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Factors Related to Low Student Turnout for Career Development Services in a Community College: A Qualitative Study

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Factors Related to Low Student Turnout for Career Development Services in a Community

College: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This thesis examines the factors related to low student turnout rates for career development services at a community college. Existing literature discussing factors related to this issue are examined. A phenomenological qualitative study, using a semi-structured interview with ten questions created by the researcher, was conducted to gain the personal perspective of students as to reasons why they do not utilize career services. Seven undergraduate students were chosen using a convenience sample and individual interviews were conducted and recorded via audiotape. The experiences reported were analyzed using coded themes from individual transcripts and compared among participants and existing research. Conclusions and recommendations were elaborated, including the need for change in communication strategies and delivery of career services to students and the expansion to other ethnic groups in the participant-selection process.

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Career development centers at the community college level have been facing deficits in the number of undergraduate students interacting with their services. Nationally, between 17 and 22 percent of students enrolled in a two or four year college or university report concerns in educational and career decision-making (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003). A portion of these students include freshmen who have a tendency to be uncertain about their career choices when entering college (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). If career services are unable to reach out to these students, freshmen may lack the necessary help to recognize career interests (Andrews, 1998). Thus, the purpose of this study is to identify ways in which career development counselors and students can connect with one another more effectively. The research question that the study is based on is: what are the factors related to low student turn-out rates for career development services at a community college?

The significance of this study can be depicted in three ways. First, the results can provide valuable information from the view of undergraduate students at community colleges surrounding the use of career development services. Second, career development professionals may use this research for their own sites across the country in order to increase student attendance rates. Third, the ability to hear qualitative feedback from students regarding the use of specific forms of media could be beneficial for the college to achieve effective communication practices.

In this thesis, four chapters address the research question. First, a comprehensive literature review will discuss past research as it relates to student involvement with career development services. This will be achieved by looking at the benefits from utilizing these services, the effects of career concerns on a student's well-being, and career-related expectations from other individuals such as families, classmates, and friends. Second, a method section will

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provide a breakdown of the participants, materials used, research design, and procedure used to conduct the study. Third, a results section will discuss the responses given by the participants in the subject areas of career and academics, family influence towards college, reasons for not interacting with career services, helpful ideas from students to increase turnout rates, and defining career from the students' perspectives. Finally, the discussion section will provide a connection between past research and this study's findings in order to provide logical interpretations of the students' responses, limitations to the study, and a conclusion that emphasizes the study's findings and future recommendations and practices.

Literature Review

Career development services at colleges and universities are under-utilized by students (Ludwikowski, Vogel, & Armstrong, 2009). This is a significant issue because while students report a vast number of career-related concerns, many students do not seek out career development services while in college. Thus, the purpose of this literature review is to examine factors related to students' lack of participation in career services. Topics of discussion include the benefits to students from exposure and utilization of career services, the effects of career concerns on a student's well-being, and career-related expectations placed on students from other individuals such as families, classmates, and friends.

Student Need and Avoidance of Career Services

Entering a new campus, dealing with career and life stress, and finding role-models and social networks – these are all potential elements of the college experience for incoming freshmen. When coupled with deciding on an ideal career path, the student may become overwhelmed and confused. Internal factors are not the only components of a student's career and academic journey that can lead them away from career services, however. Societal elements – from family and social networks to work values and belief structures – influence a student's career decision-making and could place additional pressure on him or her (Bullock-Yowell,

Peterson, Reardon, Leier, & Reed, 2011). These external factors may present a host of challenges for college students to cope with in addition to career decision-making, including marital and family relationships, financial stress, mental and physical health, affordable housing, and positive leisure activities (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011).

Between 17 and 25 percent of students enrolled in a two or four year college or university are seen at counseling and career centers for career-related concerns, including career and academic indecision, with a dramatic increase in these reports occurring over a ten-year span (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003). As of 2008, approximately 6.2 million students were enrolled in 1,195 community colleges around the country (Inside Higher Ed, 2008; Santora, 2009), and that number is projected to reach 8.2 million by 2019 (Wang, 2012). Comparing those figures together, that would mean that between 1 million and 1.4 million students enrolled at community colleges report concerns related to academic and career decision-making on a national scale. An important aspect to consider when reviewing these figures is that specific groups of students, such as freshmen, have received surprisingly little attention in the way of career counseling from colleges and universities (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). This can be problematic because freshmen seem to have a tendency to be uncertain about their career choices when entering college (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Without adequate guidance, they could choose to declare themselves undecided about a major. Having the designation of “undecided” is defined as a student who is unwilling, unable, or not ready to make educational or vocational decisions while attending college (Slowinski & Hammock, 2003).

Undecided students from two and four year colleges have been shown to experience frustration and attrition when thinking about career decision-making (Lavin & Cook, 1992). A primary reason for these stressors could be that students may lack sufficient knowledge to make an educated choice (Andrews, 1998). A lack of information for effective academic and career decision-making could stem from student experiences inside and outside of the classroom. For

instance, some undecided students may be first-generation college students, the latter representing approximately 27 percent of all graduating high school students (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). First-generation students are the first in their family to take the initiative for higher education (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). Being the first member in the family to attend college can have both beneficial and stress-related effects for students. One of these effects could be that the student's parents lack experience with the college application process, and may not be adequately equipped to assist their child to attain the college of the student's – and sometimes the parents' – choosing (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). Without a guide for becoming attuned in the college experience, first generation students may feel lost, disoriented, or unaware of resources in their new environment. Thus, a second effect of being first-generation is the importance of locating a role-model. Finding an individual with college experience may be difficult to achieve if one has to look outside one's family and rely on friends, counselors, and teachers at their institution for support (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). Being new to a college or university may place additional anxiety on students, and creating and maintaining new relationships may prove daunting.

