College students should base their choice of a field of study on the availability of jobs in that field.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim. In developing and supporting your position, be sure to address the most compelling reasons and/or examples that could be used to challenge your position.

Sample for Score 6

The assertion that college students should base their choice of a field of study solely on the availability of jobs in that field reflects a pragmatic, economically driven worldview, particularly compelling in an era of soaring tuition costs and significant student debt. While the need for financial solvency and career security cannot be ignored, to adopt job availability as the exclusive determinant for an academic path is a fundamentally shortsighted approach. I disagree with the claim that career choice should be based entirely on market demand; instead, market demand should serve as a crucial secondary filter applied to fields where a student possesses genuine interest and innate aptitude.

The primary argument against the claim rests on the principle of intrinsic motivation and long-term career fulfillment. A degree is not merely a credential; it is a prolonged, immersive intellectual effort requiring intense focus. If a student lacks passion for a subject—say, choosing Computer Science strictly for high starting salaries—they risk burnout, mediocrity, and dissatisfaction. Research, such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of motivation, consistently suggests that while salary (a hygiene factor) prevents dissatisfaction, it is recognition, achievement, and the nature of the work itself (motivators) that drive true job satisfaction and superior performance. A student who genuinely loves history, even in a "low-demand" field, is far more likely to pursue advanced skills, network effectively, and adapt creatively to the job market than an unmotivated student who chose a "hot" major out of obligation. Ultimately, high performance, which is fueled by passion, is the best job security available.

However, the most compelling challenge to this position is the undeniable economic reality faced by the modern graduate. To argue for the primacy of passion can sound idealistic when 45 million Americans collectively owe trillions in student debt. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, in particular, often view their college degree as an essential tool for social mobility, making the return on investment (ROI) a necessary calculation. If a graduate in a low-demand field struggles for years to find relevant employment, the psychological and financial toll of debt can negate any intellectual fulfillment derived from their studies. As some studies indicate, debt burden can influence students to pursue majors with higher expected earnings, and graduates from traditionally lower-earning fields like the arts often report that their debt decreased their likelihood of working in jobs related to their major. This suggests that without the necessary financial groundwork, the pursuit of passion is often curtailed by economic necessity.

Nevertheless, this challenge does not justify making market demand the sole basis for choice, but rather highlights the need for a strategic synthesis. The modern job market is rapidly evolving; the highest-demand jobs of today may not exist in five years, rendering current market data quickly obsolete. The truly valuable skill set is not a specific major, but adaptability, critical thinking, and communication—skills cultivated rigorously in fields like philosophy, literature, and the sciences alike. Therefore, the strategic approach is to combine the fundamental subject of interest with high-demand functional skills. For example, a Political Science major can minor in Data Analytics, or a Literature major can focus on UX/Technical Writing. By leveraging their intrinsic drive for their core discipline while acquiring marketable, cross-functional skills, students transform their passion into a viable professional commodity. This integrated model is far more robust than relying on the fleeting popularity of any single, narrow field.

In conclusion, while pragmatism must inform a student's career strategy, it should not dictate their academic calling. College is an expensive investment, and students must be mindful of job availability to ensure a manageable financial future. Yet, forcing a student into a highly compensated, high-demand field they detest guarantees long-term unhappiness and professional mediocrity. The superior choice involves identifying one's natural strengths and passions, and then strategically navigating the curriculum to augment those interests with the practical, high-demand skills that enable both employment and enduring satisfaction.