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AUTHOR Shelton, Beverley; Isberner, Fred
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the College of Applied Science and Arts (ASA) at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) Transfer and New Students Info Web site that responds to the need for high school and community college students, guidance counselors, and parents to explore and plan a program of study that provides the opportunity to enter the workforce while including options to pursue studies for associate and baccalaureate degrees. The Student Support Services program at ASA developed the self-directed Web site to provide Illinois' students with the ability to track their technical high school program of study to an Illinois community college and/or directly to SIUC. The site can help students clarify career options and educational training program options that lead to the career paths they have identified through career self-exploration and assessment activities. (GCP)

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by

Beverley Shelton
Fred Isberner

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Map Your Future Through ASA's New and Transfer Student Web Site

Beverley Shelton

*Visiting Lecturer and Coordinator of ASA Student Support Services
College of Applied Sciences and Arts
Southern Illinois University Carbondale*

Fred Isberner

*Professor and Associate Dean
College of Applied Sciences and Arts
Southern Illinois University Carbondale*

Introduction

Students completing the baccalaureate degree generally have greater career advancement and earnings potential than high school, certificate or associate degree graduates (Amirault, 1994). Today's high school and college students seek web-based information on career paths that lead to rewarding careers with the option to continue toward baccalaureate degree programs either directly or through local community college transfer (Harris-Bowlsbey, 1997). The College of Applied Sciences and Arts (ASA) at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) provides 14 technically orientated baccalaureate programs for high school graduates or college transfer students. Students who may be interested in careers requiring a baccalaureate degree may visit ASA's Transfer and New Students Info website <<http://www.siu.edu/~perkins/asacareer/ASACar.htm>> to access information about career paths available at SIUC that relate to their interest areas.

Our most successful students often come to ASA with a fairly clear picture of where they are going and what they expect to accomplish during their college education. They are ready and willing to work hard to become more than adequately prepared for their chosen career. Their enthusiasm shows through in everything they do while here; and they are nearly always the first ones to receive offers for exciting and rewarding careers. We want all of our students to be that successful. To that end, we have developed our website to be used at multiple levels of career exploration to help potential students find those career fields that will feed their enthusiasm and enable them to find the strength and motivation to overcome obstacles to achieving career success.

Many people, when contemplating career choices, struggle with questions, confusion, and indecision (Cutshall, 2001). "What type of career is appropriate for me?" "How can I adequately prepare for that career?" "Is that career really as wonderful as it sounds?" "What can I do at the middle-school, high school, and community college levels to prepare to excel in a baccalaureate program that enables me to achieve my career goals?" "If I complete a program at university, will it actually prepare me to enter into my chosen field?" "Would it honestly be worth the time and money required to acquire a bachelor's degree, or would I be better off entering the workforce directly from high school or community college?"

All of those questions and more need to be answered on an individual basis. Although resources for researching and refining those answers are available on the Internet, much of the information is fragmented and difficult to locate; and it is often provided at a generic level that students cannot apply to a personal career action plan (Kirk, 2000). The ASA Transfer and New Students Info website seeks to provide students with easy access to information that is helpful in assisting them to make an informed career path choice that may link with one of ASA's technical career majors.

Audience

This paper describes the ASA Transfer and New Students Info website that responds to the need for high school and community college students, guidance counselors and parents to explore and plan a program of study that provides the opportunity to enter the workforce while including options to pursue studies for associate and baccalaureate degrees. The Student Support Services program at ASA developed the self-directed website to provide Illinois students with the ability to track their technical high school program of study to an Illinois community college and/or directly to SIUC. The site can help students clarify career options and educational training program options that lead to the career paths they have identified through career self-exploration and assessment activities.

Middle school students should begin developing a broad-based career interest inventory to help them plan to enroll in appropriate high school courses to match their long-term career needs and interests (Dahir, 2001). They will want to take the "eagle's eye" view of careers in that they are mainly looking at an overview of all possible career areas. General skills required, job titles in each career path, associated rewards and responsibilities, and geographic considerations are some of the puzzle pieces that students at this level will explore. They may find that their idea of a perfect career will change several times during this initial career exploration phase. It is very likely though that they will have begun to understand their individual level of interest in a general career area by the time they are ready to enter high school if they have taken the time to investigate characteristics of that career.

