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## ABSTRACT

The Career Introduction Model discussed in this chapter is an early intervention strategy intended to support the first-generation freshmen enrolled in the Education Opportunity Program (EOP) at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). The model is an interactive approach to assist students in connecting their academic pathway to their career pathway. As a growing population in higher education, first-generation students represent a unique group with distinct goals, motivations, and constraints. This model is important for the following reasons: to counteract students' limited occupational knowledge; to provide a tangible connection with a long-term resource center; and to help increase students' self-efficacy and sense of inquiry with regard to major selection and career choices. Although the model presented focuses on the first-generation student population, it can easily be modified and implemented to serve other diverse groups. Re-entry students, students with disabilities, veterans, and other groups with unique characteristics also deserve a personal approach and a welcoming hand into the university. (GCP)

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by

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# A Career Introduction Model for First-Generation College Freshmen Students

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## Introduction

The Career Introduction Model (the model) discussed here is an early intervention strategy intended to support the first-generation freshmen enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). The model is an interactive approach to assist students in connecting their academic pathway to their career pathway. First-generation students are the first in their families to attend college and whose parents received a high school education or less. As a growing population in higher education, first-generation students represent a unique group with distinct goals, motivations, and constraints (Hsiao, 1992). For many of these first-generation students, attending college offers both opportunity and great risk. Often, first-generation students are less well prepared academically and psychologically for college thus representing a greater risk for attrition (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Hsiao, 1992; Olenchack & Hebert, 2002).

This career introduction model is important for the following three reasons: to counteract students' limited occupational knowledge; to provide a tangible connection with a long-term resource center; and to help increase students' self-efficacy and sense of inquiry with regard to major selection and career choices. Research has shown that for first-generation students, the motivation to enroll into college is a deliberate attempt to improve their social, economic and occupational standing (London, 1986). The majority of these students come from lower income families and have limited levels of the career awareness and self-understanding needed to make educated career decisions. If a first-generation student claims to know what they want out of college, it is probably a decision based on parent encouragement to seek security, a job that does not require physical labor, and one that permits the student to live at a level in society above that of their parents' (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). The model presented in this paper addresses some of these areas of concern.

Although the model presented focuses on the first-generation student population, it can easily be modified and implemented to serve other diverse groups. Re-entry students, students with disabilities, veterans, and other groups with unique characteristics also deserve a personal approach and a welcoming hand into the university which gives them an opportunity to express their own unique needs in a non-threatening environment. It has too frequently been the practice of institutions of higher learning, out of need for fiscal expediency, to mainstream unique populations of students in an attempt to simultaneously meet the needs of students and the

institution. The model introduced here reasonably and realistically responds to both the institutional need to be fiscally responsible while also creatively addressing the needs of unique student populations without mainstreaming. While the primary benefactors of this intervention model are first and foremost the students, the model also demonstrates the feasibility of collaborative efforts between various student affairs units and academic departments. Central to the success of this model at CSUS, has been the development of a distinct and dynamic partnership between the Career Center and the sixteen sections (400+ students, eight faculty) of EOP Freshman Seminar courses.

### **The Career Introduction Model**

The partnership with the Career Center and eventual formulation of the Career Introduction Model began with an inquiry phone call from a special program counselor to the campus Career Center. The counselor was interested in providing information about the Career Center services to groups of first-generation students. Arrangements were made to take groups of 10-12 students to an information session at the Career Center. After working with the first two groups during the round table style introductory session, it became obvious that the students had difficulty understanding and assimilating the information as presented. Upon review of the process by the Career Center counselor and program counselor, it was decided that an interactive approach should be explored to allow the students to learn about the Career Center services through hands-on activities. The result was the beginning of a developmental process that resulted in the Career Introduction Model.

The model begins with a group of 10-12 students. The group is gathered together in the Career Center workshop room and given a 5-7 minute introduction and explanation of the activities they will be asked to perform. The group is then divided into four sub groups (3-4 students). Effective staff to student ratio and space logistics determines group sizes. The Career Center is also divided into four "stations" with a staff member assigned to each station to guide and instruct students in the use of the resources. Each student is given a worksheet asking the student to fill in information from each station. The four student groups are each assigned to a station with the instruction to rotate clockwise when prompted so that each group can easily access each station within the time allotted. The time allotted at each station is about 10 minutes, requiring about an hour to go through the complete model.

Station #1 requires students to utilize the Career Resource Library to locate an occupational title. Station #2 requires students to use the computerized career guidance software of EUREKA to locate and print out a description of an occupation of their choice. Station #3 requires students to become familiar with the Student Employment area of the Career Center and learn how to use the J.O.B. Board database to view part-time, full-time, internships or volunteer positions. Station #4 requires students to become oriented with the reception desk where they are instructed to ask the receptionist for various pieces of information including how to sign up for a workshop, the Career Center's operational hours, and the Career Center's web site. When every sub group has visited each station, the complete group gathers together again in the workshop room for a debriefing of their experience. This question and answer activity is guided by staff.

## Classroom Instruction Component

The students who participate in the Career Introduction Model through the EOP program are enrolled in a Fall Freshman Seminar course. Career exploration is a mandated part of the general education curriculum pertaining to personal development, and in particular the Ethnic Studies 21, Freshman Seminar courses at CSUS. The purpose of the Career Introduction Model fits appropriately into the course objectives of the Freshman Seminar curriculum, so arrangements were made to incorporate the model into the course with some preliminary classroom instruction. The Freshman Seminar course generally meets twice a week for 3 units of credit. Prior to the Career Center visit, the students go through a series of classroom activities. The general chronology of classroom activities is as follows:

Day 1: Provide introductory lecture, handouts, definition of terms, and concepts related to career and personal development.

