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A Study to Determine the Necessary Content for an Educational Unit for Career Path Research

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A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE NECESSARY
CONTENT FOR AN EDUCATIONAL UNIT FOR
CAREER PATH RESEARCH

A Project Presented to the
Graduate Faculty
Darden College of Education
Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

By
Sally K. Shield

May 1992

THIS PROJECT WAS PREPARED BY

SALLY KAY SHIELD


UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

DR. JOHN M. RITZ

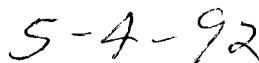
VTE 636--PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION

IT WAS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE PROGRAM DIRECTOR
AS PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE
MS IN VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

APPROVED BY



Dr. John M. Ritz
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Date

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Proprietary schools have always provided job placement and career development information as part and parcel of their intensive skill programs. Since they have the limited objective of employment in the student's field of training, it has been assumed that in the process of getting skilled, the student also picks up the realistic picture of typical entry level employment.

Although that may be true in some of the situations, it has become obvious from recent graduate student surveys that program planning assistance is an area that needs to be addressed in a specific and factual manner. Career development courses, which, in the past 20 years, have increased in popularity at all types of colleges, must now be thoroughly evaluated for content, scope and structure to determine the most effective career units in any particular school situation. (Since not all colleges have the same type of college student, the decided course content should not be the archetype for all colleges.)

Data obtained from the placement surveys used by Commonwealth College indicates that dissatisfaction exists in two college service areas: program planning assistance and career placement. Since the existing statistical support of the placement office indicates a high degree of job placement in the field of study, suppositions may be made

about the inconsistency of program planning assistance and its eventual effect on job satisfaction.

Program planning assistance currently exists in sporadic and unevaluated efforts which may or may not contribute to a comprehensive overview of career path depending on student effort, college effort, or a combination of the two. This assistance currently includes admission counseling, program orientation, and career search placement seminars at which attendance is required or placement service is waived.

The effort of this study is to assess the current program planning assistance, determine the needed information (if any) that is not currently included, and design a unit of study which will help the students develop a realistic plan for their career path.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to determine the necessary content for program planning assistance and to develop an intensive unit of study designed around that content to be included in an existing, structured career course currently offered for credit at Commonwealth System of Colleges.

Research Goals

This study had three general research objectives:

1. To determine what information is currently provided the students through the existing efforts of admissions, program orientations, career search offices and current career development classes.
2. To determine the most valuable information for career planning to be included in an intensive unit of study.
3. To structure a unit of study to include the determined content for a currently existing Career Management course which would effect an increased satisfaction perception by the students.

Background Information

Private career schools have played an important role for the past two centuries in providing a significant portion of vocational training in the United States. The earliest schools can be traced back to the development and growth of the railroad industry when the demand for bookkeepers, file clerks, and accountants exceeded the supply. The invention of the typewriter and development of shorthand systems created the need for more trained office personnel to aid the rapid growth of business and industry. This, in turn, fueled the growth and development of the private career schools. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, this industry has prospered by consistently meeting the ever-changing demands of business.

A prime characteristic of the schools that prospered is the ability to consistently supply a qualified candidate for the current market demand. Therefore, one of the strongest selling points of a private career school is its placement office and its successful contribution to the college graduate's entry level employment.

Commonwealth System of Colleges, and specifically their Virginia Beach campus, has an excellent track record for their placement office. Each branch has a designated career search officer who is responsible for the implementation and coordination of placement activities. Permanent placement files are kept on each student, and graduate files must include resumes, references, job preferences and requirements, and information concerning all career search efforts. Placement statistics indicate that 100 percent of 1984-85 graduates who were qualified for placement were employed in an expertise area covered by their career program at the Virginia Beach Campus.

In spite of the successful statistics concerning the placement efforts from the administrators' viewpoint, there is an observable trend seen on the annual graduate placement surveys of general dissatisfaction in the career search effort. Analysis of this trend indicates that although the career search office is in fact fulfilling its efforts, student expectations of job placement are not consistent. Since consumer dissatisfaction with a product, whether actual

or perceived, is a final determinant of business prosperity, it behooves the school to use all methods available to change and reverse this trend.

The effect of this study will be an attempt to bring into line the student expectations of job market placement with the career search office expectations, and in so doing, increase graduate satisfaction with their overall training background.

Limitations

This study made use of a previously designed and implemented survey of Commonwealth College graduates to determine the research problem. As with all surveys, intent of the question and subsequent interpretation of their answers are assumed in equipollence. The mood, attitude, and willingness of the surveyed graduate could have limited or affected the survey outcome.

