

AN EXAMINATION OF UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT  
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SECONDARY CAREER  
GUIDANCE PROGRAMS

By

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ABSTRACT

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Examination of University of Wisconsin-Stout undergraduate students'  
perceptions of secondary career guidance program content and effectiveness.  
(Title)

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The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of University of Wisconsin Stout undergraduate freshmen and sophomores regarding the content and effectiveness of their high school career development programs and services.

Data was collected through a survey given to all freshmen and sophomore students enrolled in General Psychology for the Spring 2002 semester. The participants were informed verbally of the nature and purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary and the participants were informed of this through the use of a written consent form. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns with the researcher.

The survey was developed by the researcher using information from the National Career Development Guidelines and the American School Counselor Associations Standards. These models provide a framework for schools to meet the career development needs of students. The survey examined whether the participant's school program provided help in gaining competency in areas specified by the aforementioned models. The survey also asked participants to evaluate their preparedness in these same areas of competency. The survey also asked for suggestions and comments regarding how their school could have best prepared them for career planning.

Data analysis was used only for those identifying themselves as graduating from high school since 1992 . The rationale behind this was to minimize the effects of memory distortion due to the amount of time since the target events occurred . Data analysis looked at the percentages for each item response set. Data analysis also looked at possible relationships between different response sets. The content of the suggestions and comments section was analyzed for themes and summarized in the findings.

This study hoped to examine whether schools are providing services and whether students are acquiring competencies as recommended by the national standards. The research also solicited suggestions and comments regarding program effectiveness from the subjects. The research also hoped to ascertain whether schools are effective in what they do address.

Evaluating the state of secondary career guidance services is necessary to ensure that schools can improve their services to meet the needs of their students. Based on the research findings, the researcher hoped to develop recommendations to increase the effectiveness of secondary career guidance programs. This research also hoped to increase overall awareness of the important influence of career guidance to meeting the needs of students. It is hoped that this increased awareness of the need for career guidance will result in improved services for students. More effective career guidance programs would mean increased preparedness and success in transition from high school. Ultimately, developing skills and planning for transition into adulthood can increase the likelihood of success and satisfaction throughout ones career life span.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The transition from youth to adulthood is a critical time in which a myriad of decisions must be made in planning for one's future. The process of making sound career and educational decisions is directly related to future success and fulfillment. The career planning process is important; without structured guidance, the process can be overwhelming or even overlooked. The expectations of the current workplace and abundance of options available for today's high school graduates necessitates preparation and planning. Without guidance and support during this process, individual outcomes can be jeopardized.

Isaacson and Brown (2000, n.p.) reiterated, "There is a need to engage high school students in career decision making so that they can choose their educational and career paths wisely." The Career Development Training Institute (n.d., n.p.) stated, "Leaving high school without the knowledge and skills to attain career goals can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, disappointment and failure".

There is ample evidence suggesting the need for effective career guidance to assist high school students as they transition into further schooling or work. Isaacson and Brown (2000, p.1) cited results from the National Career Development Association Gallup survey indicating that only "one-third of adults

in this country were in their current jobs as a result of conscious planning” Half of those surveyed were unsatisfied with their jobs. Seventy-two percent of participants also responded that they would obtain more (career) information if they were starting over.

The career decisions made by high school graduates have an impact on many areas of their lives. Those that enroll and graduate from college can expect to earn \$450,000 more than high school graduates (Isaacson & Brown, 2000). In addition, 25 percent of students leave school before graduation (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997). The decision to drop out of high school has significant economic repercussions; high school graduates earn over \$7000 per year more than dropouts do. The U.S. Department of Labor SCANS report (DOL, 1991) found the disturbing result that over half of high school graduates lack the knowledge to find and keep a good job.

Career guidance services during high school can greatly help in this planning and transition process and ultimately lead to greater achievement and fulfillment for the individual. Kobylarz (1996) reported concluded that these programs would have several positive outcomes: higher self-esteem, better social adjustment, better decision making, awareness of the changing work world, and appreciation for education.

Two organizations, the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC, 1989) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 1997) have published nationally recognized standards for effective career

guidance programming. The standards act as a guide for the development, implementation, and evaluation of effective career guidance programs. Both sets of standards are organized around competencies or skills that students should obtain from the school career guidance program. These outcomes provide a way to measure the effectiveness of career guidance services.

The evaluation of career guidance programs is an important tool that ensures the effectiveness of programs. When evaluating the outcomes or product of a program, schools can use the findings to make adjustments that increase effectiveness and document their value. Product or outcome evaluation should compare student achievement against standards such as those developed by ASCA and NOICC. The National Center for Research in Vocational Education (Matias, Maddy-Bernstein & Harkin, 1998) reported the use of student feedback to improve the program to better meet student needs as one of the components of “exemplary” school career guidance programs.

This study hopes to examine whether schools are providing services and whether students are acquiring competencies as recommended by the national standards. The research will also solicit suggestions and comments regarding program effectiveness from the subjects. Based on the research findings, the researcher hopes to develop recommendations to increase the effectiveness of secondary career guidance programs. More effective career guidance programs would mean increased preparedness and success in transition from high school.

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of University of Wisconsin Stout undergraduate freshmen and sophomores regarding the content and effectiveness of their high school career development programs and services.

