Identifying and Advising Subtypes of Undecided Students

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MULTIPLE SUBTYPES OF DECIDED/UNDECIDED STUDENTS
SOME ADVISING IMPLICATIONS

VERY DECIDED

Identifying Characteristics:
Confident of their decision
Believe they have personal control over their lives
Feel good about themselves
Consider future career important to them
Implementing their choice and making plans

Information Concerns:
Apparently none; decision was based on solid, timely information about self, majors and occupations; however, if decision was made prematurely, they may not be aware of lack of information.

Advisors may want to review the source and type of information they gathered to confirm its adequacy and timeliness.

Decision Making Concerns:
Advisers might ask students to describe how they arrived at their decision and their perception of the process they used.

Some students may need assistance with implementing their decision as well as setting some long-term goals related to it.

Personal/Social Concerns:
Even some decided students may be feeling some anxiety about their choice and where it may lead them.

Some students may have made a decision against the wishes of significant others and may need to discuss how to deal with it.
TENTATIVELY DECIDED

Identifying Characteristics:
In process of crystallizing a choice
Some doubts about choice
Might be concerned about making the "right" choice.
May be displaying mild to severe anxiety associated with their choice
Usually have an internal locus of control
May need more specific, in-depth information
May have felt pressured to decide initially and now having doubts

Information Concerns:

May need help in gathering additional information about self
May need additional information about choice (e.g., market projections, profile of satisfied workers in the field)
Contact with workers in the academic or occupational area they have decided upon may help them commit.
Suggest they get work-related experience in area to help confirm their decision
Help them confirm the accuracy of the information they have obtained

Decision Making Concerns:

Help take element of "chance" out of decision
May need to clarify their personal values and the work values inherent in their choice
Assist them in integrating the information they have about themselves with the information about majors and careers
Help them negotiate the action steps needed in order to finalize their decision
May need help in setting goals for implementing their decision (e.g., timetable)

Personal/Social Concerns:

Help them recognize their source of anxiety if this is a concern
Reassure them that choice is not forever
Help them resolve conflict with significant others if this is a problem
Help gain confidence by encouraging work/volunteer experiences in chosen area
Advisor can provide support while decision is being made
DEVELOPMENTALLY UNDECIDED

Identifying Characteristics:

Often actively exploring their options
Need help gathering information about self, majors, and occupations
Varying degrees of anxiety associated with being undecided
May have external locus of control; relies on others' opinions
Has not developed a vocational identity
May be multipotential
Developmentally not ready to decide
Vocationally immature

Information Concerns:

Help crystallize educational and occupational interests
Help clarify personal and work values
Help acquire and assess information about their strengths and weaknesses as it applies to different options
Help identify sources of information about academic and career alternatives
Help confirm accuracy of information as it is acquired

Decision Making Concerns:

Teach decision making process overtly and by modeling
Help understand how values affect decisions
Help integrate information they have gathered
Help set educational and occupational goals
Help learn to compromise among several alternatives

Personal/Social Concerns:

Reassure some anxiety is normal in decision making
Help shift to internal locus of control
Provide support while they are in the process of making a choice
SERIOUSLY UNDECIDED

Identifying Characteristics:
High level of anxiety
Poor vocational identity formation
External locus of control
Unclear personal, educational and/or occupational goals
Lacks problem-solving skills
Cannot connect current behavior to future outcomes
Lacks confidence in self
Negative self-appraisal, self-concept

Information Concerns:
May or may not need certain types of information, but this is not a primary concern.

Decision Making Concerns:
May be somewhat indecisive
May have difficulty taking risks
Probably needs high structure for decision making process
May be unwilling to take responsibility for own decision making (e.g., dependency on others, fear of failure, fear of making “wrong choice”).

Personal/Social Concerns:
Scope of problems may indicate need for personal counseling beyond purview of academic advising
May have low self-concept
May be avoiding or not acknowledging important personal concerns
May require longer-term counseling before academic or career decisions can be made
CHRONICALLY INDECISIVE

Identifying Characteristics:

Psychologically dysfunctional
Paralyzed about decision making
Dependent
Often feels helpless
Manipulative
Debilitating anxiety

Information Concerns:

May or may not need information but this is not a primary concern

Decision Making Concerns:

Immobile; unable to make decisions about many aspects of their lives.

Personal/Social Concerns:

Help acknowledge general distress/excessive anxiety
Help acknowledge confusion about vocational identity
Help explore influences of significant others
Help build confidence in ability to negotiate the decision making process
Need long-term counseling focusing on personal/emotional issues
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