More specific program planning assistance data was obtained through a newly designed survey form. The wording and interpretation of this survey may also have been a limiting factor although efforts to minimize this were taken. In addition, this survey was administered, in part, to previously surveyed graduates who had already formed and expressed opinions in this area.

The time allowed for responding to the questionnaire may have limited the response rate for mailed surveys. Adjustments for this limitation were made by making personal, follow-up telephone calls to non-responding, currently employed graduates to increase their response rate.

Basic Assumptions

This study was conducted with the following assumptions:

1. The placement statistics provided by the Career Search Office were valid representations of actual job placement.
2. The majority of Commonwealth College, Virginia Beach, graduates are working in a field in which they use a minimum of 50 percent of their skill training.
3. The graduates who responded to the first and second surveys were a typical representative sample of the whole population.
4. That job satisfaction levels can be improved by the inclusion of a unit of instruction on realistic career expectations.
5. Clarification of career goals improves academic and job satisfaction.
6. A study done using the population at the Virginia Beach campus can extrapolate its results for each of the Commonwealth System's Colleges.

Procedures

The procedures by which this study was conducted began initially with a listing of items normally considered valuable for inclusion in career development research courses. Using this list, a questionnaire survey was constructed on the current career search efforts provided by the Admission Counselors, Program Coordinators, Career Management Instructors, and Career Search Offices. The same questionnaire survey was sent to all 1984-85 graduates. Upon receipt of the returned surveys, information was compiled to determine adequately covered content, inadequately covered content, and materials currently not represented in any area which should be included in the unit of study. Finally, a unit of study was prepared to synthesize and incorporate career research information and include it in the existing Career Management course at the Virginia Beach campus.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study. Their definitions are included here to aid the reader's interpretation of this report as intended.

1. Course of Study: A subject of study that is taught in a fixed length of time for academic credit. All subjects taught for one quarter term are courses of study.

2. Unit of Instruction: A subject of study that is taught in a variable length of time. Several units are usually included within a course of study.

3. Career Management: A course of study designed to provide the first quarter student an overview of attitudinal and personal skills necessary for academic and employment success.

4. Career Path Research: The efforts necessary to obtain factual data and realistic definitions of career field placement for entry level job attainment.

5. Career Programs: A field of study of pre-determined length designed to prepare a student for successful entry level employment in one major skill area. Usually one to two years in length.

6. Job Placement: The process of preparing the student for job attainment. Includes preparation of resumes, interviewing techniques, dress and physical appearance, and the provision of job interviews.

7. Vocational Education: Education designed to provide students with the training needed to enter a job/trade. Areas include business, health, electronics, marketing, trade/industrial, etc.

8. Proprietary Schools: Privately owned schools with limited educational objectives of training for the market place.

Overview of Chapters

This study was inspired by the desire of the researcher to not only improve the quality of instructional coverage at Commonwealth College, Virginia Beach campus, but also to change the student's attitude of that instruction by attempting to match perceptions to reality. This chapter endeavored to introduce the reader to that desire as well as to the goals and subsequent methodology of this research study.

The balance of this study will be broken down into a review of current and related literature concerning itself with student career development, job satisfaction as related to educational training, and the realm and realism of proprietary vocational education. Another chapter will outline the research methods and procedures used to conduct this study.

The fourth chapter will contain the results and findings and their uses in constructing the unit of study for Career Management. The conclusions drawn from the study and further recommendations for continued research will be presented in the fifth, and final, chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

ROLE OF RELATED LITERATURE

This second chapter is a comprehensive overview of the literature available on the areas of concern in this study. In an effort to move from the topics of general interest and concern to the specific problem under study, the following areas of literature were examined: 1) The current status and evaluations of Career Development courses; 2) The nature of the Proprietary Vocational Student and their specific career development needs; 3) Scope, sequence and content of current Career Development courses.

The Current Status and Evaluations of Career Development Courses

After years of neglect by the post-secondary schools, there has been a resurgence of popularity for the college orientation or career management courses. In addition, what had been relegated to the college personnel offices as extra, non-essential student services, is now being offered as a career course for academic credit at many colleges and universities.

"Although there has been a large increase in the number of career development programs in higher education over the past 10 years, only 10 percent of the literature in the field of career psychology has focused on the evaluation of career

development interventions."1 Private vocational schools have consistently offered career information as an integral part of their training but this new emphasis has presented a plethora of new information, content, and methodology worth examining, evaluating, and incorporating.

