Meal-ticket majors in college?

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In Hong Kong, there has been much hype about "meal-ticket majors" (栄養士) — named by the media and students alike as they believe such majors, including medicine, law, global business, and even education, will give them better job prospects and income.

I understand that there are many students who enroll in these subjects because they do believe these are what they had wanted growing up, but I have also heard many who say they simply enroll because they believe studying these majors will make them winners in life and lead them to a free meal ticket. I cannot disagree more with such a way of thinking.

As an educator, I have always believed that what one majors in college does not necessarily determine career success. Just take a look at the resumes of CEOs working for leading companies around the globe, and you will see that very few of them studied these "meal-ticket majors" when they were in university.

Steve Jobs was a double major in physics and literature as a freshman, but he dropped out to study philosophy and calligraphy on his own. Tim Cook, Jobs' successor, majored in industrial engineering when he was in college.

I also notice that many successful entrepreneurs studied engineering (including computer science engineering), such as Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, Google's Sergey Brin, Larry Page and Sundar Pichai, Amazon's Jeff Bezos and Microsoft's Bill Gates. While one may then say these CEOs are all from major technology companies (and hence their engineering background), consider the following:

Alibaba's Jack Ma Yun majored in English, Netflix's Reed Hastings majored in mathematics, and YouTube's Susan Wojcicki majored in history and literature.

The diversity of these top CEOs' majors tells us that success has a lot more to do with ambition, drive, passion to pursue your dreams and take some risk, and of course, a little luck.

For these successful figures, the majors they studied did much more than give them a meal ticket — they were simply life changing.

By no means am I suggesting engineering and the arts are the new "meal-ticket majors" — but if Hong Kong really is going to develop innovation and technology, the opportunities available to these successful CEOs should be available to young Hong Kongers in the future.

To that end, family support plays a big role.

Both Zuckerberg and Gates faced great pressure dropping out from Harvard (it is Harvard!) to pursue their dreams, and Bezos took a leap of faith by leaving his high paying job in Wall Street.

I believe these acts would not have been possible if their parents did not raise them with an open mind.

How many parents in Hong Kong would do the same given the stakes, and let their children leave their comfort zone to take the road of risk?

It is my strong belief that universities should never become purely vocational training colleges. A university education aims at providing all students an open platform to pursue knowledge, train them to think independently and diversely, and equip them with communication skills, manners, leadership capabilities and confidence.

By immersing themselves into university life, all students would then develop a better idea of who they are, what they really want, and get an international perspective on ideas, so that they would go on and combat challenges on their own, one time or another.

Every major can be a "meal-ticket major," and some would even become one's big ticket — but we should never give them labels and think one is better than another.