosing a major?

Did/Do you ever feel pressure to make a decision about a Major?

- If so, where does this come from? Parents? School administrators? Faculty? Other students?
- If not, do you think others do? Where does this come from?
- IF UNDECIDED: How does it feel to say you are “undecided”? What are the reactions you get [from various groups]?

1.2 Perceptions of Majors

What is the *general perception about majors among Emory students*?

OR What are the *main distinctions between “Major” groups* on campus? How are these groups viewed by students? What sets them apart from each other?

For example, are there certain *majors* that are more *popular* than others? Or more *desirable*?

- If YES, which ones? **Why** do you think these are more popular or more desirable?
- If NO, can you explain? E.g., Are all majors considered similarly desirable?
- AND/OR are there some *majors* that are considered more *prestigious* than others?
 - If YES, which ones? **Why** do you think these are more prestigious?
 - If NO, can you explain? E.g., Are all majors considered similarly prestigious?

Do you think some majors are considered *prestigious* by *people outside Emory*?

- For example: *Parents / Employers / The media*?
- *Which majors*? And *by which “outside Emory” groups*?
- *How/where have you heard this*?

[PROBE HERE for any/all of these categories/combinations!]

2.1 Career Plans / Ideas

Now, tell me about your ideas for a career or plans for after graduation. Do you have a particular career in mind or ideas about grad school?

IF YES: HOW did you come to these ideas/decisions about career and/or grad school?

- What are some of the **key factors/reasons** for your plans or your interest in this career?

PROBES

- **Personal interests, values:** own values or purpose; own abilities, skills, interests?
- **Key people:** Friends? Family? Faculty or staff? External encouragement from parents, peers, professors, career center.
- **Turning points?** Classes? Events on campus? Conversations? Internships? Work experiences?

If UNDECIDED:

- Do you have any ideas about what you might like to pursue? What are they?
- What issues are you having with choosing a career path?

Do you ever feel pressure to make a decision about a career path?

- If so, where does this come from? Parents? School administrators? Faculty? Other students?
- If not, do you think others do? Where does this come from?

How does it feel to say you are “undecided”? What are the reactions you get [from various groups]?

2.2 Perceptions of Careers

What is the *general perception about jobs/careers among Emory students*? OR what is the *general “chatter” about jobs/careers* among students at Emory?

- For example, are there certain *career paths* that are more *popular* than others? Or more *desirable*?
 - If YES, which ones? **Why** do you think these are more popular or more desirable?
 - If NO, can you explain? E.g., Are all careers considered similarly desirable?
- AND/OR are there some *careers* that are considered more *prestigious* than others?
 - If YES, which ones? **Why** do you think these are more prestigious?
 - If NO, can you explain? E.g., Are all careers considered similarly prestigious?

Do you think some *jobs/careers* are considered *prestigious* by *people outside Emory*?

- For example: *Parents / Employers / The media*?
- *Which majors*? And *by which “outside Emory” groups*?
- *How/where have you heard this*?

[PROBE HERE for any/all of these categories/combinations!]

2.3 Own Career Perceptions

- How does your intended job/career fit in with these larger perceptions?
- How have these notions influenced your thinking about your own career plans?

3. Encounters with Career Topics/Conversations on Campus

Extending some of what we just talked about [IF THEY HAVE NOT ALREADY MENTIONED THESE POINTS] → I would like to know more about your experiences with the way that majors and careers are talked about at Emory.

Thinking about your daily life at college: Tell me about *informal conversations with other students* [that focus on issues around majors and/or careers and work after college.]

- Do these topics come up very often? How are these topics talked about?
- What are some common conversations around jobs/careers?
- How are the *desirable or prestigious careers* that you mentioned talked about?
- Does it vary by different groups on campus – e.g., Students? Faculty? Admin/Staff?

4. Emory Context

Now, I would like to know more about your general experiences of undergrad culture at Emory.

4.1 Undergrad Culture

What is the undergraduate culture like at Emory?