The problem of evaluation of successful career program interventions is highlighted by the severe lack of studies done in this area. "Adams was one of the first to comment on the lack of formal evaluation of career programs in college settings. He listed three reasons that might explain this deficiency: a) lack of institutional research personnel to assist in evaluation efforts; b) lack of time on the part of student services professionals to conduct carefully designed research; and, c) the threat of possible negative outcomes of such evaluations."2 Additionally, it is the contention of experienced researchers that the studies which do exist have seriously flawed methodology and research designs. "The need for more well-defined evaluation studies of career interventions is apparent."3 The Carver and Smart research study examined, among other things, the value of having made career goal decisions on academic achievement and the effect of firm commitments to a specific career goal on self-concept. There was a decided significant increase in academic major certainty and achievement for students taking a career development course. Although this particular study failed to prove the theory of the improved self-concept, a

longitudinal study was recommended to further test that hypothesis.

Other studies are also recommended by these and other researchers into the areas of most effective content for career development courses. Even though the need for them appears self-evident, the course content and structure is debated at many points. This is not necessarily bad, as not all courses will be all things to all students.

Recent legislation for evaluation of vocational education has spurred new studies aimed at data collection from employers on their satisfaction with vocational education. Much of this new data has been collected to comply strictly with the legislation, and is, therefore, restricted in scope and presentation. "A classification of the most common data collected in employer follow-up studies (O'Reilly and Asche, 1979) during the period of 1970 to 1977 revealed that almost all of the studies asked employers to rate specific former vocational education students on selected work skills, habits, and attitudes or characteristics."4

"Employer feedback data does have the potential of assisting planners in modifying programs, developing better guidance services, and providing information for program assessment and other uses."5 However, because these studies were done more for legislation compliance than for true

evaluation research, not all of the information is useful, and these studies should not be the sole source for reassessment. Overall, the 16 studies abstracted seem to indicate a high level of satisfaction by employers with their vocationally educated employees. The conclusion could tentatively be drawn that vocational training at the post-secondary level is being adequately covered in most of the general areas.

"Employers indicated that the graduates were better qualified for the position as a result of their vocational training, particularly in terms of job interview skills, career direction, and motivation."6 This particular study points to the integral part career development courses or integrated information plays for the vocationally educated student. From the remaining studies, a firm conclusion could be drawn that all vocational education would benefit from a more positive public image, and that the schools, students, and employers would experience an increase in self-concept and satisfaction levels. "Since the employee's adjustment on the initial job reflects the kind of business education the employee has received, it is essential that high standards of achievement be maintained.the requirements and demands made by business upon the new employee must be acknowledged and the business education program must be revised to meet them."7

The Nature of the Proprietary Vocational Student and Their Specific Career Development Needs

Before implementing an evaluative study, or assessing and revising current units of study, it is important to have a background understanding of both the type of educational system and the students involved. There is a "college fit" theory, proposed by Pantages and Creedon that deals with different types of institutions having different images and therefore appealing to different students. "According to the theory, students whose values, goals, and attitudes are congruent with the college are more likely to persist."⁸

An open admissions policy at private vocational colleges allows for a wide degree of "fit" with cognitive and attitudinal skills in their student populations. Therefore, it is in the best interest of both school and student to find a closer adaptation fit to the career school and job placement goals as soon as possible. The sooner this occurs, the more likely academic achievement and lasting job satisfaction will occur.

Private vocational schools have as their main income resource their student's tuition; it is imperative for them, therefore, to provide a quality product to the student and to the employer. "Most schools do what they promise to do; train for the best possible job in the shortest amount of time."⁹ More than 80 percent of students surveyed in a large

study done on private vocational schools said that "their schools provided good job training, practical skills, good teaching and equipment."¹⁰ Other results yielded by that study indicated that the completion statistics for those students are higher than national averages for post-secondary schools in general:

Courses 6 - 12 months long = 65 - 75 percent finish

Courses 12 - 24 months long = 50 - 70 percent finish

Also, of those that graduate, 60 - 80 percent get jobs that directly relate to their training.

"The profit motive is tempered by the need to provide suitable training; hence, the quest for profits serves to stimulate continuous changes in operation and instruction."¹¹ Nationwide studies of students who graduated from private vocational schools yielded information which was important to know before attempts to change student attitudes were implemented. Statistics relating to job placement services show that less than 20 percent of the graduates had gotten their job through the placement office or a school official. This is an important fact, especially when it is known that many vocational students specifically select their school because of the placement services. Another revealing statistic is that 80 percent of all employed students were working in positions equivalent to or related to the types of training received. This is a high indication of training and instructional level, and combined with employer surveys on satisfaction, should combine to increase student job

satisfaction.