The lifestyle of a student transitioning into college may be predetermined by how he/she was raised; thus, a third effect of being a first generation student may be related to dynamics outside of the student's immediate control, including family or personal values, prestige, and role-modeling for younger generations in the student's family or social network (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). For example, in the mind of the student, higher education could be seen as a means to a good job, while family values may dictate that he/she attend a college close to home. The balance between family and educational needs may be so intertwined that first-generation students may feel the need to leave college before completing their degrees due to the need for earning a steady wage or taking care of a family member (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). Any and all of these effects could potentially impact a student's ability to examine career development

effectively, especially without support from career counselors or advisors. Therefore, it may be important for students dealing with these issues to examine their life meaning in relation to college, career, and family goals.

Life meaning.

Life meaning, defined as the degree to which individuals believe that their lives have a clear purpose (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006), is an important element for a student's overall development, especially in a college setting. In a general sense, human beings are characterized as possessing an innate drive to find meaning and significance in their lives (Steger et al, 2006). Because there is no universal meaning that can fit everyone's life experiences, students must create meaning in his or her own life (Steger et al, 2006). This can be done through the pursuit of important career or academic goals, the creation of a coherent narrative or life-story, meeting value, purpose, efficacy, and self-worth needs, and placing an emphasis on the importance of everyday decision-making and action (Steger et al, 2006). Failure to create and maintain meaning in a student's life may result in various symptoms of psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse (Steger et al, 2006). In contrast, acquiring meaning has been positively correlated with increased work enjoyment, life satisfaction, and happiness (Steger et al, 2006). Career counseling services can be an effective resource for college students to get help in harnessing sense of purpose as they begin their college journey.

Career calling.

Depending on how developed their career goals, values, and networks are, students may believe that their personal knowledge alone is enough to guide them along their career path. A student may have such a strong passion and interest in a particular career field that he or she believes there is no need for career services. These individuals may experience what Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) refer to as a *calling*. This instance can be defined as "an extraordinary summons

that is experienced outside the core self of an individual to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented towards a sense of purpose and that holds values and goals as motivational sources” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427). To put it simply, a calling can be experienced by any individual, but there is such clarity in the career or academic choice that other options seem irrelevant. Students who feel the presence of a calling are more likely to be decided and comfortable with their career choices, to view their career path as important, and to have strong vocational self-clarity (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007).

According to Duffy and Sedlacek (2010), a significant portion of students currently entering college seem aware of the term “calling” as it applies to their career and 40 percent of students believe that having a calling was either mostly or totally true of themselves. When looking at gender, men are just as likely to have or be searching for a calling as women (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). Students planning to obtain advanced college degrees, such as doctoral, medical, or law degrees may be moderately more likely to feel called to a certain line of work already, instead of searching for a calling, compared with students who are seeking bachelor's or master's degrees (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). Endorsing a calling may provide a student with a constructed career path, allowing one to venture on one's own without need for career guidance. On the other hand, these individuals may still need support with other career-related services outside of discovering an effective career path, such as resume-critiquing, mock interviews, and assistance with college applications. In addition, students may face concerns that are not necessarily about career development, but can impact an individual's decision making process as a whole, such as anxiety and stress.

Effects of Career Concerns on Students' Well-Being

Students may discover that throughout their academic career in college, decisions about career path may be accompanied by varying degrees of career and life stress. Without adequate knowledge of what career development counseling can do to help alleviate these concerns, the

affected student may veer away from these services, especially when considering what career and life stress entail overall (Bullock-Yowell et al, 2011). Career and life stress can be viewed as consisting of two important components. First, career tension can occur resulting from the emotions experienced when being called to make a decision (Bullock-Yowell et al, 2011). The second component is neuroticism, or the potentially disabling emotions of depression and anxiety related to one's life context (Bullock-Yowell et al, 2011). Together, these components can create significant stress that can result from actions or inactions, especially in relation to academics and career.

There are several moments during the college experience that require students to make decisions about academics or career that could result in career stress. For instance, choosing a college major or finding the first professional job upon graduation can bring up career anxiety (Bullock-Yowell et al, 2011). In addition, simply attending college can create strenuous academic demands – ranging from indecision about a major to social concerns – on students that might be a source of career-related stress (Gall, Evans, & Bellerose, 2000). These instances can have several effects on students, some of them quite debilitating. For example, depression, lack of self-confidence, and dependence on others could have psychological and social effects on a student when exploring careers (Anderson & Niles, 1995). Also, incoming freshmen – especially first-generation students - may encounter a general lack of preparedness for the college transition, feeling indecisive when choosing an academic or career path, and experiencing negative thinking about themselves (Starling & Miller, 2011). Due to these effects, students may be unwilling to come forward and seek out career or personal counseling services for help (Starling & Miller, 2011).