Data was collected through a survey given to students enrolled in General Psychology for the Spring 2002 semester. Data analysis was used only for those identifying themselves as freshman and sophomores.

This study hoped to examine whether schools provided career services and whether students acquired competencies as recommended by national standards. The survey also solicited suggestions and comments regarding program effectiveness from the subjects. Based on the research findings, this study developed recommendations to increase the effectiveness of secondary career guidance programs.

### Research Questions

This research addressed these questions:

1. Are secondary career guidance programs offering services around the national standards?
2. Are students gaining competency in the areas indicated by the national standards?
3. Which services are not being offered by secondary career guidance programs, which are essential to student competency?

4. What suggestions do students have regarding the effectiveness of secondary career guidance programs?
5. Are secondary career guidance programs effective in what they do offer?
6. Are secondary career guidance program services increasing over time?
7. Is student competency, in the areas indicated by the national standards, increasing over time?

### Definition of Terms

The definitions for the following terms will be assumed throughout this document:

Career counseling- A service provided to an individual or group who need assistance with career choices and decision making.

Career guidance-Any strategies or interventions employed to help in the career development of a client group, such as high school students.

Self-awareness-Knowledge of one's skills, abilities, values, interests and preferences.

### Assumptions

There were several assumptions that were central to this research. They were:

1. Data was analyzed for UW-Stout students graduating from high school since 1992, based on the assumption that they were more likely to remember the details of their high school experience.

2. Participant's secondary career guidance program was the main factor influencing the development of competencies.

3. The participants were motivated to answer thoroughly and truthfully.

### Limitations

There were several limitations involved in this research. They were:

1. The participants may not have accurately remembered their high school experience.

2. The participants may have developed competencies from factors other than their secondary career guidance program.

3. The results consider only traditional UW-Stout freshmen and sophomores, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings.

4. The validity and reliability of the survey instrument is not known.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

Career guidance programs in high schools have the opportunity to greatly influence each student's successful transition into the work world or further education. A comprehensive and systematic program is the best way to ensure that students will leave high school with the advantage of knowing who they are, what they want, and how to achieve their goals. Career guidance in our high schools is a vitally important and relevant piece of the entire educational package our youth need to succeed.

This literature review will begin with information on the needs and issues today's youth face. Next, the ability of career guidance programming to address these needs will be discussed. The national standards, on which this study and career guidance programming is based, will be discussed. This review will then move to a discussion of the rationale and process for career guidance program evaluations. To end, there will be a review of previous research, examining the outcomes and effectiveness of career guidance programs.

#### Needs and Issues

There is ample evidence suggesting the need for effective career guidance to prepare high school students as they transition into further schooling or work.

Isaacson and Brown (2000, p. 1) cited results from the National Career

Development Association Gallup survey indicating that only “one-third of adults in this country were in their current jobs as a result of conscious planning.” Half of those surveyed were unsatisfied with their jobs. Seventy-two percent of participants also responded that they would obtain more information if they were starting over. A majority of respondents believe high schools are not doing enough to help in making a successful transition from school to work.

The U.S. Department of Labor SCANS report (DOL, 1991) found the disturbing result that over half of high school graduates lack the knowledge to find and keep a good job. The career decisions made by high school graduates have an impact on many areas of their lives. Those who enroll and graduate from college can expect to earn \$450,000 more over their life span than high school graduates (Isaacson & Brown, 2000).

Twenty-five percent of students leave high school prior to graduation (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997). The decision to drop out of high school has significant economic repercussions; high school graduates earn over \$7000 per year more than dropouts.

Engels and Harris (1999) summarize that in today’s world of shorter job duration, increasing job switching, and the effects of an increasingly, global economy, we must be stewards of our own careers.

The work force is demanding increasingly higher levels of training to meet the growing technological needs of the economy. The Career Development

Training Institute (CDTI) (n.d.) concluded that the trend is towards more educational training for jobs. The competition for jobs is only growing stronger, increasing the necessity of post secondary training and education. What does this mean for high school students? It is very important to develop a well-informed career plan to prepare for the transition from high school.

Sabrowsky (1993) found that 77% of respondents in her study planned to pursue some schooling beyond high school. The need for assistance in deciding what to train for and where to go for that training is crucial to the student's success. The student with a well informed career plan can save money, time, and avoid finding themselves in an unfulfilling career.

#### Career Guidance Programs and Standards

The information provided above illustrates why "There is widespread agreement that the high school years are crucial and that many activities that occur routinely in the high school lend themselves to fostering career planning and development" (Isaacson & Brown, 2000, p. 267).

With the multitude of career choices available for both men and women, there is a need for career guidance in our schools to help students make sense of their options. "Decision making during the high school years can only be as good as the information on which the process is based and the students' ability to interpret and use this information" (Isaacson & Brown, 2000, p. 267). A comprehensive career guidance program is a credible and researched source of information and resources. Sabrowsky (1993) found that the strongest

influencing factor for student career choice was knowledge of interests. This finding also supports the need for thorough and systematic exploration of personal interests and their relation to careers.

