Learning outcomes for this session

Participants will
- Explore the concept of "undecided students" as a population with specific needs and challenges
- Examine similarities and differences in advising 'undecided' and 'decided' students
- Briefly review theories, principles and resources around career awareness and student decision making
- Explore the opportunities to help students bridge academic interests with career aspirations
- Be aware of additional resources and professional organizations for support, implementation and assessment around the topic of first-year students

Overview

- Undecided students: who and why
- The advising session as a framework for a planning session
- Elements of exploration
- Types of decided and undecided students
- The utility of the Holland Code
- Considering methods of delivering advising to students undecided about their educational and career direction

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

Undecided students may be...

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

Sub-types of Decided and Undecidedness

- 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 type needs different emphasis with the approaches
- The indecisive type would benefit most from counseling
Why are they undecided?

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

Contributors to being “Undecided”

Informational
- Lack self-information (personal strengths or limitations, interests, values)
- Lack information about majors or disciplines
- Lack information about careers

Developmental
- Lack of knowledge regarding decision-making processes
- Inability to make a decision
- Lack of vocational maturity
- Lack of vocational identity

Personal - Social
- Concerns about values – goal conflict
- Interest – ability conflict
- Conflict with opinions of others
  - Families
  - Teachers
  - Counselors
  - Mentors
  - Peers

Other
- Afraid to commit
- “No rush”
- Apathetic
- Original choice no longer viable

Steele’s Synthesis: Three Levels

- Decided
- Developmentally Undecided
- Seriously Undecided

Continuum of Decidedness Types


Developmentally Undecided Characteristics

- May need help in acquiring and organizing personal information (e.g., interests, values, and abilities)
- May need help in acquiring or confirming information about academic/career alternatives (e.g., work tasks involved, market projections, course work involved, profile of satisfied worker)
- May need assistance with learning the decision-making process overtly and through modeling
- May need help in setting academic and career goals
- May need reassurance that some anxiety about choice is normal
**Developmentally Undecided Characteristics**
- May need help in learning to compromise in decision-making
- May need support while decision is being made
- May need help in crystallizing educational and occupational interests
- May need help in clarifying personal and work values
- May need help to shift to an internal locus of control

**Seriously Undecided Characteristics**
- May be somewhat indecisive
- May have difficulty taking risks
- Probably needs high structure for decision making
- May or may not need information since this is not primary concern
- May be avoiding or not acknowledging important personal concerns
- May have low self-concept

**How to Help!**

**It’s Okay to be Undecided (at least for a while)**
- most students, even those incoming first-year students who declare a major, enter college unsure about their major or career
- being undecided is not a problem, but an opportunity
  - opportunity to take courses that will count toward graduation while exploring different major and career areas
  - opportunity to gather adequate information about different majors and careers
  - opportunity to participate in some self-exploration

**Myths of Being Undecided**
- I am the only one who doesn’t know in what I want to major
- I will waste my time and money and lose credit hours if I don’t know in what I want to major
- I need to declare a major my first semester
- I have to be a declared major in order to have an academic advisor
- I will eventually just figure out in what I want to major
- This is the most important decision of my life
“Major” Myths

- You ARE your Major!
- Majors = Specific Jobs
- Most students know what they want to major in.
- Certain majors = BIG $
- The more majors, the BETTER!

General Paths from Post-Secondary to Career

Degree A → Career A
Degree A → Career 1
Degree A → Career 2
Degree A → Career 3

Undergrad Majors → Career Goals

You need both!

Advising Decided Students

- May still need more in-depth information about academic and career choice
- Help confirm accuracy of information
- Help make contact with workers in occupational choice through informational interviews and work-related experiences
- Review past successful and unsuccessful decisions to help analyze own decision making style
- Reassure choice is not forever
- Help take action steps to implement decision

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?

The Relationships

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

The sweet spot!
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?

Career/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?

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?

Gordon’s Defining an Advising Session

• Opening the Interview
• Identifying the Problem
• Identifying Possible Solutions
• Taking Action on the Solution
• Summarizing the Transition


Virginia N. Gordon’s Areas of Planning

Holland and World of Work

- Data: facts, records, numbers, business procedures
- Ideas: abstractions, theories, insights, new ways of doing things
- People: care, services, leadership, sales
- Things: machines, materials, crops/animals

Methods of Delivery

- One-on-one
- Course
- Student Portal
- e-Portfolios
- Workshops
- Working with other campus offices (i.e. Career Services)

Encouraging Responsibility...
Advocate for students to explore by suggesting:

- Informational Interviewing
- Job Shadowing
- Volunteering
- Finding related work experiences
- That they pay attention to who they already are
- That students identify courses that match their interests and abilities

- Find extracurricular Activities
- Using Career Libraries and resources
- Using the web to locate information
- Standardized tests and Career inventories (are only a "starting place" - they will not be THE ANSWER!)

Handouts

- Virginia N. Gordon Model of Exploration
- Self-Assessment: The Party and Introduction to Holland
- Self-Assessment and Jobs: Abilities and Skills
- Self-Assessment: Career Values
- Decision Making: Force Field
- Case Studies
- Advising Undecided Students, Selected Bibliography

Bibliography