Emotions as a whole can motivate students to make and follow through on career decisions. However, emotions can cause individuals to act or react slower, faster, or randomly during the decision-making process. These latter types of emotions are known as “disabling emotions”

(Bullock-Yowell et al, 2011, pp. 302-303), and can contribute to the lack of readiness for students to engage in productive career decision-making, with or without the help of career professionals (Bullock-Yowell et al, 2011). A student experiencing a disabling emotion and thinking negatively about oneself may have distorted perceptions of self-knowledge, occupational knowledge, plausible occupational alternatives, and one's level of decisiveness as a result (Bullock-Yowell et al, 2011). Effective career counseling can be helpful to alleviate these variables and help the student to concentrate on his or her career aspirations and goals.

Counselors are trained to make inferences about an individual's readiness for career assistance by listening to the client talk about one's thoughts or by examining self-reported responses to assessments (Meyer-Griffith, Reardon, & Hartley, 2009). If a student is struggling with negative thinking, a counselor can assist the individual in locating the focus of the difficulties within one's cognitions; by doing so, the therapist can help the student overcome or minimize career-related issues (Gati & Amir, 2010). The journey is a two-way street, however, and the student must be able to communicate his or her feelings, thoughts, and conflicts accurately with the counselor in order for both individuals to be on the same level of understanding (Meyer-Griffith, Reardon, & Hartley, 2009). Then the student may experience a reduction in emotional distress and the work can shift to focusing on attaining a comfortable degree of certainty and satisfaction with their career choices (Bullock-Yowell et al, 2011).

Factors that Contribute to Career Decision-Making for College Students

Before entering college, students have already been creating and maintaining family, educational, and social networks that have helped in the development of cultural values, belief systems, and ethics; these systems essentially signal to a student what is or is not appropriate behavior, emotions, or roles to play in society. At times, however, life experiences may conflict with the pre-existing values and beliefs of the student and the expectations of others surrounding the student's academic and career future. Entering college could be viewed as one of those life

experiences; upon the initial admissions process and exploration of colleges and programs, students can find themselves directed towards career and academic paths by other people in the students' inner circles. Thus, there should be no surprise that some students would decide not to interact with student services when entering college to avoid adding another voice that would assist in deciding their fate. Topics for further review in this section include expectations from people surrounding the student, work values, barriers within diverse populations, and role models.

Expectations of others regarding career development.

College students may have several individuals in their family, educational, and social networks possessing expectations and ideas for his or her career aspirations outside of the student's own desires (Ludwikowski et al, 2009). In particular, teachers, family members and other students may try to influence how a student views career services (Ludwikowski et al, 2009). A potential effect of such influence may be that the student avoids seeking career guidance to prevent disappointing others (Ludwikowski et al, 2009). In addition, the student may be viewed as fighting against the wishes of his peers and family if he or she decided to explore other career options (Ludwikowski et al, 2009). If the student had difficulty with creating or maintaining a career path – especially one designed by others – he or she may be viewed as indecisive, unmotivated, less intelligent, and unsuccessful (Ludwikowski et al, 2009). Students experiencing any and all of these effects may avoid career services to prevent being linked to negative labels (Ludwikowski et al, 2009). Thus, it is important for counselors to understand how family and significant others impact the student's decision-making strategies and work values.

Influence of work values on college career decision-making.

Work values have been shown to significantly predict career choice, job satisfaction, and job performance (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Work values refer to what a person wants out of

work in general and which components of a job are important to be satisfied in their place of work (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). For example, men typically rate values related to prestige, responsibility, and pay as more important than do women (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). On the other hand, women are more likely to rate social values, such as helping others and working with people, higher than their male counterparts (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). When looking at race, black adolescents tend to place a greater emphasis on extrinsic and prestige-oriented values, while white students tend to place a greater emphasis on social values, and report work values focused on economic rewards and job security (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007).

Barriers against utilizing career resources within diverse groups.

The presence of culture in a college student's life is important when considering career exploration. Socioeconomic status, race, gender, disability, and sexual orientation all have roles to play in how students view career exploration. For example, college students of color typically anticipate barriers related to academic and career pursuits, such as financial constraints, ethnic and sex discrimination, and conflict between family and work demands (Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumberg, & Ponterotto, 2007). The presence of these barriers may explain often-reported discrepancies between high career aspirations and low career expectations for students of color (Rivera et al, 2007); in particular, Hispanics have reported that a lack of success in achieving upward social mobility has influenced them to set relatively low levels of aspiration for attaining a preferred status (Abona, 1990). Therefore, it is important for career counselors to consider how barriers are perceived by these students not only to understand their career decision making strategies, but also to intervene effectively to assist the students in achieving their goals (Rivera et al, 2007).

In some instances, students may decide to hold on to aspects of their culture of origin while acquiring new beliefs and attitudes of another culture in order to function effectively in the new environment. This process is known as acculturation (Rivera et al, 2007). In a college

setting, students with differing cultural views or potential cultural barriers may deem it necessary to find ways to assimilate effectively with other students, faculty, and staff in order to fit in and feel welcomed. Engaging in the acculturation process in college may affect a student's attitudes, values, and beliefs, influence their perceptions and self-efficacy beliefs, dictate the types of activities they are willing to engage in and the types of careers they are willing to consider (Rivera et al, 2007). The acquisition of role-models in college may be helpful for these students to transition into this new experience effectively.