Studies have also been done on the job improvement status which showed that student satisfaction with new duties versus previous (before training) duties was up significantly and that 60 percent of the surveyed students also said earnings were improved. The opportunities for job advancement were significantly improved in the majority of cases also. The ROI (Rate of Return on Investment) as calculated on the expense of private vocational training in a study financed by the US Office of Education by the Institute for Research was 29 percent, or five times the return if the cost had been invested in a bank instead.

Another large study done by the Center for Research and Development at the University of California yielded more interesting and, in some cases, conflicting information. This study was done for the purpose of comparing factors of vocational education in public post-secondary vocational schools with proprietary post-secondary vocational schools. These factors included training costs, post-graduation earnings and job satisfaction, socioeconomic status, ego development, and adequacy of training. Among the conclusions drawn for the accounting graduates from both types of schools were the following: "Public graduates were significantly ($p \pm .05$) more satisfied with their earnings and their jobs. They rated their training as significantly ($p \pm .13$) more

adequate than the proprietary graduates. Almost 30 percent of the proprietary graduates would not go back to the same school compared with 12 percent of the public graduates who wouldn't."¹²

The study done of secretarial graduates was much more heavily weighted in the advantage of proprietary school training concerning earnings, promotability, and time needed for program completion. Even in this case however, the proprietary students still rated their training significantly lower than the public graduates.

The researchers of this study drew the conclusions that the cost involved in proprietary training was the main determinant in whether or not they would repeat the same training at the same school. Since other studies concluded that proprietary students have a higher completion rate, equal to better training, and an excellent rate of return on investment, it would appear that proprietary students are not getting a whole picture of their progress and goal, and because of this do not understand all the alternatives.

Wilm's study revealed that while a student's socioeconomic background was definitely related to the kind of school he chose, only a limited relationship existed between those characteristics and his ultimate success or failure in his career. It was also pointed out that the lower the socioeconomic background the student had, the more

likely they were to attend a proprietary school. Although this fact at first seems contradictory, because they could attend a public school for much less initial cost, it is important to note the completion rate for these students in the public sector, and realize that the theory of "college fit" takes effect. If a student isn't comfortable, he won't persist, and if he doesn't persist, the cost is much higher to student and society as a whole.

Scope, Sequence, and Content of Career Development Courses

"Basically, career education provides a core for the educational program, using the job as a unifying force for all school disciplines."¹³ This, it seems, is an integral value of vocational education, and in the private vocational industry, job placement is continually held up as the ultimate end for the means. "Placement as a feature has a double purpose: to insure that career education is goal-oriented for all students, and to insure that the educational system is willing to accept the burden of its own casualties."¹⁴ Since tuition is the proprietary school's primary source of income, job placement of its final product is the surest method to continued success. "Finally, because placement is the only real measure of a school's success, private schools spend considerable time and energy preparing their students for the job market."¹⁵

If the 90 percent placement rate, which keeps the schools in business, is to be maintained, employers as well as future employees must be satisfied with the instructional content. It is also important to know when and how to use it. Programs must be geared to the specific student objectives as well as to the employers. The students who select private vocational training as their means to success have been newly defined as "'Specially Oriented Students (SOS)'" because they already know what they want to be and are merely seeking the means to attain it."¹⁶

This definition of the proprietary vocational student has decided implications for the content of their career development course. It would not, it seems, be necessary to have units of study concerned with occupational opportunities and career decision making since by their very enrollment, these decisions have been made.

Course content should concentrate more on helping the student to develop firm self- and occupational concepts. "As students look inward at their own interests and abilities and outward at work activities, job environments, and the way of life of workers, they are evaluating themselves and occupations."¹⁷

Summary

Career development interventions are currently popular

at most post-secondary schools, colleges, and universities. Although career development courses are not new to the proprietary vocational school systems, there are strong indications that the course content for those courses needs reassessment and probably revision. The goals of the proprietary schools and students are synonymous, and most studies indicate goal attainment is successful for 60 - 80 percent of all enrolled students. The problems indicated then are ones of perception and attitude changes. The final efforts of this study will be to assess the perceptions and attitudes of existing students and past graduates, and to create a unit of study to be included in the Career Management course which will effect a change in student attitudes towards their training and school choices.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the necessary content for a unit of study on career path research which would enable the students to obtain a realistic picture of their career opportunities and appreciate the means they are using to reach those goals. To accomplish this task, it was necessary to determine 1) the concerned population, 2) to construct a questionnaire/survey, 3) to collect the data, and 4) analyze the data. This chapter will explain the procedures used in carrying out the study.