Secondary career guidance programs are strategic and comprehensive efforts to help students obtain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to making a successful transition from school to work or further education. The secondary career guidance program includes a wide variety of services including, but not limited to: systematic delivery of career information, activities to enhance self-awareness, classroom, small group, and/or individual career counseling, job placement, etc. The organization and coordination of the school guidance program is generally the responsibility of the school counselor, yet involves the help of other school staff and community members in its implementation (CDTI, n.d.).

The theory behind career guidance is that, with the appropriate guidance and information, people can maximize their career success and satisfaction. “The fundamental goal of the high school career guidance program should be to alert the student to each impending decision sufficiently far enough in advance to permit the student, . . . , to prepare for a wise choice” (Isaacson & Brown, 2000, p. 266).

Many educators believe that career guidance programming is “complementary to the idea that schooling should first and foremost be preparation for life” (Isaacson & Brown, 2000, p. 237). Many also believe that

career guidance programming enhances student achievement by illustrating the relevance of education to work and thus to students' futures (Isaacson & Brown, 2000).

The expected benefits of high school career guidance programs include decreased dropout rates, improved school attendance and academic achievement, and increased motivation to reach personal goals (Kobylarz, 1996). Students develop an understanding of the relationship between education and employment, lending relevancy to coursework.

Several other reputable sources have listed expected benefits or outcomes of career guidance; enhances individual career plans, develops decision-making skills, improved post secondary course choices, assists in acquiring knowledge of self and others, and broadens knowledge of our changing world (Dahir & Campbell, 1997) and (CDTI, n.d.).

Gary Walz (1984) provides a strong rationale for career guidance and planning. "Establishing and working toward important life goals is a powerful motivator for students to undertake difficult learning tasks (p.1). Walz (1984) further explains that a relevant and updated career plan can help students see how any area of learning can contribute to achieving their goals.

The National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) have each established voluntary standards or guidelines for establishing, coordinating, and evaluating effective career guidance programs in our schools. The guidelines

were developed in the hopes of rejuvenating and improving career guidance programming in the schools. "Standards may be viewed as ideals for student achievement, or as clear, tangible goals for all students" (Dahir & Campbell, 1997, p. 3).

A report by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, or SCANS, identified the knowledge and skills that are needed in the workplace. GOALS 2000 provided public and private policies and ideas for change on a more broad scale (Engels & Harris, 1999). Both the NCDG and ASCA standards were developed as a result of and based on the information provided in these reports.

The standards address program content and the knowledge, attitudes, and skill competencies that all students will develop as a result of participating in a school counseling program, of which career guidance is a part (Dahir & Campbell, 1997). The primary goal of national standards is to assure similar opportunities and experiences for all students in all schools

Both sets of standards or guidelines are organized around desired student outcomes or competencies. Competencies are viewed as broad goals, whereas indicators describe specific knowledge, skills, and abilities related to career development" (CDTI, n.d., n.p.) An example of a student competency area would be; to understand the world of work and employment expectations. These general student competencies are then further specified with student indicators. A corresponding example of a student indicator would be; to

demonstrate skills in preparing a resume and completing job applications (NOICC, 1989).

The NOICC developed what are called the National Career Development Guidelines (NCDG) in 1989. The NCDG is only a part of the initiative sponsored by the NOICC. The NOICC provided funding and input to states to support the development of career guidance programs. Currently, over 40 states report using the NCDG as part of their state career development strategy. The NCDG promotes an organized and sequential program of experiences and activities to help students plan and develop their career options (CDTI, n.d.; NOICC, 1989).

The guidelines were developed and published in 1989 in collaboration with the professional career counseling community, local program administrators, counselor educators and state guidance supervisors. The NOICC also coordinated with other similar efforts by professional organizations, career development researchers, and state departments of education. Several advisory and technical assistance teams were formed to ensure the comprehensive and organized nature of the research and development process (Miller, 1992).

The NCDG are based on the idea that children pass through developmental stages as they grow and that specific areas of learning should occur at each level. High school students need to apply what they have learned in previous stages whereas middle school students are experimenting with and building understanding of new ideas and elementary students are becoming aware of new ideas (CDTI, n.d.).

The content areas that the NCDG is organized around are self-knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, and career planning. These content areas are included in each developmental level: elementary, middle, high school and adult. School staff are expected to help students acquire the skills outlined in this document and necessary for them to successfully plan for their future career(s)

The area of self-knowledge includes topics such as self-concept, interpersonal skills, personal interests, and growth and development stages. The area of educational and occupational exploration includes topics such as the relationship between learning and work, career information seeking skills, job seeking, and impact of labor market changes on career. The area of career planning includes topics such as decision-making, diverse life roles, gender issues in career, and applying career planning skills (Miller, 1992).

The ASCA national standards were developed after the NCDG in 1997. ASCA actually used the NCDG as a basis for developing their standards. As a result there are many similarities between the two.

The ASCA standards' credibility is bolstered by the reputation of the association itself, but also the process by which they were developed. These national standards;

reflect the input of more than eleven hundred survey participants, more than one hundred years of school counseling history, hundreds of research studies, state and local district models, and

suggestions from thousands of school counselors nationwide who participated in field reviews and presentations (Dahir & Campbell, 1997, p. 6)

In other words, the conceptual base for these program standards was built on the collection of rational and empirical information about the career development skills and attitudes needed by students to be successful in a career (Isaacson & Brown, 2000).

