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ABSTRACT

College students are continuously engaged in attempting to successfully pass courses, fulfill degree requirements, and plan for their future careers. Career counselors who work in a collegiate setting, are often faced with situations where students are unable to pass their courses; are undecided about which major to pursue; or are uncertain about how to formulate long term career goals. Based on Adler's theory that high levels of social interest will translate to success in achieving career satisfaction; a sample of 85 college students was studied. Forty-three students voluntarily sought career counseling assistance and 42 were facing academic probation and were mandated to receive career assistance. All students were administered Crandall's Social Interest Scale. Results yielded significantly low levels of social interest for students who were facing academic probation ($p=.040$; $p<.05$); who had an undecided major ($p=.006$; $p<.05$); and for those who had not formulated long term career goals ($p=.009$; $p<.05$). Significant findings were also revealed for ethnic minority, female, and non-traditional aged students. Implications of these findings as well as ideas pertaining to how college-based career counselors can help their students develop higher levels of social interest are discussed. (Author/BJJ)

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Facilitating the Development of Social Interest
As An Intervention With At-Risk Career Counseling Clients

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Abstract

College students are continuously engaged in attempting to successfully pass courses, fulfill degree requirements, and plan for their future careers. Career counselors who work in a collegiate setting, are often faced with situations where students are unable to pass their courses; are undecided about which major to pursue; or are uncertain about how to formulate long term career goals. Adler (1939) theorized that individuals who have high levels of social interest are the most successful in achieving satisfaction in their career "life task" because their innate potentiality for "socially useful goal striving" has been realized (p.28). A sample of eighty-five college students was studied. Forty-three students voluntarily sought career counseling assistance and forty-two were facing academic probation and were mandated to receive career assistance. All students were administered Crandall's (1975) Social Interest Scale. Results yielded significantly low levels of social interest for students who were facing academic probation ($p=.040$; $p<.05$); who had an undecided major ($p=.006$; $p<.05$); and for those who had not formulated long term career goals ($p=.009$; $p<.05$). Significant findings were also revealed for ethnic minority, female, and non-traditional aged students. Implications of these findings as well as ideas pertaining to how college-based career counselors can help their students develop higher levels of social interest are discussed.

Work is one of the most fundamental of life tasks. Dreikurs (1953) believed the inability to successfully accomplish this task was a symptom of maladjustment. Work not only means being a salaried employee, it also includes childbearing, homemaking, volunteer services, educational endeavors, and other activities meaningful to oneself and to others (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991). Lewis (1991) asserted all three life tasks must be approached from a social interest perspective in order to be accomplished successfully.

Procedures

The present study was designed to test the relationship between a student's level of social interest and his/her ability to formulate definite educational and vocational goals. Undergraduate and graduate students were tested on social interest and were asked to rate their vocational and educational plans on a likert-type scale. Additional questions (age, ethnicity, gender, major, and reason for seeking career counseling) were asked to provide background information.

Subjects

Subjects for this study consisted of eighty-five undergraduate and graduate students who attended a major Southwestern university. Forty-three participants sought individual career counseling sessions at the university's career development center. Forty-two participants were

mandatorily enrolled in an academic survival workshop in an attempt to avoid academic probation. Of the eighty-five subjects, fifty-five were female and thirty were male. The students were primarily undergraduates (n=77). All eighty-five participants were needing to resolve an educational and/or vocational concern.

Instrumentation

Crandall (1975) designed the Social Interest Scale (SIS) to assess a person's interest in the welfare of others. The SIS consists of fifteen paired-personality traits and nine "filler" paired traits (Carroll, 1992). Respondents choose which of the two paired traits in an item they prefer as self-descriptive (e.g., considerate vs. wise).

In addition to the SIS, five demographic and two career-related questions were developed relating to the students' gender, ethnicity, age, class standing (e.g., freshman, sophomore, etc.), and major area of study. The student was asked to circle the answer that applied to him/her, except for the "major area of study" question; they were asked to write their major in a space provided.

Data gathering and analysis

This study involved 2 types of university students. The first type consisted of students who voluntarily sought career counseling from a career counselor in the

university's career development center. Each student met with the career counselor individually, and was asked to participate at the end of his/her initial session. The remaining sessions were used for career counseling, there was no further mention of the study.

The students who were facing academic probation and were mandated to attend an "academic survival" workshop were asked to participate in the study at the end of the workshop. The career counselor explained the study and the proper procedure for completing the questionnaire. A large envelope was passed around in order to collect the completed questionnaires systematically and anonymously.

Results

The total number of students participating in this study was 85. Forty-three students participating in the study were voluntarily seeking individual career counseling from the career development center. Their social interest scores ranged from 1 to 15, with a mean score of 8.65. The median social interest score for this group was 9 and the mode was 7 and 9.