Population

The population of this study was divided into five categories. In an effort to obtain a complete picture of the current status of career path research information available to the graduating student, it was considered necessary to survey all of the population which can and should supply career information to the students, as well as the students themselves. These five categories are comprised of the following groups:

1. Admission Representatives: All eight representatives who worked with the Virginia Beach campus since June, 1983, were included in the survey.

2. Program Coordinators: The current coordinators, as well as their predecessors who have counseled the 1984-1985 graduates. A total of 13 coordinators were involved.

3. Career Search Counselors: There have been two Career Search Counselors who worked with the 1984-85 graduates. Both counselors were surveyed.

4. Career Management Instructors: In the majority of the cases, career management instructors are also the program coordinators. An additional four instructors not included in other areas of this study were surveyed.

5. June 1984 - September 1985 Virginia Beach Campus Graduates: A survey was mailed to all graduates within the designated target year. This group consists of 126 of the most recently placed graduates who initially identified the problem area of program planning assistance, and it is the graduates' perceptions and attitudes which are the eventual target.

Instrument Selection

Due to the nature of this study, and the concentrated application of its results, a questionnaire survey was designed by this researcher to collect the pertinent data. Questions comprising the survey were designed to produce

information in three categories. First, what information concerning career path research is currently available, and how thoroughly is it covered. Second, how is this information ranked in importance by the graduates as necessary and pertinent to career path research. Third, which student service area is providing the career information. It is with this data that an intensive unit of study can be constructed to make available in one concise area those topics deemed necessary and pertinent.

The survey booklet (Appendix B) was accompanied by a cover letter (Appendix A) requesting participation from each individual, as well as explaining the purpose of the study. For those surveys which were mailed, an addressed and stamped return envelope was provided enabling those surveys to be returned at no cost to the participant. The survey booklet was designed in a manner so that each participant would do as little writing as possible. Additional comment space was allowed at the end of the survey, and those comments were summarized in the concluding chapter.

Data Collection

Surveys and their cover letters were mailed to those graduates and previous school employees who were part of the targeted population. Return postage-paid envelopes accompanied the questionnaire. The remaining population who are currently employed at the Virginia Beach Campus were

personally requested to participate, and their questionnaires were hand-delivered and picked up. A two-week response time was indicated in the cover letter and at the end of this time, follow-up phone calls were made to all locally residing students who had not yet responded.

Data Analysis

The first two areas of the questionnaire assess the attitudes of the school administrators and the graduates on the thoroughness of item coverage and rate their preferences of career search items. The response categories are weighted by a method of numerical values of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 which are assigned to the response categories beginning at the favorable end. For example, in area one, a Strongly Agree would receive a weight of 5, and Agree would receive a 4, and a Strongly Disagree, a weight of 1. In area two, and Exceptionally Important is weighted a 5, a Very Important would receive a 4, and a Not Important, a weight of 1. In this way, a total score can be calculated for each item in each of the first two areas. This data was hand tabulated and displayed in tables and graphs where appropriate.

The third area was designed to determine the frequency of material coverage, and which student services areas present these items. This information was hand tabulated and used for intensifying and concentrating the unit of study.

The results of this study are presented in the following chapter (Chapter Four), and the interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations are contained in Chapter Five.

Summary

This chapter has presented an in-depth description of the methods and procedures involved in conducting this study. The five categories used in the population sample were presented in detail. The methods used for preparing the questionnaire/survey, and the reasons for its use were discussed. The procedures for collecting and tabulating the data were also presented. The last two chapters of this study deal with reporting and interpreting the information collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The basic purposes of this study were to 1) determine what career information is currently provided to students through existing efforts; 2) determine which areas of career information are considered most valuable for career preparation; 3) find out which departments are or are not providing the career information; and 4) structure a unit of career information to be provided in the existing Career Management course.