Influence of role-models on career choice for college students.

As discussed in the first section of this literature review, role models can be important in providing guidance for students entering in and continuing their college education, especially for first-generation students. They may also attempt to exert a measure of control on a student's career choices. This may be done by providing students with verbal persuasion and encouragement to engage in certain types of behaviors (Rivera et al, 2007). At times, this can be helpful; in 2005, 78 percent of Mexican high school students sampled by researchers reported that role-models, such as family members, were a major source of support and encouragement in educational and career pursuits (Flores & Obasi, 2005). Overall, role-models may be a significant factor for students in the participation of career development services while attending college by allowing students to feel comfortable with particular ideals, values, beliefs, and career choices admired in their role-models.

The Present Study

The utilization of college or university career development services by students is influenced by a wide variety of internal and external factors that are shared by many and are simultaneously unique to each individual student. First-generation college students are a major group impacted by these factors, for without experienced family members and role-models for collegiate support, the students may face negative emotional, cognitive, and social factors that

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could influence their desire or inhibition for career development assistance. For example, career and life stress may connect with family and social pressures for higher education achievement that may result in a first-generation student struggling with one's own definition of life-meaning and career and academic readiness. There is a need for career and personal development resources to reach out to these struggling students and help them cope with their stresses. It is important to understand that while extensive research has been focused on emotional, cognitive, and social factors of career decision-making and the use of career services as a potential coping strategy, the problem of the underutilization of career development centers on and off campus continues to exist in 2013. Furthermore, campuses have seen a shift in all services from on-campus delivery to online delivery techniques, which can evolve the usefulness and usage of career services for college students. Student perceptions on what they believe is important in locating, accessing, and participating in services are important in data collection. For this current study, the researcher will use an interview-type format to answer the following research question: What are the factors related to low student turnout rates for career development services at a community college?

Method

This research was phenomenological in nature and designed to measure the relationship between low student turnout rates for career development services in a community college and factors that would increase or decrease these rates. Phenomenological research designs focus on the lived experiences of the participants, and their answers can pull from their stories related to the experience (Sheperis, Young, & Daniels, 2010). This method is essential for the researcher's goals for the study, including gaining an in-depth understanding of the utilization or lack thereof for career services from a student's perspective, discovering more effective methods of communication between students and career professionals, and listen to students' ideas for additional programs and events.

Participants

Participants in this study were chosen through criterion sampling; the sampling population consisted of any undergraduate student enrolled at the community college in order for the best possible outcome related to the research question. This type of sampling ensures that all participants are purposefully selected due to their experience of the phenomenon in question (Sheperis, Young, & Daniels, 2010). The criterion was interaction or lack thereof with career services. Seven students were selected using this method, four males and three females. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 years old to 44 years old. Demographic information required for identification purposes was limited in nature to protect confidentiality and included age, major, academic year, year of birth, and if the participant was currently employed. The rationale for collecting these specific pieces of demographic data was to examine the age of students and compare that to their readiness for career exploration, what kind of jobs they currently possessed or had worked in the past, and their certainty for the academic program they are enrolled in. Other potential pieces of demographic data that were not collected include socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religious and political affiliations, and place of residence. These items – while important for looking at holistic trends in connection with career planning and readiness – were not selected because of the short time-frame that the study was conducted for the study.

Materials

The instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview created by the researcher and consisted of ten questions. The questions were as follows: 1. State your age, major, academic year (freshman, sophomore, etc.), year of birth, and if you are currently employed. 2. Since starting your academic career at the college, have you ever interacted with the career development services at the career development office? If so, what has your experience been like? If not, what are some reasons for not interacting with those services? 3. What motivates you to obtain assistance for career services? 4. Can you name at least one career

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development service that you have used in the past at the college that you found particularly useful (resume critique, presentations, assessments, etc.)? What about one service that you felt dissatisfied about? 5. Have you ever participated in academic class activities in the career development office, such as presentations? If so, what was that experience like for you? 6. How did you hear about this research interview opportunity? What interested you about it? 7. Have you heard about any events, workshops, or services offered by the career development office's career development committee? If so, which ones appealed to you? Did you attend these events or take part in the service? If you have not heard about any events, workshops, or services, what are some ways in which we can best reach out to you – the student – to inform you of these events or services? 8. What is important to you in regards to career? 9. What kinds of programs, activities, presentations, and/or services would you like to see at the career development office? 10. In what ways could this interview process be improved upon for future participants?

While the number of questions chosen for the interviews may be large for a phenomenological study, the decision behind the questions above stemmed from the vast array of services offered at the career development center and the anticipation that some students may not realize the depth of those services. In addition, some of the questions are closed-ended with open-ended follow-up questions to create a dialogue about the participant's experiences or lack thereof with those services.

For data collection purposes, an audiotape recorder was used to analyze the responses of each participant. These tapes were examined solely by the researcher and destroyed upon completion of data analysis.