Day 2: Review and integrate personal values and goals discussed in previous class discussions and administration of the Self-Directed Search by John L. Holland, Ph.D., Form R.

Day 3: Take first half of the class (12-15 students) to visit the Career Center and issue a writing assignment pertaining to their visit. Alternately conduct major and career choice activities in class with the remaining half of students.

Day 4: Facilitate culminating discussion/activity and administer final exam. Discussion of cultural differences and family influences are part of the activities on Day 2 above. Exploring careers begins with not only learning about oneself, but by learning about ones family history. The students' relationship between learning and the world of work, their definitions of concepts such as higher education, career and success, significantly effect and *belong* in this discussion.

Before attending the Career Center, students are given the Self-Directed Search assessment in class as a catalyst activity to help them understand and connect the relationship between their interests, choice of major, and career options. The Self-Directed Search assessment is used based upon its practical use in the classroom and its direct relationship to the systemization of the CSUS Career Center, which is structured around the Holland personality types and environmental models. After fundamental interpretation of their Holland code results in the classroom, students are able to attend the Career Center with a basis from which to research occupations in the Career Resource Library by Holland's personality types (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional). Students are also able to use EUREKA, the computerized career guidance software, to locate descriptions of occupations related to their Holland code. Staff has found that equipping the students with this important information has increased their confidence in understanding the purpose of using the Career Center as a long-term resource center.

## Outcomes

The goal of the Career Introduction Model is for students to become sufficiently excited about the extensive choices available to them in the career fields of the world, that they would continue their academic endeavors with a renewed and limitless vigor. They would take enough time to investigate and pursue positive personal and academic goals and find fulfillment and joy in the service they provide to humanity. This interactive model is designed to encourage and allow room for the pursuit of idealistic dreams. As Counselors to EOP students, it is our goal to

spark the pursuit of dreams that too often get extinguished by the practical minded or non-supportive families of the first-generation student population (Hsiao, 1992; London, 1989).

In an academic vein, the expected outcomes would include notably increased self-confidence demonstrated by voluntary return visits to the campus Career Center during the first year of college and in subsequent years. In addition, major and career related vocabulary would become part of the students' general academic discourse as evidenced by their use in everyday Freshman Seminar course discussions and on follow-up assignments.

Fall 2002 will be the third semester since the formal inception of the Career Introduction Model at CSUS. Feedback on the model from staff discussions and student reactions thus far has been unanimously encouraging and optimistic for continuation of our efforts. Forms of quantitative measurement such as an EOP Spring student survey and examination of the Career Center registry are being considered to evaluate the effectiveness of the model. Discussions have also taken place regarding the potential for development of follow-up components for sophomores, juniors and graduating seniors.

### **Planning for Implementation**

Planning considerations to implement a Career Introduction Model on any given campus should include but not be limited to the following:

- Determine the need to develop a model.
- Identify student population to be served.
- Identify other units or programs needed to participate in the model in addition to the Career Center.
- Identify lead person to be liaison between participating groups.
- Outline goals and outcomes.
- Determine logistical and staffing needs.
- Identify material needs.
- Develop methods of evaluation.

It is realistic to assume that one would encounter reluctance on the part of busy directors or their staffs when approached to embark upon a new venture such as the model proposed here. Often, our colleagues in the career guidance field are embattled with budget, staffing woes and reports that usurp valuable time. An enterprising planner might allay some of these potential hurdles by first addressing the preceding planning considerations before approaching skeptical parties. In addition, those wishing to explore the viability of a similar model on their campus might consider the following essential questions.

1. Will career counselors be able to conduct more fruitful student appointments if students are more informed about the career exploration process before they seek help from the counselors?
2. Will better informed students and hands-on experience mean that more students will be able to help themselves in the Career Center and thus free-up counselor time?
3. Are there academic departments on campus where building relationship through such a model would be beneficial to both parties?
4. Are there Career Center goals and objectives that could be met by implementing a Career Introduction Model?

#### Career Introduction Model?

5. Would a variation of this model work with community organizations to improve Career Center networking efforts?

A review of an institution's career center goals, organization, philosophy, and mission should reasonably provide responses to these questions.

### Conclusion

Research concludes that causes for leaving college include unclear intentions about higher education, adjustment problems, and feelings of isolation (Olenchack & Hebert, 2002). The Career Introduction Model introduced in this paper serves to counter the potential causes first-generation students may have for leaving college. The model is viable and important. All parties involved get their money's worth. Values, goals, college majors and the multifaceted concept called Career Guidance and Development is too complex to presume that any student, especially a student characterized as first-generation, will by their own initiative find their way into the Career Center at any time during their freshman year.

"Career" is a very broad concept and is given numerous definitions. As society evolves so does the concept and understanding of "career". Apply to this the worldview and understanding of the new immigrant, the bilingual student born and raised in this country, and other many layered factors such as culture, generation, and gender difference and one can get a glimpse of the monumental task that faces the instructor and career counselor. The beauty of this model is that it not only "introduces" freshmen to the Career Center, it "engages" them with the center by providing a hands-on, "first-person" experience making their experience positive and motivating.

The groundwork for a real and lasting relationship between student and Career Center is created. The Career Center receptionist summed it up best when asked for her assessment of the students' experience in the center. "I asked one student if I could help," she said. The student replied, "No, I know how to use everything." For a first semester, first-generation freshman, that measure of self-confidence is remarkable. There is no doubt, "relationship" is everything and the new-found relationship between the CSUS Career Center and the first-generation students from the EOP Freshman Seminar courses seems to hold abundant potential.

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### **Recommended Resources**

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