

Dispatch №6: before Nov. 1, the worst of 115 bachelor's subfields returns –\$306,014

From the desk. The early deadlines are close, and the form asks you to pick a school.

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canonical: <https://le-teen.com/dispatches/price-the-major-before-you-commit>

November is when the early applications go in. College Board's BigFuture says Nov. 1 is the early decision deadline at most schools, with others set in mid-November or on Dec. 1. Early action applications are generally due in November too.

The two plans make different promises. You can walk away from an early action offer. An early decision acceptance, in BigFuture's words, is "a binding commitment."

So you're about to lock in a school. What you'll study there is still open, and that choice has a price of its own.

The bottom of the table

We ranked 115 bachelor's subfields by mean lifetime return, using FREOPP's 2021 data weighted by graduate cohort. Dance comes last of the 115, with a mean lifetime return of **–\$306,014**. Weighted by graduate cohort, **92.3%** of Dance graduates come from programs FREOPP estimates will never break even.

Dance has company. In FREOPP's 2021 data, **15 of 115** bachelor's subfields carry a negative mean lifetime return, and seven of those 15 belong to the Visual Arts and Music category. Religious Studies is second from the bottom of the 115 bachelor's subfields, at $-\$296,314$.

Now flip the table. In FREOPP's 2021 data, Construction Management tops all 115 bachelor's subfields with a mean lifetime return of **+\$1,486,369**. From the lowest mean lifetime return to the highest, the spread across the 115 bachelor's subfields in FREOPP's 2021 data is **\$1.79M**.

Getting in is the easy half

FREOPP also estimates the return for students who drop out before finishing. In FREOPP's 2021 data, the average return for students who drop out is **negative in all 115 bachelor's subfields**, from $-\$94,746$ to $-\$138,827$. An acceptance letter gets you a seat. Four years of finishing is what pays it back.

Before you hit submit

Look up the major you'd actually pick at le-teen.com/majors, where every one of the 115 subfields has its own page. Then run your early school through the 30-year math at le-teen.com/worth-it, and run your backup through it as well. If your major's number is one you can live with, apply early and mean it. If it isn't, you still have a few weeks to rethink the school, the major, or both.

We'll see you next dispatch.

Receipts

- **Early decision and early action deadlines, the "binding commitment" wording:** College Board BigFuture, [*Early Decision and Early Action Calendar FAQs*](#) (read 2026-10-11).

- **Subfield figures:** FREOPP Higher Education ROI (2021, CC BY 4.0), cohort-weighted by bachelor's subfield (one per CIP program family with at least 50 ROI-bearing programs); dropout return is FREOPP's own "ROI if student drops out before finishing degree" column. Per-subfield pages at [/majors](#); the open dataset is DOI [10.5281/zenodo.21351602](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21351602).

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