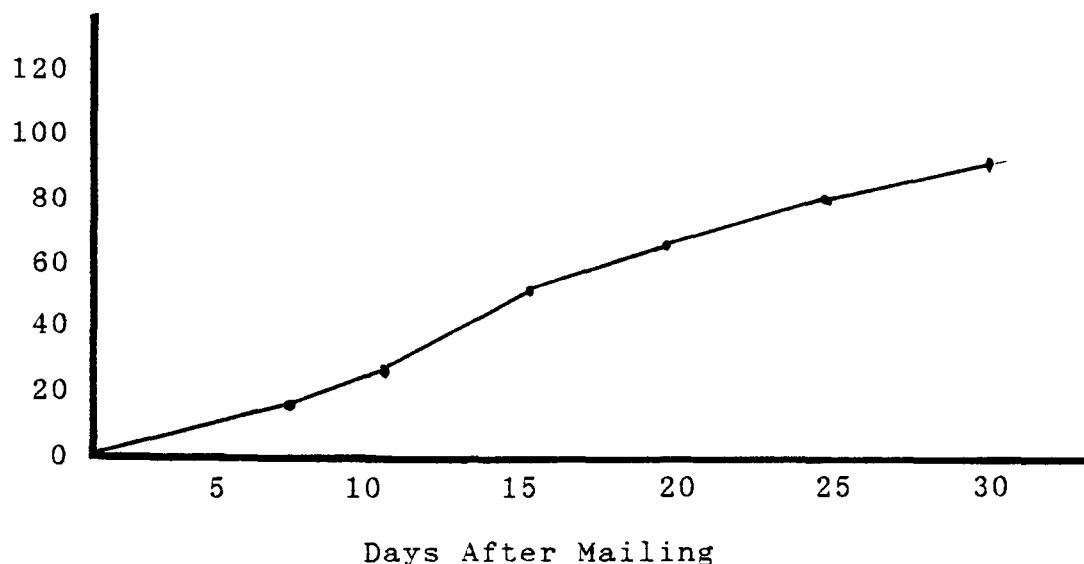
Questionnaire/Survey Implementation

A survey questionnaire was hand delivered to the personnel populations currently employed by Commonwealth College. These populations included eight Admission Representatives, thirteen Program Coordinators, two Career Search Counselors, and four Instructors. All members of these populations completed and returned their questionnaires, giving a campus representation of 100 percent completion and return rate.

The survey questionnaire (Appendix B) and a cover letter (Appendix A) were mailed to 126 Commonwealth College, Virginia Beach campus graduates from the years 1984 - 1985. The response rate for the mailed questionnaires is shown in the following table:

TABLE 4.1 Questionnaire responses from graduates

Total Mailed 126



Ninety-one of the 126 mailed questionnaires were returned in the 30-day time limit allowed for this study, giving a return rate of 72.2 percent. A non-return rate of 27.8 percent is higher than desired; however, there are plausible explanations for this lower return rate other than a product of study bias. First, Commonwealth College graduates are surveyed on an annual basis, and many had recently participated in a Graduate survey. This factor may have caused some graduates to disregard the importance of returning this questionnaire. Secondly, some graduates had changed jobs; this caused some questionnaires to be returned, necessitating a remailing, which in some cases caused them to be returned beyond the study's response time limit. Thirdly, a few graduates had left the Tidewater area which made it impossible to deliver and return the questionnaire within the study response time limit.

It was found in the telephone follow-up that many graduates had simply failed to complete and return the questionnaire but willingly did so once its importance was related to them. After the telephone follow-up, the number of returns increased from 64 to 91 in the next nine days.