Research Design

The phenomenological qualitative paradigm was used in this study. The purpose of this design in general is to address questions that pertain to a lived experience, whereby answers can be derived from participants who have lived through that particular experience (Sheperis, Young,

& Daniels, 2010). The experience in this study was whether or not the participants have utilized career services and the factors behind that choice. Participants were invited to share feedback and acknowledge their expertise in the field in question, while the counselor used active listening and clarification skills to find themes to deepen the understanding of the topic (Sheperis, Young, & Daniels, 2010). In phenomenological research, the quantity of participants needed is small and can be anywhere between one to six participants; in the case of this study, seven participants were chosen (Sheperis, Young, & Daniels, 2010).

The researcher examined other likely choices for qualitative paradigms and determined that phenomenology achieved the purposes of the research study more effectively than ethnographic, single-subject, and human-inquiry-grouped studies. For instance, the study was not meant to single out any particular participant, neither in one instance nor over time, as is the case in ethnographic and single subject studies (Mcleod, 1999). The study was not designed for group work, such as in human inquiry groups where the importance of research data lay in the dialogue between co-participants (Mcleod, 1999). In addition, while the design stemmed from the observation of students interacting or not interacting with career services, the point of the research design was not to continue observing these behaviors over time – as is the case in ethnographic studies (Mcleod, 1999) – but rather to gain an understanding of the causes of behaviors through interviews with students.

Procedure

The researcher notified staff members at the career development office in a staff meeting about his study, providing relevant information about the purpose of the study, benefits for the participants, and needs of the researcher to conduct the study. In addition, he notified the career development committee of the research. To locate participants, the researcher created flyers and placed them across campus after obtaining approval from several student affairs offices, including Counseling, Veterans and International Services, Advising and Graduation, and

Residence Life. Also, he promoted the study by attending career-related events held on campus and asking students passing through the career development office if they were willing to sign up and participate. Participants registered for a 30-minute appointment with the researcher by contacting the career development office in person or over the phone, and the receptionist set up the appointment. Students could also contact the researcher through email and notify him of their availabilities for participating.

On the day of their appointment, the participants entered the career development office and met with the researcher in his office. Before the interview began, the researcher explained the research study to the student and invited participants to fill out an informed consent form. Upon written consent by both the participant and the researcher, the audiotape was turned on to record the responses. During this interview, the entirety of the conversation was recorded, unless the researcher was notified by the participant that she/he wished for either a part of the conversation to be omitted or the interview to end completely. Upon completion of the interview, the participant was notified that her/his part in the research was complete and they were compensated for their time with a \$10 gift card to the college's bookstore.

Data Analysis

The audiotape recording for each participant was synced and uploaded to a computer owned and password-protected by the researcher, where the recording was transcribed in a Microsoft Word document for data analysis. If there were any inconsistent communications in the participants' responses, the researcher disregarded the data, labeled it as incomplete, and mentioned this issue in the limitations section of the thesis. The coding procedure used for reducing information into categories and themes was discussed with Dr. Goodspeed-Grant at The College at Brockport.

Results

In order to examine the factors related to low student turnout rates for career development services at the career development office at a community college, each interview was transcribed and coded. Codes were selected based on common responses from participants and themes created by the researcher. Key themes included the connection between career and academics, family influence towards college, reasons for not interacting with services at the career development office, helpful ideas from students to increase turnout rates, and defining career from the students' perspectives.

Career/Academics Connection

For some college students class subjects can influence their career interests and options, allowing them to explore these areas through assignments and projects, employment, and past life choices. Three participants in this study indicated that their academic and career experiences and goals have helped shape who they are as individuals and where they see themselves going in the near future. For instance, participant five has seen that while he may not be ready to commit to a career yet, his academics may be more than just turning in assignments for a grade: "my classes are helping pique my interest in deciding what I want to do [as a career]." Participant six reported benefitting from his academic experiences by looking at his job: "Lately I have been able to relate whatever is in class with whatever is going on in my everyday life with regards to work."

As an adult student enrolled at the college, participant seven explained that the college experience has been a transitioning and discovery period in her life, stating "There was a terrible laziness in my life that I had to overcome, but I see there's so much potential with the ability to access it personally. I have seen stuff come out of me that I did not even know I had." This student participated in career development services during her first semester. While she was glad that there was somewhere to go on campus for career guidance, she did not view her appointment with a career counselor as the exact help she needed: "I feel as though [our meeting]

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was too short. I see [career counseling] more as a soul-searching type of counseling than talking about intimate subjects such as how you're doing in life, how it's been so far, that type of connection."

Family Influence toward College

Students can gain valuable information from family members about the college experience, especially if that guidance relates to the student's potential career aspirations. This knowledge could result in seeking out career development services in a college or university. Three participants indicated that in some form their families influenced their choice to become a college student. Participant three indicated that she deals with being a role model for her siblings as a first-generation college student: "It's pretty difficult because I have to make sure that my standards are set high; my younger sister and brother look up to me, and hopefully they can come to me if they ever need help."

While participant four has had several people in his family attend college before him, the impact of their experiences was minimal: "I know my mom has gone to college, and I have had three other brothers that have gone before me and one that is going with me. [Being new to the college experience] really has not affected me, but [my family has engrained in me] the expectation that I do go to college." This student indicated that the pressure to go to college has been more societal in nature than family-oriented, naming it "cultural pressure." He explained it by saying, "In America today we're all pressured to go to college. You will get more money, get a better job, and find out what you want to do...it is just what I've been conditioned to do in school: study for the next quiz, do homework, and focus on my grades."