Forty-two students were facing academic probation and were mandated by university authorities to enroll in the "academic survival" workshop. Their social interest scores ranged from 0 to 15, with a mean score of 7.0. The median

social interest score for this group was 7 and the mode was 5.

It was hypothesized that the social interest scores of students voluntarily seeking career counseling would be significantly higher than the social interest scores of students mandated to obtain career counseling. A between-group analysis yielded the following results. A t-test was performed to compare the differences of the means. Table 1 shows a significant difference ($t(83)=2.0, p=.040; p < .05$) between the social interest scores of students who sought career counseling (8.65) and students whose attendance was mandated (7.0).

Insert Table 1 about here

Additionally, 54% of the voluntary career counseling students' social interest scores were about average (8.21); compared to 60% of the mandated students who scored below average. These results may indicate that students who have a high sense of social interest have a better understanding of who they are as people and how they can best benefit society.

It was hypothesized that the students participating in career counseling who had chosen a major area of study would

have significantly higher social interest scores than those who had not chosen a major area of study.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 shows a significant difference between the means of the social interest scores of the voluntary career counseling students who had decided on a definite major (9.12) and the mandated students who had decided on a definite major (6.72); ($t(60)=2.87, p=.006; p<.05$). In addition, the voluntary career counseling students who had definite majors had much higher social interest scores than the two groups of students who were undecided about their majors.

These results may indicate that students who have developed a strong sense of social interest have less difficulty in formulating concrete decisions regarding their major area of study. It may also indicate that students who have a strong sense of social interest, choose an appropriate and realistic major, which in turn would lead to a more successful completion of their degree.

It was hypothesized that students participating in career counseling who had definite career plans would have significantly higher social interest scores than those students who did not have definite career plans.

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 3 shows a significant difference in social interest scores between the voluntary and mandated career counseling students who had formulated definite career goals. Students who sought career counseling and had little or no academic difficulties had significantly higher social interest scores ($t(47)=2.71$; $p=.009$; $p<.05$).

Additionally, Table 3 indicates that students who were not experiencing academic difficulties, had definite career goals, had sought assistance and guidance independently, had much higher social interest scores. These findings may indicate students who have developed a high sense of social interest have less difficulty in both formulating definite career goals and ultimately achieving them.

Discussion

The results of this study provide preliminary support for the hypothesis that college students who are experiencing educational and/or vocational difficulties have lower than average social interest scores. While it is not appropriate to suggest a unidirectional, causal relationship between high levels of social interest and educational and/or vocational success, the results do suggest some interesting areas for counselors and researchers to explore.

Career counselors may want to give special consideration to students 1) who have undecided academic and occupational plans, 2) who have academic difficulties (i.e., low grade point averages), 3) who are of the ages between 18-25, and 4) who are ethnic-minority students.

Many students who are on academic probation may be experiencing a sense of discouragement because they wanted to be, for example, a physician and their grades will not allow them to achieve this goal. Helping these students raise their level of social interest may enable them to discover where they can realistically fit and contribute in society. This, would in turn, give them an optimistic outlook on their educational and vocational futures.

Undecided or "terminally lost" students can benefit from developing their social interest. This might result in an increased sense of vocational maturity, which would enable them to make informed and realistic choices about their careers (Krebs, 1986). One of the best ways a student can develop social interest is by becoming actively involved in the social issues of their communities (McClure & Russo, 1986).

Recognizing the importance of providing effective educational and vocational services for freshmen and sophomore college students is important. Considering 71% of the voluntary career counseling students and 73% of the

academic probation group in this study consisted of juniors, seniors, and graduate students, one can only hope they are not receiving career counseling too late.

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TABLE 1. Comparison of the means of Social Interest Scores between Counseling Students and Academic Probation Students.

GROUP	SOCIAL INTEREST SCORES			
	N	M	T	P
COUNSELING	43	8.65	2.00	.040*
PROBATION	42	7.00		

NOTE. *p < .05

TABLE 2. Comparison of the means of Social Interest of Definite Major and Undecided major by Counseling Students and Academic Probation Students.

GROUP	Decision on Major					
	N	$\frac{\text{Definite Major}}{\text{M}} \text{ T}$	P	N	$\frac{\text{Undecided Major}}{\text{M}} \text{ T}$	P
COUNSELING	33	9.12	2.87	10	6.70	.006*
PROBATION	29	6.72		13	7.62	-.51 .612

NOTE. * $p < .05$

TABLE 3. Comparison of Social Interest means of Definite Career and Undecided Career by Counseling Students and Academic Probation Students.

GROUP	Decision on Career					
	Definite Career			Undecided Career		
	N	M	T	N	M	T
COUNSELING	15	10.00	2.71	28	7.79	-.17
PROBATION	34	6.76	.009*	8	8.00	.862

NOTE. * $p < .05$