

Relating College to Careers: A Group for First-and Second-Year Students

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Many students are uninformed about the relationship between their education and career preparation. Most still attend colleges and universities with the primary objective of "obtaining a better job" and assume that completion of their degree requirements provides them with specific career training. Van Wey (1977) observed that most students consequently associate career planning with degree requirements rather than with gaining the skills necessary to enter a particular career field. As a result, students nearing graduation attempt to identify the careers for which their degrees will qualify them without prior thought to career direction.

Many of the students who seek career planning assistance at the UCLA Placement and Career Planning

Center can be characterized by Van Wey's observations. A recent informal study of the clientele who use counseling services in the center revealed that an overwhelming majority were graduating students and alumni, many of whom were seeking advice about what careers they could enter with their majors. Less than five percent were first or second year students.

Career Discussion Group

Students should be made aware, early in their academic experience, of the ways in which college does and does not provide career preparation if they are to effectively use the resources available to them. They should be encouraged to take responsibility for career planning and goal setting so skills necessary to enter a desired career area can be learned. To meet

this objective, the center developed a group career counseling program for first- and second-year students titled "Career Discussion Group." The group has four primary purposes: to help students better understand the relationship of college and careers, to introduce basic concepts in the career planning process, to increase awareness of the campus resources that may afford specific skill development, and to introduce the career planning services and resources of the center. The group meets two hours each week for two weeks and has a free discussion format with a minimum of structured exercises.

Session One

During the first session, students are provided with a copy of Van Wey's article and a list of potential discussion topics including "Does College Prepare You For a Career?", "What Skills Will College Provide?", "Selecting Majors and Courses," "Is Graduate School Necessary?," and "Improving Your Chances for a Job Upon Graduation." The students are asked to indicate the topics that are most relevant to them. Group discussion then enters around the relationship of college majors and career requirements and around those topics most commonly identified by the participants. Emphasis is placed on the student's individual responsibility for career planning with focus on skills and requirements rather than specific majors. At the end of the first session, the students are assigned to identify five courses at UCLA and five extracurricular experiences that could enhance their ability to explore careers or to develop relevant skills.

Session Two

The second session begins with a discussion of the homework assignments. Some students find that the task was difficult because their career goals have not

yet been established. The group leader uses this discussion to emphasize the importance of establishing goals and relating selected courses and activities to the achievement of those goals. The group leader then describes the services offered by the center to assist students with career planning and goal setting. Finally, the students are paired and each is given a checklist of career planning activities and is asked to check those activities in which assistance may be needed. The group then brainstorms and discusses ways to obtain help with each activity.

Discussion

The career discussion group is unique in that its central focus is on the relationship of education and careers. It attempts to clarify what Solomon (1977) suggested are the complementary processes of academic training and career preparation and it emphasizes the individual's responsibility for career planning. Finally, the program serves to inform students of the career planning resources available to them in their collegiate experience.

To date, five groups have been conducted with an average of eight students per group. Formal evaluations have yet to be completed, however, initial feedback has been positive. Participants have increased understanding of the career planning process as it relates to their college education.

Questions about the group or requests for materials should be directed to the author.

References

- Solomon, L. C. Rethinking the relationship between education and work. *UCLA Educator*, 1977, 19, 18-31.
- Van Wey, R. L. Students' lack of career direction: A problem. *Journal of College Placement*, 1977, 38, 31-32.