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Advising Undecided College Students

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Learning outcomes

- What are the characteristics of undecided students?
- What are effective advising strategies for working with them?
- How do we help them develop their academic and vocational plans?
- How do we help them integrate this process into their life planning?

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Question


- What does your institution do to help undecided students achieve degree completion?



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Students want help

Noel-Levitz found that 65.7% of first-year college students would like some help selecting an educational plan that will prepare them to get a good job




(Hughey K. & J., 2006; Hull-Blanks et al., 2005)

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Undecided students: Who are they?

- “Students unwilling, unable, or unready to make educational and/or vocational choices*”
- Students who enter college with a tentative decision that changes
- Students rejected from a selective or oversubscribed program
- Major changers in transition




* Gordon, V.N. & Steele, G.E., 2015, p. vii

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Undecided students may be...

- ...High ability students
- ...Student athletes
- ...Adult students
- ...Underprepared
- ...Community college students
- ...Upper division students



* Gordon, V.N. & Steele, G.E., 2015, p. 101-141

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Sub-types of Decided and Undecided

- Virginia N. Gordon (1998) identified:
 - 3 decided student types
 - 3 undecided student types
 - 1 indecisive student type
- Both the decided and undecided types would benefit from an integrated academic and career advising approach, though each types need different emphasis with the approaches
 - The indecisive type would benefit most from counseling

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← Continuum of Decidedness Types →


Very Decided	Unstable Decided	Developmentally Undecided	Chronically Indecisive
	Somewhat Decided	Tentatively Undecided	Seriously Undecided

Gordon, V.N. 1998, pp. 386-403.

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Why are they undecided?

- Primary contributors:*
 - Informational
 - Developmental
 - Personal-Social
 - Other



Gordon, V.N. & Steele, G.E., 2015, Chapters 1 & 3.

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Contributors to being “Undecided”

<p>Informational</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of self-information • Lack information about majors or programs • Lack information about careers 	<p>Developmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge regarding decision-making processes • Inability to make a decision • Lack of vocational maturity • Lack of vocational identity
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Gordon, V.N. & Steele, G.E., 2015, Chapters 1 & 3.

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Contributors to being “Undecided”

<p>Personal-Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern about values – goal conflict • Interest/ability conflict • Conflict with opinions for others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families • Teachers • Counselors • Mentors • Peers 	<p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afraid to commit • “No rush” • Apathetic • Original choice no longer viable
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Gordon, V.N. & Steele, G.E., 2015, Chapters 1 & 3.

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Types of undecided students

- Entering first-year students
- First-generation college students
- Major-changers
- Undecided Upper-class students
- Older undecided students
- Undecided community college students

Gordon, V.N. & Steele, G.E., 2015, Chapters 3.


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What is academic advising?

- What we know: Academic advising (AA) is a process that is integral to the mission and goal of higher education.

One definition...

- It is a "series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. AA synthesizes and contextualizes students' educational experiences within the framework of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes (NACADA, 2006)



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Gordon's curriculum for working with undecided students


- Self-assessment
- Educational planning
- Career planning
- Decision-making

Gordon, 1992 p.75

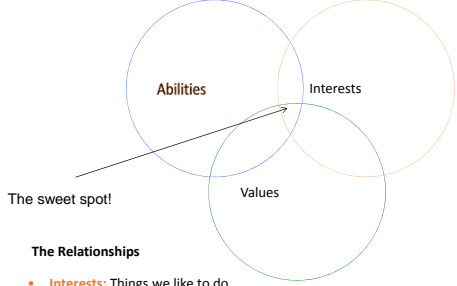
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Advising Curriculum: Self-Assessment

- Interests** - What activities do you enjoy? What do you do in your leisure time? Hobbies?
- Aptitudes/Abilities** - What are your personal and academic strengths? What skills do you have?
- Values** - What is important to you in a career? What do you believe in?
- Goal Setting** - Where are you going? How do you get there? What are your aspirations?



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The Relationships

- Interests:** Things we like to do
- Abilities/Skills:** Things we do well
- Values:** That which is most important to us

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O*Net online self-assessment inventories

Interests


- <https://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/browse/Interests/>

Abilities

- <https://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/browse/Abilities/>

Work Values


- http://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/browse/Work_Values/



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Advising Curriculum: Educational Knowledge

- What educational programs will provide you with the knowledge and skills you need?
- What college majors interest you? What vocational programs interest you?
- What courses will you need to take?
- What degrees and/or credentials do you need?



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Students Building 21st century skills

Skills: while choosing a course

- Available courses
- Course content
- Prerequisite information, graduation requirements, course sequence
- Rules and regulations
- Other?




(O'Banion, Oct/Nov, 2012, p. 44)

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Students Building 21st century skills

Skills Scheduling of courses

- Altering schedules and timelines
- Work and commuting limitations
- Other?



(O'Banion, Oct/Nov, 2012, p. 44)

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Examples of resources and activities for educational planning

- Have students complete a three academic term exploration plan listing coursework
- Have students interview students currently enrolled in the program they are exploring.
- Have students interview faculty in the program they are exploring.
- Have students review academic support programs that are available on campus

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Advising Curriculum: Occupational Knowledge


- **Nature of Work** - What tasks are involved?
- **Place of employment** - Who will hire you?
- **Qualifications and Advancement** - What entry level expertise is expected? What experiences do you need? What are the opportunities for promotion?
- **Employment outlook** - What will the job market be like when I graduate?
- **Earnings and Working Conditions** - What is the pay range? What are the physical demands of the job?
- **Job seeking skills** - How do you write a resume/cover letter? What job interview techniques are desirable?