- AND/OR Can you think of three words to describe it?
 - Now, tell me what you mean by these?
- AND/OR For example, if you have friends at other colleges/universities, how does their undergrad experience differ from yours at Emory?
- What is student life like? (E.g., you are trying to get at notions like: competitive, cooperative, stressful, social, academic, divisive, etc.)

What kinds of experiences have you had that illustrate this? Can *you give me a story or example?*

AND/OR, *if not one culture: Are there multiple cultures or subcultures?* Can you explain?

- Which ones are you a part of? What most characterizes the culture/subculture that you experience?
- Are there any that you avoid?
- Are there any that seem to “dominate” student life? Or that are “loudest” on campus?

4.2 Common phrases [IF THEY HAVE NOT MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY]

I've heard some students mention some words/phrases, and I want to see if these have any meaning to you.

Have you heard the word “*pre-professional*”?

IF YES: Can you tell me what pre-professional means to you? What does pre-professional include? Is this a common phrase? Where (and from whom) do you hear it?

“Everyone knows what they are doing.”

- Do you ever hear this? IF YES: Who says this? When do you hear it?
- Do you ever feel like this? IF YES: Tell me more. Why do you say this? Who is “everyone”?

5. COVID-19 Impact [OPTIONAL]

If you would like, let's talk a little bit about how COVID-19 has influenced your career plans.

- How, if at all, has COVID-19 affected your career trajectory, plans, or goals?
 - Probe about applications, summer jobs, etc.
- How has COVID-19 affected how you view certain career options?
- How has COVID-19 affected your academic goals? Have you thought about switching majors or taking different courses?

6. Wrap-up

- Finally, is there anything else about college-to-career issues that you think is important, but which I haven't asked? Anything about student culture?
- Is there anything that we talked about that you would like to go back to, talk more about?
- Finally, do you have any questions for me?

Appendix E: Recruitment Email

Hello [NAME],

I hope this finds you well! I am conducting a research project with Dr. Tracy Scott (faculty member in the Sociology Department) about undergraduate life at Emory, and **I would like to ask you to participate.**

We are interviewing undergraduate students to better understand your experiences of student life, particularly your thoughts and experiences about college-to-career issues on campus; this includes your thoughts about your own path (major and/or career plans) as well as your experiences with the way these issues are presented and talked about on campus. We are **seeking volunteers from a wide variety of majors and with various involvement (or not) in different student groups.** Your participation is completely voluntary and will not affect your studies at Emory in any way.

Your participation would involve an in-person interview that will last about one to one and a half hours. The interview will be conducted by me, via Zoom, at a time of your choosing. All information will be kept confidential and we will protect your identity in any published work.

It would really help us a lot if you would agree to be interviewed. This is also an excellent opportunity to share your overall thoughts about “life at Emory” to a sympathetic, interested listener!

If you are interested please email me at: jbraver@emory.edu

If you are unsure and have questions, please contact Dr. Scott: tscott@emory.edu.

Thank you for your consideration!

Jennifer Braverman

Emory College Class of 2021

Political Science and Sociology

Appendix F: Interview Demographic Questionnaire

College to Career: Interviewee Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the questions below, save the document, and email the completed document to:
jbraver@emory.edu

- 1) What is your age?
- 2) What is your year in college? (Or list graduation year)
- 3) What is your major in college?
- 4) What is your gender?
- 5) What is your race and/or ethnicity?
- 6) What is your nationality?
- 7) What type of high school did you attend? (e.g., private, public, charter):
Location of HS: City, state, country:

During your high school years, who was/were your parent(s) or guardian(s)?

- 8) *Parent/Guardian 1*
List relationship to you (e.g.: mother, father, legal guardian):

What is their highest educational degree?

What is their occupation?
- 9) *Parent/Guardian 2*, if relevant
List relationship to you (e.g.: mother, father, legal guardian):

What is their highest educational degree?

What is their occupation?
- 10) How many siblings do you have?