ASCA sees their standards as “a public statement of what students should know and be able to do as a result of participating in a school counseling program” (Dahir & Campbell, 1997, p. 1). The ASCA standards focus on three main content areas; academic development, career development, and personal/social development.

ASCA states that the purpose of career guidance is to “support and enable the student to develop a positive attitude toward work, and to develop the necessary skills to make the transition from school to the world of work, and from job to job across the life career span” (Dahir & Campbell, 1997, p24).

### Program Evaluation

An added purpose of these standards and guidelines is to aide in program evaluation and accountability. In order to ensure our programs are effective and to improve upon them, we need to be able to evaluate their outcomes. The aforementioned standards provide us with a way to do this.

Evaluation is “the systematic collection of data about what is offered to students in the way of assistance and counseling, and what kinds of outcomes or changes are the result of what has been provided” (Walz, 1984, p. 2). In other words, looking at the extent to which students have obtained competencies set out by national standards.

Many authors and organizations have endorsed the benefits and importance of regular program evaluation of student outcomes (Dahir & Campbell, 1997; Herr, 2001; Lusky & Hayes, 2001; NOICC, 1989; Otto, 2001; Walz & Bleuer, 1997). Some of the reasons mentioned include; program accountability, to prove the efficacy of career guidance program funding, and program improvement.

The emphasis should be on program output (student outcomes/competency), not simply program inputs. This puts the focus on whether the program is effective and ultimately makes a difference for students (Walz, 1997).

There are two main types of program evaluation: process and product evaluations. Process evaluation examines the program’s procedures, structure, and schedule. Product evaluation examines the extent to which the program was effective in helping students gain competencies as specified by the standards (CDTI, n.d.).

There are many theories about what an effective career development program should consist of, however only a handful of researchers have actually

evaluated program components based on outcomes. These outcomes are based on specific competencies or goals for learning, that the program hopes to instill in students. The National Center for Research in Vocational Education (Matias, Bernstein, & Harkin, 1998) has conducted nationwide evaluations of career development programs and reports that, out of all the factors they consider, “The students’ responses reveal the most about the effectiveness of a program” (p. 10). The NCRVE report (1998) stated that exemplary career guidance programs consider program evaluation, including student outcomes, as an essential part in improving services for students. These exemplary programs also address the main competency areas as outlined by the national standards. More importantly, the NCRVE research shows that secondary career programs can be effective in meeting the career development needs of students.

Another smaller study also reviewed one schools’ program based on recommended, program, process elements established by the NCRVE report, such as outreach,, evaluation, instruction, and counseling (Werbowsky, 1997).

According to a meta-analysis of eighteen career development programs, by Baker and Popowicz (cited in Isaacson & Brown, 2000), career development programs can be effective as evidenced by positive outcomes for students.

Evaluation of the career development program in a Midwestern, urban school found that the majority of student participants met the competencies targeted by the program. Success was attributed to components of the program including: age appropriate career development activities, mentoring, direct

service (counseling), and positive employment opportunities (Schleppegrell, 1998).

In 1991, Semingson examined the perceptions of Regis High School students on the schools' career counseling program. The result suggested that the program could be beneficial to students.

A study by Drier and Bebris (1989) reported total student outcomes in specific competency areas. Knowledge of career and educational opportunities, the work world, and the process of career planning accounted for eighty-one percent of reported outcomes, leaving some competency areas lacking. Life roles competencies were not reported by any participants.

Other studies (Hoyt & Lester, 1995; Stanton, 1990) found a clear need for increased and improved career counseling services. The results of the various studies discussed here show divergent outcomes of career guidance programs. Following national guidelines for career guidance programs is important to ensuring the most comprehensive and consistent services for all students.

Some studies have solicited suggestions about what works and what needs to improve within career guidance programs. In a study by Nevo (1990), students reported that the most effective or valuable career service was individual discussion with a counselor. Interest inventories, objective tests, and vocational information followed in importance.

Newton (1994) examined the perceptions of D.C. Everest High School graduates on the school's career guidance program. Newton found three most

common suggestions from the students; market the existing program more, require or mandate bi-yearly or yearly appointments with the counselor, and provide more in depth information, starting as early as middle school, on colleges and the challenges of college.

A considerable amount of research has focused on evaluating the influence of different factors on career decision making. Several studies have found that counselors and school activities were ranked lower than other factors (family, friends, job experiences) in providing assistance with career decisions (Brown & Isaacson, 2000; Sabrowsky, 1993; Newcomb, 1992; and Bergquist, 1990). The influence of these other factors could explain inconsistent student outcomes in relation to career guidance services.

The findings of a national survey of guidance program directors (Moles, 1991, as cited in Brown & Isaacson, 2000) indicate that only 9-13 percent of counselor's' time is spent on career activities. More emphasis is put on academic achievement, post-secondary schooling plans, and personal growth.

### Conclusion

Many studies have been done which focus on the evaluation of specific school programs using varying standards. This literature review did not find research looking at the application of the national standards and resulting student competencies in general. The results of such research could help to increase the use of national standards for career guidance and also encourage career program improvement in general.