High school students begin narrowing their career choices to fit their personal career needs. Ideally, they have begun to plan for a career centered on their natural abilities and interests (Masikiewicz, 2000). With a variety of information at their fingertips, it is anticipated that they will explore career areas more than casually before arriving at a final selection of two or three career and degree possibilities. Finding a good personal fit will increase the likelihood that they will complete their educational activities in a straightforward and logical path and then move into a satisfying career.

A high school student, while exploring several career possibilities, would certainly be initially interested in knowing the skills, level of education, salary, job demand, and working conditions for each career. When one career track has been selected, he or she should be very concerned that the courses taken in high school are appropriate preparation for the next level of education and training. Finally, he or she should be able to map a strategy to prepare for that career in an efficient and effective manner.

Many high school students start career paths seeking immediate entry into the workforce. Most find rewarding careers, however many others realize that further education

is necessary to achieve their career goal. Unfortunately, when they subsequently choose to continue their education we often find that they have not taken high school courses that lead to an efficient and smooth transfer to a baccalaureate degree. The website allows them to quickly determine what options they have for enrolling at SIUC.

Students frequently enroll in community college programs to minimize educational expenses with the intention of transferring to a university after receiving an associate degree. If they have carefully planned their transition, this strategy works quite well. However, all too often students find that they may have spent precious time and money on courses that will not transfer to the program of choice at the university level. This website helps them find programs at their Illinois community college that also fit well with programs at ASA. Some community colleges have articulated program-to-program agreements with ASA to allow their graduates to enroll in the related program at ASA at a junior level with full credit for their Associate Degree coursework.

Community college students who may have originally planned only to complete an associate degree may very well have a completely different set of concerns. That student may be employed and subsequently realize that further education was necessary to allow him or her to advance beyond the level of employment afforded through the associate degree. He or she will want to find a baccalaureate program that allows for a seamless transition into the next phase of career training. Even though the career path has already been established, the student will want to know what program at the university level allows for that transition.

Guidance counselors need access to information to counsel high schools students on associate and baccalaureate degree transfer opportunities. In addition to presenting students with clear information about the degree options available to them through ASA, they can use the website's links to assist students in exploring options for any career that appeals to them. We expect that many of the schools will provide links for their students to explore this option independently. Students who prepare for meetings with their guidance counselors through individual research can help streamline the process and improve their career awareness.

Parents frequently request information about career paths that lead to jobs and options for associate and baccalaureate degree transfer (Lozada, 1999). The website can help reinforce parents' career-related discussions with their children and it can help them understand their child's options through our college.

The ASA Transfer and New Students Info Website

The ASA Transfer and New Students Info website was developed to help students identify career paths that will work best with their skills and career interests and also lead to baccalaureate degrees at SIUC. Knowing that our students enter from a variety of backgrounds, the site briefly and succinctly answers questions that are typically asked by prospective students and then provides appropriate links to resources for obtaining more in-depth information. What information do students need to explore career paths and take steps to choose a future that leads to jobs and options for pursuit of higher education? The website addresses several essential topics for today's high school and college transfer student.

The topics presented below are intentionally focused with information that is quick and easy to access.

Why would I want a bachelor's degree?

Certainly not all students' career aspirations require a baccalaureate degree. Our intention was to provide them with tools to make sound career decisions regardless of the educational requirements involved in their ideal career selection. Several arguments for a B.S. degree are included in this section of the site. These arguments can be used to support parents' or counselors' contention that a B.S. degree is important to succeed in many careers. Where the motivator for not entering college is fear, we attempt to allay fears by showing students that their success is supported through the many resources provided by the college, the university, and the community and through links to other sites of value to them.

Many of today's students are interested in exploring careers, and salary is certainly an important consideration. This section depicts the earnings differential for high school, associate and baccalaureate degree graduates. It is intended to motivate students to choose rewarding careers that also offer options to continue their education and complete associate and baccalaureate degrees leading to higher earnings potential. Students have the option to continue their education now or re-enter at a later time to complete a baccalaureate degree and they are enabled to make that decision from an informed position.

What degree transfer options does ASA offer from my community College?