Participant five indicated that while many members of her family have gone to college, the decision to pursue higher education was her own: "My parents both went to college and my sister is going to college currently. I guess hearing about their college experiences made me want to go. They told me I did not have to go to college, but I wanted to." She stated that choosing the

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current community college over other colleges and universities was also important, especially for cost-purposes: “I have a big passion for traveling, and staying at home I can save up a bunch of money. I plan to take a year off in two years and backpack through Europe for a year.”

Reasons for Not Interacting with Career Services

Six out of the seven participants reported that they had never used career development services at the career development office for several reasons. These reasons included scheduling conflicts, alternative resources for career development, knowledge or lack thereof for career exploration and counseling, and career readiness.

Participant’s schedule.

Two participants indicated that their schedules do not allow for additional time outside of classes, social interactions, and homework. For instance, participant five stated, “Usually if I am not in classes I am sitting with friends at Java’s or home, so I do not really spend much time on campus. My classes are usually ten minutes apart so I can stay and do homework, relax, or just run errands.” Similarly, participant four said, “When school starts I focus solely on my classes, like the day-to-day instead of my future, concentrating on my classes, hanging out with friends, and doing homework.”

Career resource alternatives.

Two participants reported that they use alternative sources for gaining career knowledge other than the career development office at the community college. For example, participant three explained that she works with an individual from the athletic department for counseling-related issues. She said, “[my counselor] works with athletes for transfers and internships for other schools to make sure we are on top of things, and we can go to her with any problems we have.” Additionally, participant three indicated that having a role model in her family helped in her career decision-making and thus she seeks her uncle’s guidance for her career needs: “My uncle on my dad’s side owns his own company...he’s helped me a lot, recommending schools to

transfer to, and showing me what he had to do to get to where he is, because he's really successful." In contrast, participant two explained that the process of critiquing resumes was easier for him to understand by going to another office. He said, "I have wanted to get resume help, but I have never understood the whole process, so I ended up going to the writing center because it's simpler there and they actually deal with the writing stuff anyways."

Knowledge of career services.

Four out of seven participants indicated that knowledge or lack thereof for career resources was an additional factor for not interacting with the career development office. Two of those participants replied that they had no knowledge of the office's existence or where it was located. Communication was another major area for possessing knowledge about career services. Participant two stated that while he knew of the office's existence, he "did not know the scope of everything that [the center] did." When asked what can be improved regarding services offered at the center, participant two said, "From the students' side, [what is offered] is not always clarified properly."

Career readiness.

Six out of seven participants reported varying degrees of career readiness in relation to not interacting with career services. Three of the participants indicated that they were not ready to commit to a career. One participant stated, "I think there's no point in deciding if I don't know what I want to do yet." Another stated that what he was learning in his classes was important in his career decision-making.

Two of the seven participants indicated that their lack of knowledge about the college experience coincides with their inability to choose a career path. For instance, participant four stated, "I haven't given [career exploration] too much thought, besides what I should study for tests." Participant one described his experience as being in a "not-knowing stage." The final participant who addressed career readiness indicated that her knowledge and certainty of her

career path made her ready. She responded, “I am on the path of graduating with my business administration degree in the honors [program], so I want to make sure where I transfer I’m going to enjoy it.”

Helpful Ideas from Students

Six of the seven participants offered several suggestions for increasing the number of students who engage in career services at the career development office at the community college. The ideas included: presentations in classrooms or residence halls, modifications in advertisements, increasing the use of electronic communication methods to connect with students about services, and creating - in the words of one student - a “career path in which a career advisor could walk alongside a student during the course of one’s academic career.”

Presentations.

Two participants indicated that having a presentation or workshop to discuss the services offered at the career development office to students outside of the center would be helpful. One participant described a potentially useful workshop - “Maybe [you could provide] a [class] presentation during junior or senior year that is required.” She went on to describe the format of the presentation as “how your classes can translate into the work world, bringing employers into a class to describe how academics are translated into a career.” A residence hall advisor expressed that he would benefit from career services workshops. He described as beneficial his experiences of working with other student services offices in his role as a resident advisor: “Some of the stuff I know, like counseling services, I know because they did a session with us during RA training.”

Advertisements.

Four students remarked about how effective or ineffective advertisements as a whole have been on campus. Changing the shape, size, or color of brochures, posters, and handouts were suggested as ways to improve the ability to grab students’ attention. One student remarked

how linear designs were not effective when he stated, “I tend to overlook things that are straight and organized because I tend to like my things that way. When things are out of order I tend to notice them more.” That participant suggested also that the font style used for documents tends to make them read “just like a list.”

Two participants indicated that the location of advertisements matters significantly. One student responded that a clever way to promote activities would be to leave handouts on tables at specific hangout places across campus in small, plastic stands. A second student stated that “there should be more [signage] in the front [of campus] for things like this, not inside an office.”

Email.

Three participants talked about accessing daily email. According to one participant, “every teacher is saying check your email.” The effectiveness of using email can be understood through several of their responses. For example, one student stated, “I knew about the transfer fair through an email that was sent [en masse] to all students.” The difficulty comes when there is no mass list created for specific groups on campus, including students who are undeclared. A student commented, “There are not many emails sent out to undeclared people, which could [represent] a wide margin [of people].”