There is no doubt that career guidance is a necessary part of secondary education today. GOALS 2000 established the vision of preparing our students for the workplace and the SCANS Report established general goals for skills and knowledge needed in tomorrow's workplace. The NCDG and ASCA guidelines provide each school with a blueprint for providing education in these essential career skills. Resources and opportunities abound, but have educators taken the next step as visionaries and begun to implement comprehensive and effective career guidance programs? This research examined these questions and developed recommendations for the improvement of career guidance programming.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

#### Introduction

This section will describe the participants and the process for selecting them for involvement in the research. The development of the instrument used to collect data will be explained. Next, data collection and analysis procedures will be covered. In addition, limitations of the research methods will be discussed.

#### Description of Subjects

The subjects in this study were comprised solely of students enrolled in the General Psychology course at the University of Wisconsin-Stout during the spring semester of 2002. Each participant was an undergraduate student between the ages of 18 and 26. Both male and female students were asked to participate.

#### Sample Selection

In order to obtain the most representative sample of undergraduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, all sections of General Psychology, a required course, were targeted for sample selection. Also, students tend to take this course within their first two years at the school, thus putting them closer to their high school experience and increasing the accuracy of their recollections about their high school experiences.

Permission to conduct the study was solicited from the professors of each General Psychology course offered on campus. Ten sections of General Psychology were sampled. The total number of participants completing the survey was 272.

Each student attending class on the day of data collection was asked for their voluntary participation in the study. Each participant was exposed to the same survey and consent form. They were given an overview of their participation in the study and the instrument.

### Instrumentation

The instrument used was a survey developed specifically for this study. There was no suitable instrument available for measuring the variables of this study. An instrument was needed to examine a universal set of career guidance content areas and student outcomes or competencies.

The National Career Development Guidelines (NOICC, 1989) and the American School Counselor Associations' (ASCA, 1997) National Standards for School Counseling Programs are well respected and widely used models for career guidance program content and outcomes. Almost every state uses one or both of these models for program development and evaluation.

The ASCA standards were developed from the earlier NCDG guidelines, and as such, are complimentary to each other. Those main items that are present in both models were identified and reworded for greater clarity and understandability. The end result was nine content areas to be used as the

content of Part II and III of the survey. These nine content areas serve as a benchmark for effective, career guidance programs and thus can be used to evaluate current high school career guidance content delivery and outcomes.

Part I of the survey asked about participant gender, age, class rank, year of high school graduation, and state or country of high school. Information on age, class rank, and year of high school graduation were collected to minimize memory distortion due to time elapsed and to track any differences in response over time.

Part IV of the survey was comprised of two open-ended questions. The purpose of these questions was to obtain the participants' subjective thoughts on how effective their high school career guidance was and their suggestions for improvement.

#### Data Collection

Each section or classroom was given a brief overview of their participation. The participants were told to carefully read the consent form and detach it for future reference. A brief description of the study purpose and information on survey completion was also delivered verbally. Surveys were passed around the class. There was no time limit on survey completion, but most participants finished within 10 minutes. When participants were done, they handed in their survey. Once the survey completion was over, the participants were debriefed and given the opportunity to ask questions.

The data collection took place at the start of each class period and lasted between 15 and 20 minutes total. All data was collected within three days.

### Data Analysis

Part I of the survey used multiple choice or fill in the blank measurements. For those items with non-numerical responses, a numerical code was assigned for each different response. Those items with numerical responses were entered as is. Part II and III used multiple choice Likert scales of measurement. The response sets for both sections were assigned numerical codes. Part IV was analyzed by looking for themes and summarizing responses.

Percentages were used to analyze within each item's response set. This illustrated what areas of content (Part II) or competency (Part III) were being fulfilled and to what extent.

Percentages for responses across all items in a section were looked at for overall program effectiveness. Whole section response percentages were compared across years to see if there is a trend towards more effectiveness and services over time.

Cross-tabulations between Part II and III corresponding item responses were used to determine whether guidance services offered were effective. Also whether those who said yes to content services on average had higher competency ratings than those who said no or not sure was analyzed.

## Limitations

The aim was to get a representative sample of UW-Stout undergraduate students to participate, however, going into multiple sections of a required course may not yield this. Therefore, caution should be used in the generalizability of the results.

The fact that only college students at UW-Stout were studied, not high school graduates that went on to 2 year programs, military, or workplace, is a limitation to the generalizability of the results.

Another limitation to the methodology was that the survey was designed specifically for this study, therefore, there was no measure of survey validity or reliability.

Other influences on participants' competency ratings were not considered in this study. Experiences outside of school such as interactions with parents and other adults may have had an influence on their competency rating.

The honesty and insight of the participants' responses may be variable as there was no incentive or motivation to do so. Also, collecting the completed surveys directly from the participants may have influenced the participants' perception of confidentiality and thus their responses.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

This chapter will present the results of the data analysis performed. Demographic information and descriptive statistics will be presented first. Results of the data analysis for each of the research questions will then be given.

#### Demographic Information

The sample consisted of 54.3% (n=140) males and 45.7% (n=118) females. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 26, with age 19 as the most frequent age reported, at 49% (n=127). Freshmen made up 68.7% (n=178) of the sample, with 61% (n=153) graduating from high school in 2001. Wisconsin high school graduates made up 72.9% (n=188) of the sample and Minnesota graduates had the next greatest frequency at 24.8% (n=64).