Every community college in Illinois is listed, which in turn represents every high school district in the state. When students click on their college, every general program area offered through that college is listed with information about its corresponding baccalaureate transfer options at SIUC. Where there is a logical transfer option to a program offered through the College of Applied Sciences and Arts, that program title links to the corresponding program at ASA. If there is no obvious transfer option to ASA, the link takes you to a course-by-course articulation agreement between SIUC and that college. The student may then explore options in other colleges at SIUC, or they may decide that they still want to transfer to ASA and work out their own transfer agreement with the appropriate Academic Advisor at ASA. It is noted that not all programs that are linked from a college have direct articulation agreements with an ASA program. For an articulated program, the student would enter the program as a junior with the opportunity to complete the baccalaureate degree in two additional years.

What jobs are right for me?

This question is the source of great concern for many prospective students at ASA and often people who have already entered the workforce ask themselves that same question. The ideal career is one that makes you feel alive, productive and engaged. Few people find that ideal career because they do not spend enough time exploring their strengths, their capabilities, or their passions as they relate to career selection. We provide several options for students at all stages of career exploration to examine their possibilities. If, for example, a student has no idea what type of career they might like they can click on the list of general careers and then click on an interesting choice. That choice may take the student to a major

in ASA, or it may take them to a list of all majors at SIUC to expand the search.

Another option would be to click on the list of typical careers for ASA students. That list may spark an interest in a student who would then click on the interesting topic to go to information about the program that prepares them for that career. When they have selected a career that sounds interesting to them, students could learn about typical salaries, working conditions, skills required, and geographic considerations for that career by clicking on the "Career Exploration" button. Many students consider careers based on title, salary or perhaps perceived image or status without learning about some of the day-to-day issues. In this section, general job expectations and working conditions are presented to help students decide if a career path fits their personality and interests. Expectations include, detail, dexterity, writing, team work, individual assignments, problem solving, supervision, outdoor work, hands-on with patients, customer complaints, etc.

What can I do to prepare for entrance into SIUC from my high school?

Many high school and community college students choose courses that fulfill their institution's graduation requirements, but do not transfer to Illinois universities. This important section lists SIUC's entry requirements for high school graduates. Transfer students can identify those courses that will fulfill university requirements should they chose to transfer immediately or at a later date.

Students wishing to enroll in SIUC directly after completing high school can plan to enroll in high school courses that are required for admission into the university. Again, students are directed to career planning sites to help them solidify their career goals early enough to properly prepare for the next step in their education. They are encouraged to explore all programs offered through ASA to find areas of interest to them while also exploring career paths that take them from high school to community college to ASA. In addition, students may take courses that offer dual credit at their local community college that also will transfer to SIUC.

Anticipated Outcomes

Use of this website will help students both prepare for immediate entry into the workforce while also providing for the immediate and/or subsequent seamless transfer to SIUC baccalaureate degree programs. We anticipate that students who utilize the site will have a fairly clear understanding of the program they eventually select and of the career they prepare to enter.

Postsecondary institutions are encouraged to partner with community colleges to develop easily accessible information sources to inform high school and community college transfer students of direct and seamless career paths leading to associate and baccalaureate degree programs. The website described herein can be replicated by universities and community colleges to inform students of entry or transfer options, requirements and procedures.

Summary

We have created a website that follows through on the career development model by allowing students to examine career preparation activities specific to their needs. The intention of the site is to help prospective students, or those involved in career decision-making, choreograph a well-developed plan for seamless transition from secondary education to community college to university, or directly from secondary education to university, and then into a career that is meaningful and fulfilling to them. The site provides details about types of careers ASA students traditionally enter, characteristics of those careers, and suggestions for preparing to enroll efficiently into ASA programs. It includes links to quality career exploration and informational sites developed by well-known organizations such as America's Career InfoNet, Illinois Department of Employment Security, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Further, the site includes links to various types of support available to enable students to successfully enroll and complete career development programs at SIUC.

Conclusion

Students, parents, and guidance counselors need career information provided in a variety of formats. Students need easy access to reliable information to help them make an informed career decision. They should have information available to help them develop realistic career expectations, and they need to be aware of resources available to assist them in successfully preparing for their chosen career. We invite our readers to link to our website, encourage students and others to use it to enhance career exploration activities, and possibly replicate and/or modify portions to fit their needs.

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