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What is career planning and development?

Career planning and development is a lifelong process that includes all psychological, sociological, educational, economic, cultural and physical factors, as well as chance factors that interact to influence the career of the individual.



(Sears, 1982, adapted by Brown, 2003)

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What is career advising?

- Understanding of interrelatedness of academic decisions and future life and career goals
- Helping students to increase awareness of who they are, where they want to go, and how to make decisions to get there

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Super's theory of career development

<http://www.careers.govt.nz>

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Ages 14-24 Super called "Exploration"

- A period when individuals attempt to understand themselves and find their place in the world of work.
- Through experiences they try to identify their interests and capabilities and figure out how they fit with various occupations.
- They make tentative occupational choices and eventually obtain an occupation.
- This stage involves three career development tasks.
 - crystallization of a career preference, is to develop and plan a tentative vocational goal.
 - convert generalized preferences into a specific choice, a firm vocational goal
 - implementation of a career preference by completing appropriate training and securing a position in the chosen occupation

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Career Advising...it works in the advising session

The 3-1 Process

Inquire

- Ask probing questions so advisor and student as partners in the process, can address the situation correctly.

Inform

- Advisors must connect advisees with reliable resources for career information, especially related to their particular interests and goals.

Integrate

- Connect self-assessment with major, major with occupation information, and all exploration to the career planning process for effective decision making.

Gordon, V.N. 2006

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Relationships between academic programs and occupations

General Paths from Post-Secondary to Career

Adapted from Virginia N. Gordon's recommendations, by George Steele

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Internet resources for career exploration

- Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) (www.bls.gov/ooh)
- O*NET online.onetcenter.org or (www.onetcenter.org)
- America's Career Kit (<http://americascareerkit.com/>)
- Occupational Outlook Quarterly (<http://www.bls.gov/opus/ooq/home.htm>)
- Occupational Outlook Statistics (www.bls.gov/oes)
- Riley Guide Career Research Center (<http://www.rileyguide.com/careers/index.shtml>)

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What advisors can do

- Establish personal career-advising principles for advising
- Expand knowledge and understanding of career and student development theories
- Know first-hand the career resources on campus and create career-related handouts applicable to the majors they advise
- Develop a career-advising library for their offices
- Become familiar with resources on your campus such as Career Navigator and Focus 2.
- Take part in advisor development programs that can expand career-advising expertise.

Question

How do you integrate career advising on your campus? Do you have advising/career offices in a shared model?



Advising Curriculum: Decision-Making Knowledge

- Can you link self-knowledge with occupational information?
- What kind of decision maker are you? What styles or strategies do you use?
- What are the critical points in your life where you will make career decisions?
- What kind of life-long decision making skills do you need to learn?
- How well do you integrate your values into your decisions?
- How do you implement your decision once it is made?



Reflective thinking

“Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds to support it and the further conclusions to which it tends”



Dewey, J., 1933, p. 9

Decision-making styles

Many different theories

- Johnson and Coscarelli (2007) for types
 - External-systematic * External-spontaneous
 - Internal- systematic * Internal-spontaneous
- Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory (LSI) (1984)
 - Diverging- concrete experience & reflective observation
 - Assimilating – abstract conceptualization & reflective observation
 - Converging - abstract conceptualization & active experimentation
 - Accommodating- concrete experience & active experimentation

Question

- Has technological integration in the exploration process helped your undecided college students? Advisors?
 - SIS
 - Degree audits
 - Internet resources
 - LMS
 - Early alert systems



Advising Process

Gordon* identified a process for working with undecided students:


- Help student determine why he or she is undecided
- Help student develop a plan for exploring
- Help student integrate all the information that has been collected
- Support students while they make their decisions
- Help students initiate an action plan
- Encourage follow-up contact

Gordon, V.N. & Steele, G.E., 2015, pp. 184-193.

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1. Help student determine why he or she is undecided


- Lack of independence
- Lack of knowledge about the decision making process
- Lack of information
- Multiplicity of interests
- Lack of interest
- Lack of ability
- Lack of knowledge about educational and occupational relationship
- Lack of desire to attend college
- Explore personal concerns about being undecided
- Determine level of indecision
- Determine level of commitment to exploring
- Help identify student's decision making style



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2. Help student develop a plan for exploring


- A general overview of all majors offered on campus
- A summary of the basic requirements for all majors
- Identify possible career paths related to potential majors
- Help generate a list of questions to ask faculty, college counselors and other resource persons
- The opportunity to share information and reflect on it with a generalist advisor



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3. Help student integrate all the information that has been collected

- Student's developmental levels might hinder this process
- Advisor needs to be able to ask probing, high cognitive level, and value clarifying questions
- Be familiar with Internet resources



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4. Support students while they make their decisions


- Why understanding students' decision-making style is important
- Personal support of a caring adult can be reassuring



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5. Help students initiate an action plan

- An action plan that specifies activities to be done and time-line for accomplishment
- Identify short-term and long-term goals
- Reinforce with students the need to re-evaluate plans



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6. Encourage follow-up contact

- Not all students progress through the process in the same manner – some may need to re-trace steps (i.e. students not accepted into a selective major, change of mind once some courses are taken in major program, etc.)



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