A total of 272 surveys were completed. Due to incomplete surveys and participants not meeting the population criteria, 13 were not useable. A total of 259 surveys were used for the data analysis.

#### Research Question 1

Research Question 1: Are secondary career guidance programs offering services around the national standards? In Part II of the survey, participant's chose between yes, no and not sure regarding services provided by their high school. The frequency and percentage for responses to each item in Part II were calculated (see Table 1). Overall, 136 out of 259 (52.5%) participants reported receiving services and 87 out of 259 (33.6%) reported not receiving services.

On items 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8, between 57.9 and 71.8 percent of participants responded “yes” to having received these services. On Item 3, 42.6% said “no” and 24% said “not sure” and on item 9, 49.8% said “no” and 18.9% said “not sure” to having received these services. Items 4 and 5 were nearly equally divided in their responses.

### Research Question 2

Research Question 2: Are students gaining competency in the areas indicated by the national standards? Part III of the survey asked participants to evaluate their level of competency in nine areas. Participants responded to statements of competency (i.e.; I apply decision-making skills to career planning and course selection.) by indicating either Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), or Strongly Agree (SA). The frequency and percentage for responses to each item in Part III were calculated. Response percentages for Agree and Strongly Agree are combined and reported as “agreed.” Response percentages for Disagree and Strongly Disagree are combined and reported as “disagreed.”

On item 1, 97.7% of the participants agreed that they applied decision-making skills to career planning and course selection. Item 9 indicated that 93% of them agreed that they could seek, obtain, maintain, and change jobs. The results on item 4 indicated that 92.7% agreed that they understood interpersonal skills needed to meet workplace expectations. Item 6 results found that 92.3% agreed that they understood their interests, skills, and lifestyle preferences and how to relate these to career choices. Items 1, 4, 6, and 9 had the highest

percentages of agree responses, and thus the overall degree of competency in these areas was greatest.

Item 3 found that 68% of the participants agreed that they understood traditional and non-traditional occupations for males/females and how these impact career choice. Item 2 results indicated that 74.1% agreed that they were informed about educational/work options available during and after college. The results for item 8 found that 76.4% agreed that they had gained experience in areas of occupation/education interest through course selection and/or work-based learning options. Items 2, 3, and 8 had the lowest percentages of agree responses and thus the degree of competency in these areas was lower. It was also interesting to note that for items 2, 3, and 8 more participants disagreed than strongly agreed.

Overall, 146.78 out of 259 (57%) participants agreed with the competency statements, 69 out of 259 participants (27%) strongly agreed, 40.2 out of 259 (16%) disagreed, and 2.5 out of 259 (1%) strongly disagreed.

### Research Question 3

Research Question 3: Which services are not being offered by secondary career guidance programs, which are essential to student competency? Cross-tabulations and Pearson Chi-Square tests were run to examine how those services reportedly provided related to reported competency levels attained.

Items 3, 4, 5, and 9 from Part II will be examined, as they were services reported as “not provided” or “not sure” by a majority of the participants.

In the cross-tabulation between Question 3 of Part II (services) and the corresponding Item 3 from Part III (competency), a significant positive correlation ( $\chi^2=19.836$ ,  $p=.003$ ) was found. This means that the lack of service reported in this area (gender differences in occupations and impact on career choices) corresponded with lower levels of competency.

In the cross-tabulation between Items 4 from Parts II and III, a significant positive correlation ( $\chi^2=37.031$ ,  $p=.00$ ) was found. The lack of service reported in this area (interpersonal skills for the workplace) were related to decreased levels of reported competency.

In the cross-tabulation between Items 5 (forming tentative career goals and strategies to reach them) from Parts II and III, no significant correlation ( $\chi^2=10.459$ ,  $p=.107$ ) was found. The cross-tabulation percentages show inconsistent relationships between reported services and competency level (67.6% reported no services and agreed/felt competent). Twenty-nine percent of those who disagreed (felt incompetent) reported receiving services. One explanation for this result could be ineffectiveness of provided services.

In the cross-tabulation between Items 9 (how to seek, obtain, maintain, and change jobs) from Parts II and III, a significant positive correlation ( $\chi^2=14.124$ ,  $p=.007$ ) was found. The reported lack of service in this area was related to decreased levels of reported competency.

#### Research Question 4

Research Question 4: What suggestions do students have regarding the effectiveness of secondary career guidance programs? Part IV of the survey consisted of open-ended question and response (See Appendix B). Responses were analyzed by looking for themes (ideas mentioned frequently) and summarizing responses.

In response to the question, "What did you feel your high school could have done differently to better prepare you for career decision making and transition into college/career?" there were nine strong response themes. 1) Participants reported needing more help making the connections between personal interests, possible careers, and where/how to get training. 2) They also reported wanting more hands-on, real-world experiences to further explore their interests. Suggested experiences included more hands-on learning in classroom, co-ops, youth options, and job shadowing opportunities. 3) Participants indicated that career services need to be advertised more and made available to everyone. 4) An overwhelming number of participants indicated required or mandatory individual sessions with the school counselor anywhere from once a year to monthly as necessary. 5) Connected with the former statement were many responses indicating the need for more counselors due to frustrations with availability and quality of services. 6) Also frequently reported was the need for more in depth career information. Participants reported that one crash course was not enough and that career education starting in middle school and

continuing through high school was necessary for planning ahead and using high school time wisely. 7) Many responded that they wanted college prep/life skills courses covering topics such as finances, study skills, lifestyle choices, what to expect in college, and workplace expectations. 8) Also frequently indicated was the need to connect learning with real world relevancy. 9) Another reported theme was the desire for a wider variety of courses to explore interests and abilities.