Career path advisement.

Several of the participants’ responses carried the theme of a career path that a student would follow with a career advisor alongside. Without a clear path, some students have experienced difficulty moving forward towards a career. One student responded, “I’m still sitting here as a freshman wanting to be at this final destination but I don’t have a way to get there.” He explained later that this anxiety could be lessened with a checklist, “because then I could check them off as I go along; it gets them out of my head and I don’t have to worry about them.” A second participant followed a similar idea by asking a specific question: “If I wanted to be an accountant, what should I be doing now?” Participant three, who had a broad path to work with

in business, suggested that “someone could guide me where I want to go or what title I would like to go with.” A fourth participant remarked that having someone to “hold my hand until I can stand on my own two feet, or be an idea board to bounce ideas against” would be helpful for him.

Defining Career from a Student’s Perspective

Several participants offered responses regarding their personal definitions of career. These reports highlighted specific topics including motivations towards seeking career guidance and the importance of having a career.

Motivations for career guidance.

Five participants offered responses related to their motivations to reaching out for career guidance from counselors at the career development office. One reason was a belief that they needed to choose a major or career option. Participant seven stated that she had met with one of the career counselors at the center; before coming in for guidance, her impression was that “I had to make a decision quick and see what sequence I was going to take.” A second motivation was the student’s lack of knowledge about career exploration or research. One student said, “I just don’t know what my options are and if I went to a counselor, [one] might help me decide that.”

Importance of career.

Three participants provided responses about their personal definitions of what a career would mean for them. Comfort and stability was a theme used by each of them. Participant six was interested in relieving career anxiety when deciding what he wanted to do in an occupation: “[I am looking for] something where I don’t have to worry week to week or day to day [about] what [bills] I have to pay or [what tasks I need to get done].” Participant one had a belief that the degree was of major importance to his career success, stating “without the degree, you cannot get the job.”

Discussion

Factors of Low Student Turnout for Career in College

This study focused on factors related to low student turnout rates for career development services at a community college. The participants shared meaningful information as it pertained to how these services would benefit them should they need to access those resources. This section provides explanations for the research findings, limitations of the study, contribution to the literature, and avenues for future research.

Overall, students seemed to possess a need for opportunities to explore careers in order to recognize the value of the career development center on campus. This issue could be looked at from several angles. Students appeared to have difficulty fitting career services into their schedules. One recommendation to remedy this could be to allow for more walk-in appointments across the day; if two career counselors are available on a Tuesday, for example, one counselor could see students during the morning hours, and the second counselor could fit in students during afternoon and evening hours. Expansion of available time for career counseling would allow for students to integrate career assistance into their schedules without feeling pressured to sacrifice time for homework or social activities.

Another recommendation for helping students fit career services into their schedules could be to send a survey across campus to ask students what days and time-frames during the week they would be available outside of classes, doing homework, and participating in extracurricular activities. This survey can be created using the free-to-use SurveyMonkey website and can be distributed electronically through email groups, such as the undeclared program, residential life, and student government. If compensation is necessary for students to engage with the survey, a raffle for a gift card to the dining halls or bookstore could be available. The return rate of student involvement with career services could compensate for the cost of the gift card. College officials could notice the change and allow for a higher budget for career services, thus allowing for an expansion of new or updated career resources to use with students.

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In addition, participants indicated that their lack of knowledge about available career resources hindered their ability to connect with the career development office. One recommendation could be to include a handout within orientation packets given to incoming freshmen that details all of the resources and services the career development office offers. This brochure could be made appealing for students by adding multiple colors instead of black and white only and clipart related to career exploration. Career counselors can work with orientation leaders and residence life to make this suggestion possible. Thereby, career counselors would start the communication process with students at the beginning of their academic careers, sometimes even before they step foot into the building. This would allow for the counseling relationship to occur before deadlines approach for graduation, resume and cover letter assignments in classes, and transfer applications.

Furthermore career development counselors appeared to have difficulty reaching out to more students regarding the opportunity to attend class presentations about career services. Many of the participants responded that they had no knowledge that classes were involved with the career development office. One recommendation would be to inform students during class registration periods that certain classes allow for presentations of student services, including career development resources. Connecting with advisors would allow career counselors to let their services be understood when students check in about class registration for the upcoming semester. Another suggestion would be to increase the number of classes that participate in career events across campus by connecting career professionals with college professors, explaining how career resources could enhance the professor's subject matter.

A fourth view regarding career exploration opportunities is that students expressed that the use of email is an effective way for them to receive information about what is happening in the college and how they can become involved. With the inability to send an email to the entire student population at once, one suggestion would be to send messages to specific groups, such as

student government or the college's honor society, or classes that have given approval for such communications. Interacting with students in these ways may not result in reaching all of them, however, due to the stratification process. Thus, word-of-mouth and having professors, advisors, and other professional staff forward career development emails along to constituents would help facilitate shared gathering of knowledge.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

Themes brought up in this project are the basis for recommendations for future research. First, six out of seven participants identified as Caucasian while the seventh participant was African American; the addition of other races such as Latino and Asian could widen the diversity of the sample population. In addition, the goal of phenomenological research is to have enough participants to interview until saturation is reached; due to time constraints of the research and the low response rate of students willing to participate, this goal was not reached. Improving advertising techniques used by the researcher for reaching out to students could potentially increase the response rate; for example, asking permission for professors to send their students emails pertaining to the study could allow for more groups to be reached. Also, six out of seven participants declared themselves as freshmen, and five of them had spent only three weeks as a college student at the time of their interviews. If the students had spent more time in the college, some of them may have discovered and accessed the career development office. Finally, the research findings could also benefit other student services offices across a college campus, specifically counseling and advising centers. These locations may be able to connect the research with counseling and advising students on class registration and personal and family counseling.