Questionnaire - Section I

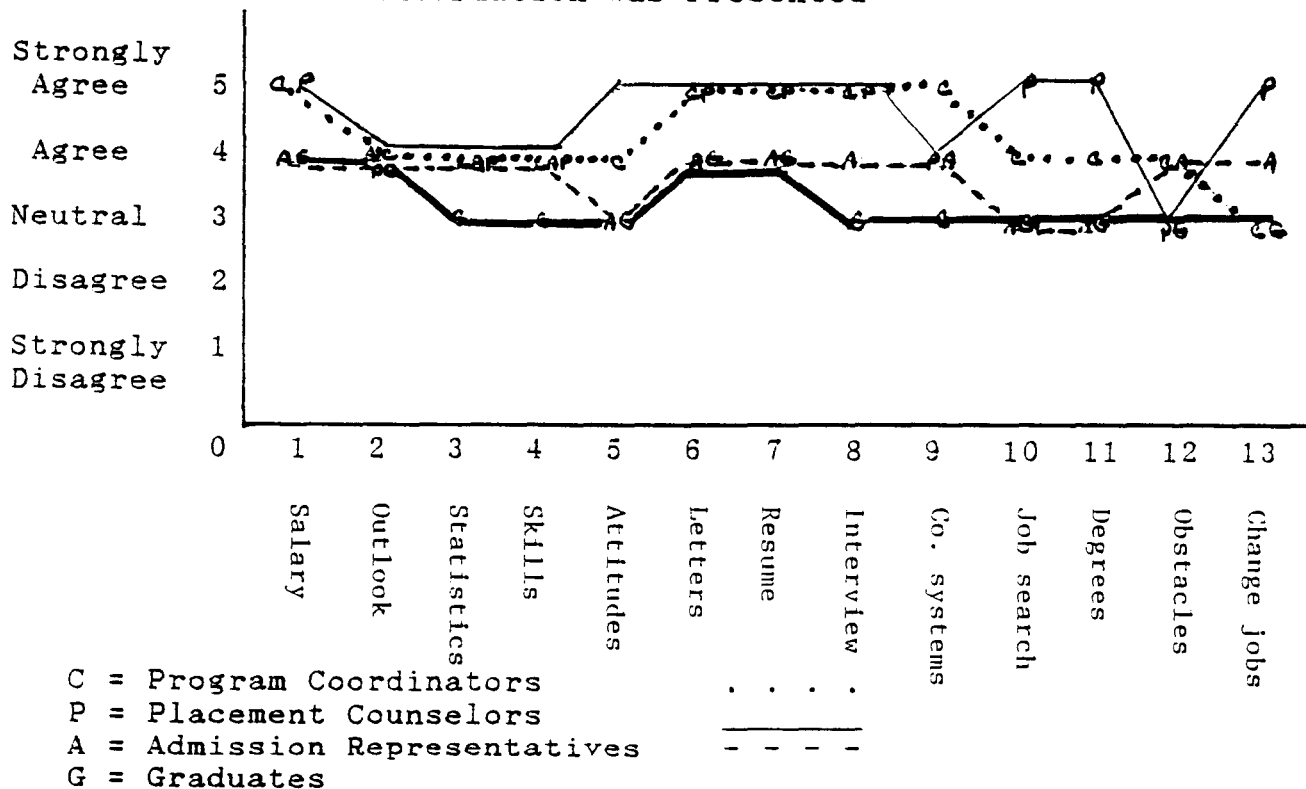
The first section of the questionnaire was designed to ascertain which information was presented to the Commonwealth students. A scale of 5 to 1 was used to differentiate the responses from a Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The data received from the questionnaires in Part I was tabulated by frequency of occurrences for each of the four populations. [The questionnaires from the four instructors who taught the Career Management course were combined with the Program Coordinators responses as all of these personnel are involved with the hands-on instruction process and their responses fell within the same parameters.]

The mode was determined for each of the 13 areas of concern, and plotted on Table 4.2 to show the responses by populations.

Interpretation of the data shown in Table 4.2 is possible only in "stronger than", "equal to", or "less than" other responses. Since this questionnaire data was ordinal in

nature, we cannot assume that we know the amount of difference between an answer of 5 or of 4. By using the mode of each population's responses, we can, however, project that a difference in opinion does or does not apply, and therefore, make some meaningful interpretations of the data.

TABLE 4.2 Career Information Was Presented



Observations of the plotted response lines by population on Table 4.2 indicate that:

--Some assumptions may be made concerning the admissions' responses. First, traditionally in post-secondary schools, Admission Representatives are not part of the academic process, and instead have a sales and marketing orientation to information presented to students. This would explain a high coverage of areas concerning a potential student, but not concentrated coverage of areas of concern to a graduating student.

--One area of concern distinctly shown on the Table is the difference between personnel and graduate responses on