The second question, "What do you feel your high school provided that was helpful in your career planning?" included eight main themes. Participants reported that the career information centers and/or resources were very important. Many also indicated that interest inventories were helpful. College fairs, school representative visits, and college information were reported as useful. The remaining five themes overlap with those from the first question. Participants found co-ops, youth options programs, and job shadowing very helpful along with career and job fairs. They reported course variety as helpful in exploring interests and focusing on a career. Counselor availability and individual time spent with students and parents was strongly indicated. Many appreciated mandatory appointments with their counselor and the advertisement of services and opportunities.

#### Research Question 5

Research Question 5: Are secondary career guidance programs effective in what they do offer? To address this question, data results from the item analysis

and cross-tabulations were reviewed. Cross-tabulation results were reviewed for those Part II Questions where the item analysis showed a majority having received the service.

For Question 1, over 98% reported having competency (agreed or strongly agreed). On Question 2, 82.4% reported having competency. Question 4 indicated that 97.7% gained competency. The results for Question 5 indicate that 84.8% reported feeling competent. Question 6 results found that 91.5% responded as feeling competent. For Question 7, 83.3% reported having competency. Question 8 indicated that 84.6% reported feeling competent.

#### Research Question 6

Research Question 6: Are secondary career guidance program services increasing over time? To address this question, data results from cross-tabulations (year of high school graduation and service responses from Part II) were reviewed.

Results indicated that the more recently a participant graduated from high school, the more services were reportedly provided to them. There was a significant positive relationship ( $\chi^2=331.414$ ,  $p=.000$ ) found.

#### Research Question 7

Research Question 7: Is student competency, in the areas indicated by national standards, increasing over time? To address this question, data results from cross-tabulations (year of high school graduation and overall competency responses) were reviewed.

There was no significant relationship found ( $\chi^2=251.435$ ,  $p=.972$ ). In other words, there was very little expected increase in overall competency based on more recent high school graduation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Introduction

This chapter will start by discussing the findings of this study in comparison to previous research findings. A summary of the findings will then be given. The final section will outline recommendations for the improvement of secondary career guidance programs, counselor education programs, and future research.

#### Discussion

Research on the influence of different factors on career decision making has found that services provided by the schools have less influence than many other factors such as, parents, friends, and work experiences. The findings of this study showed that, in some areas, participants reported competency in spite of a lack of school provided services. This finding supports the notion that other factors influenced the development of participant competency in these areas.

The research done by the NCRVE (1998) reported that those programs that implemented the recommendations of the national standards (along with other program components) were the most effective as evidenced by positive student outcomes. The results for this study also supported the use of the national standard recommendations to ensure the best student outcomes.

Many smaller, school-specific studies found that their secondary career guidance programs were effective (Schleppegrell, 1998; Semingson, 1991). This

study's findings also showed that career guidance programs can be effective in what they offer. On the other hand, several studies also found that there was a need for improved career guidance services in some areas (Drier, 1989; Hoyt, 1995; Stanton, 1990).

Nevo (1990) reported that individual career counseling, inventories, and career information were very valuable and effective. Participants in this study also reported these services as being valuable. Newton (1994) also found stunningly similar suggestions from students to the ones found in this study.

### Conclusions

The results showed that only a slight majority (52.5%) of participants reported having received services around the national standards. Considering national standards have been around for over a decade, the implementation rate seems rather low.

Those services that were reported as being provided most frequently included decision-making skills, educational/work options, relating knowledge of self to career choices, career options research processes, and career exploration through coursework and or work-based learning. Those services that were reported as being provided least frequently were; occupational gender role differences, seeking and maintaining jobs, interpersonal skills needed in the workplace, and forming a career action plan.

Overall, the highest number of participants responded being competent in the following areas; decision-making skills, interpersonal skills for the

workplace, relating knowledge of self to career choices, and seeking and maintaining jobs. The high level of competency reported in the areas of interpersonal skills for the workplace and seeking and maintaining jobs, in spite of the low level of reported services in these areas, suggests that factors other than school services influenced their development.

The lowest number of participants reported being competent in the following areas; occupational gender role differences, career exploration through coursework and or work-based learning, and forming a career action plan. These findings indicate that students need hands on experiences to explore their interests and abilities and turning their goals into a reality by forming a plan. Students also need to realize the influence that gender role expectations have on their career interests and decisions.

The overall finding that a majority of participants (84%) reported being competent in the areas outlined by the national standards is encouraging. However, this also means that factors other than services provided by the high school career guidance program are contributing to their competency, as only 57% reported receiving services.