Conclusion

There is a clear message from the data presented that college students are not utilizing career services effectively for a variety of reasons; thus, it is important that career professionals understand the need for change in the communication and functioning of these services. From

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the answers given, low turnout rates are not a simple fix for career counselors, as each student's needs are unique and may vary greatly from the general population. Some changes could be costly, such as changing advertisements to include more color and increasing their size to be the length of a large poster. Other fixes may be out of the career development center's control, such as emailing services on a regular basis to the entire student population. In addition, not every student is ready to make a career decision, as seen in this study, but career counselors can still help them navigate through academic options that could link to the student's interests to foster awareness and growth. Nevertheless, the students in this study seemed to gain much in the way of knowledge about career services from participating, with at least two participants expressing satisfaction that they received more help than originally anticipated. Thus, the process of sitting down with students either one-on-one or in a group setting has been effective in relaying feedback between counselors and students and should continue to be expanded in order to reach more students. Everyone in the college community has the capacity to help each other with career development, but without knowing how that assistance can be accessed, reaching career goals may prove difficult.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Research Student Consent to Participate in Research and Waiver of FERPA Rights

Study Title: “What are the factors related to low student turnout for career development services at a community college? A Qualitative Study”

Researcher: David Cota-Buckhout
Phone: (585) 298-8781
e-mail: dbuck1@u.brockport.edu

- ◆ **This is a consent form for participation in a research study. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.**
 - ◆ **Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part in the study you may leave the study at any time. Your decision will not affect your grades or status at the College.**
 - ◆ **As a result of your student status, your records and personal information are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Since the data to be obtained may include student record information you will be asked to sign a limited waiver of your FERPA rights for the purpose of this study only.**
 - ◆ **Please review the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.**
-

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of the research is to understand why students do or do not take advantage of career development services at a community college, in the hopes of finding more effective methods to attract students to assist in alleviating career-related concerns.

Duration of the study:

The study will take approximately 30 minutes and consist of 10 open-ended questions about career development.

Participation Expectations:

Participants will be expected to answer 10 questions about career development in an interview format with the researcher. Participants can choose to opt out of the study at any point during the study.

Benefits to Participants:

You may not experience any direct benefits as a result of participating in this study; we anticipate that the data will help us develop the most effective methods for the career development center at the community college.

Risks to Participants, Confidentiality Provisions and Data Disposition:

One risk in participating in this study is the unlikely event of disclosure of confidential information. We will take the utmost precautions to keep all information pertaining to you confidential. If you are signing this form you are agreeing to the inclusion of your data in the research activity. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study.

Confidentiality will be protected through the collection of minimal identification factors of the participant, including gender, race, age, major, current academic year, and work status. Your personal information (i.e., name, gender, age, etc.) will be used only during the study. The data will be expressed in aggregate form during presentations or publication, and participants' names will not be associated during presentations or within any publication. All gathered data will be securely stored including all printed results, audio/video, or any other data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigators' office.

Each session will be taped for data-collection purposes only; by signing this form the participant is acknowledging he or she understands they will be taped, and that the tape will be destroyed immediately after data collection and will be only heard by the researcher.

Voluntary Nature of this Study:

This study is strictly voluntary. You may change your mind during the study and withdraw without any worry of repercussion.

Compensation: Subjects will receive a \$10.00 gift card to the college's bookstore as compensation for their time participating in this study.

Copy of Consent Form:

You will receive a copy of this form for your records and the original will be kept on file with David Cota-Buckhout.

Who can answer questions about the study:

For questions or problems, you may contact **David Cota-Buckhout** by phone at (585-298-8781) or email (dbuck1@u.brockport.edu) or **Pamela Lazio** by phone (585-292-3156). For questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact James Cronmiller of the Institutional Review Board at the community college, at 585-292-2740. If you agree to take part in the research, please sign the appropriate sections of this form and return it to the designated person. This consent form has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the community college for the protection of human subjects on (March 16, 2013). Thank you for your time and assistance.

Under no circumstance, however, will participants' identifying information be released to anyone unless it is the participant themselves.

FERPA RELEASE

In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), I, the undersigned, hereby authorize David Cota-Buckhout, the primary research investigator, to gather personal data that may include information in my educational records:

_____ I understand further that (1) I have the right not to consent to the release of my education records; (2) I have the right to receive a copy of such records upon request; (3) and that this consent shall remain in effect unless revoked by me. I may revoke this right at any time, but that any such revocation shall not affect information previously accessed by the research investigator prior to the receipt of any such written revocation.

Printed name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

I have read this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I understand that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form and I will be given a copy of this signed form.

Printed name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant before requesting the signature above. There are no blanks in this document. A signed copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date