The cross-tabulations revealed that, in general, those participants that reportedly did not receive services in an area, also did not feel competent in that area. There were a few exceptions where there were inconsistent relationships between services provided and competency ratings. These findings could be contributed to the influence of other factors (leading to competency despite lack

of services) or ineffectiveness of provided services (leading to reported lack of competency despite receiving services).

Cross-tabulations also revealed that, in general, participants who reportedly received services in an area also reported being competent in those areas. These findings tell us that career guidance activities can be effective in the areas they cover.

Student responses to the requests for suggestions in Part IV of the survey show many strong themes that support the statistical findings. An overwhelming number of participants indicated that they would have liked more hands on learning experiences to explore their career interests (work, job shadowing, course variety). Many also reported needing more help coming up with a career plan.

A very interesting and important suggestion that was frequently mentioned was the need to market career guidance services and ensure utilization of services by requiring career courses and having mandatory meetings for individual career counseling on a regular basis. Participants also noticed a need for more counselors to increase availability and quality of services.

There was one main area of improvement suggested that is not covered by national standards for secondary career guidance programs. Participants reported needing college/life skills preparation in areas such as study skills and college lifestyle.

Many of the areas of need mentioned overlapped with those areas reported as helpful. This finding adds weight to the need for continued support and improvement of secondary career guidance programs in these areas.

Interestingly, data analysis showed an increase in career guidance service over time, but no significant increase in overall competency. One possible explanation for this may be related to the participants' suggestion that services need to be more visible, consistent, and required.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that secondary career guidance services are necessary for students to gain competencies in the areas outlined by the national standards. It can also be concluded that those school programs that provide services around the national standards will be more likely to meet the school- to- career transitional needs of their student's.

### Recommendations

Based on the finding that only a small majority of participants reported having received services, more school counselors need to implement comprehensive career guidance programming based on the national standards. Schools counselors should pay special attention to those areas of service that were reportedly received least and those that have low levels of reported competency. Based on the findings, secondary career guidance programs need to:

- Implement a program based on the national standards.

- Help students find work-based learning opportunities and make concrete career attainment plans.
- Market their services and increase utilization through mandatory courses and individual meetings.
- Help students realize the influence that gender role expectations have on their career interests and decisions.
- Realize the importance of evaluating student outcomes for continuous program improvement.
- Consider providing college/life skills preparation in areas such as study skills and college lifestyle.

Counselor educators may want to further emphasize the importance of utilizing the national standards and corresponding curriculum with their students. Also, increased emphasis on program evaluation skills would be beneficial to counselors in training.

Future research should be done with a broader sample to get a more generalizable evaluation of the state of secondary career guidance programming. Future research may also want to sample high school seniors near graduation to reduce the possible influence of other variables that can have an influence after graduation. More research into the reliability and validity of the Career Guidance Survey also needs to be conducted.

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## APPENDIX A

Please read the following carefully before proceeding.

I understand that by completing and returning this survey, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

Note: Questions or comments about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to Lia Reich (715-381-3561) or Dr. Amy Gillett (715-232-2680) and second to Dr. Janice Coker, Chair, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715) 232-2239.

APPENDIX B

## Career Guidance Survey

**Part I: Please circle or fill in the blanks as they pertain to you.**

Gender: Male Female

Age: \_\_\_\_

Class rank: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Other

Year of high school graduation: \_\_\_\_\_

State or country of high school: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II: Please circle your response to the following questions.**

**Did your high school offer services to help you:**

- Yes No Not sure 1) develop and apply decision-making skills to career planning and course selection?
- Yes No Not sure 2) become informed about educational/work options during and after school?
- Yes No Not sure 3) understand traditional and non-traditional occupations for males/females and how these impact career choice?
- Yes No Not sure 4) understand interpersonal skills needed to meet workplace expectations?
- Yes No Not sure 5) form tentative career goals and strategies (training, experience) to reach them?
- Yes No Not sure 6) understand your interests, skills, and lifestyle preferences and how to relate these to career choices?
- Yes No Not sure 7) how to locate, evaluate, and interpret information about career options?
- Yes No Not sure 8) gain experience in areas of occupation/education interest through course selection and or work-based learning options?
- Yes No Not sure 9) provide information on how to seek, obtain, maintain, and change jobs?

**OVER>**

**Part III: Please circle your response to each of the statements using the following legend:**

**SD=Strongly Disagree D=Disagree A=Agree SA=Strongly Agree**

- SD D A SA      1) I apply decision-making skills to career planning and course selection.
- SD D A SA      2) I am informed about educational/work options available during and after college.
- SD D A SA      3) I understand traditional and non-traditional occupations for males/females and how these impact career choice.
- SD D A SA      4) I understand interpersonal skills needed to meet workplace expectations.
- SD D A SA      5) I have formed tentative career goals and strategies (training, experience) to reach them.
- SD D A SA      6) I understand my interests, skills, and lifestyle preferences and how to relate these to career choices.
- SD D A SA      7) I can locate, evaluate, and interpret information about career options.
- SD D A SA      8) I have gained experience in areas of occupation/education interest through course selection and or work-based learning options.
- SD D A SA      9) I can seek, obtain, maintain, and change jobs.

**Part IV: Please write your response below.**

What do you feel your high school could have done differently to better prepare you for career decision making and transition into college/career?

What do you feel your high school provided that was helpful in your career planning?