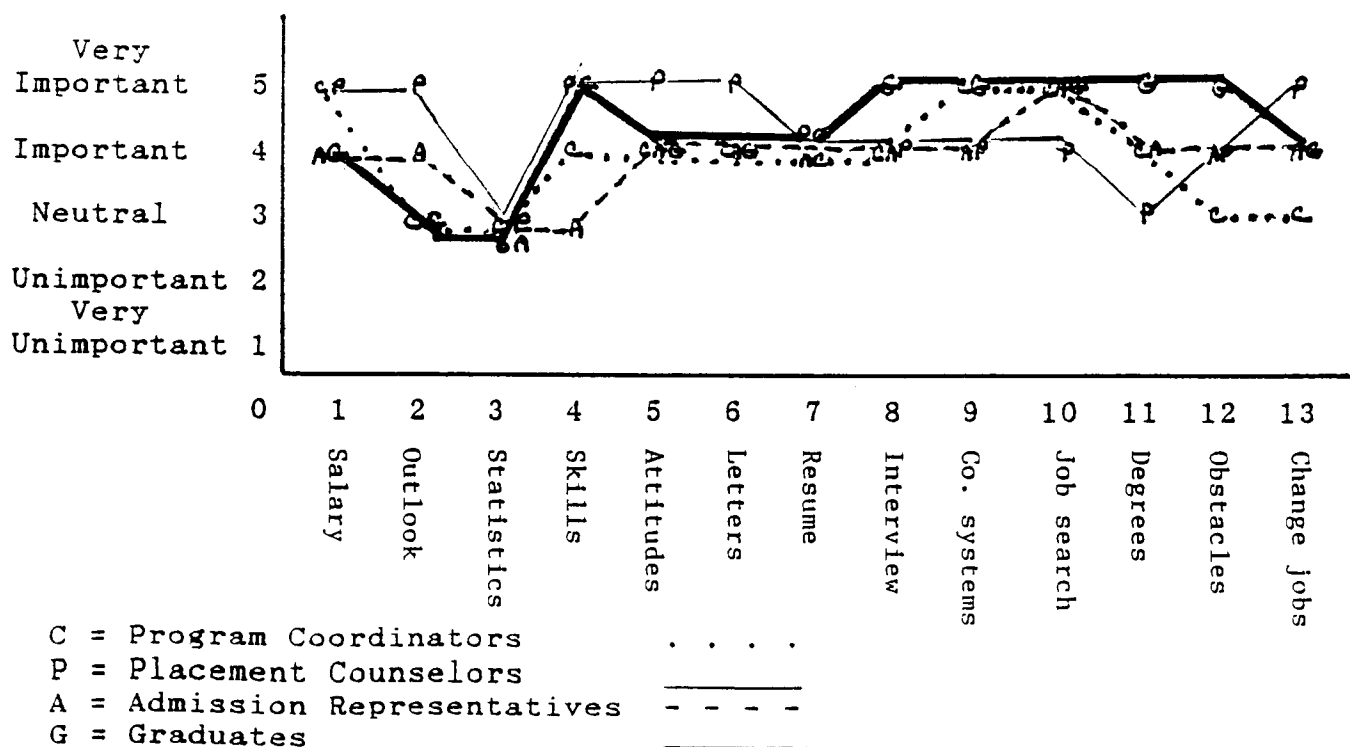
Item 1, Entry-level salaries. This difference may be caused by several factors; however, the fact that there is a difference may indicate that incoming students expect to make what is presented as the upper limits of entry-level pay scales, while the graduates may, in fact, have been hired at the lower limits of the pay scales.

- Another difference between the personnel responses and the graduate responses are on Items 3, Employment Statistics, and 4, Specific Skills needed. If incoming students are properly advised of these two areas, more realistic career decisions could be made before entering a specific program. Graduates, with the help of hindsight, may realize these areas were not adequately covered.
- The interpretation of the plotting of the placement responses indicates that they feel all areas of concern, except for Item 12, Obstacles to job-entry, are presented adequately during a student's tenure. The difference between their line and that of the graduates are of concern on Items 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 11. The difference in Item 11, Additional Knowledge/Degrees needed for promotion, indicates that the graduates wish to continue their progress, whereas placement is primarily concerned with the first entry-level job and the skills and attitudes (Items 4 & 5), as well as the specific job search skills (Items 8 & 10) needed for entry-level employment.
- The plotting of the Program Coordinators'/Instructors' responses shows a close correlation with placement concerns except in Items 10, 11, and 13. Since these items fall directly under the traditional placement department, these differences do not necessarily mean material is not presented; only that this population may be unaware of the specifics covered here.
- Table 4.2 shows a general convergence of the Commonwealth College personnel plotted responses on most areas. The divergence of the graduate response modes points to the initial concerns of this study; that is, graduates perceptions and expectations are not adequately nor consistently in line with what becomes reality upon graduation. Implications for a comprehensive unit on career information in which the students do some of the research for themselves are clearly interpreted from Table 4.2.

Questionnaire - Section II

The second section of the questionnaire deals with which information is important for inclusion in a career information unit. The modes of the responses from each population were plotted in graph form in Table 4.3. The numbers represented here are Very Important (5), Important (4), Neutral (3), Unimportant (2), and Very Unimportant (1). Again, in interpreting this graph, only the fact that there are differences greater than, equal to, or less than were used for interpretation. This data, like the first section, is ordinal in nature and cannot indicate the amount of difference between a rank of 4 and a rank of 5.

TABLE 4.3 Career Information by Importance



There is somewhat less divergence in these plotted responses and the patterns vary only slightly when compared to the responses on Table 4.2. Since a mode of 4 or above would indicate Important or Very Important, only the areas falling below 4 need examination for purposes of inclusion in a unit of study on career management. The rest of the items are agreed upon by all the populations surveyed as items to be included in a career management unit.

Those items with modes below 4 from any of the plotted responses are Items 2, 3, 4, 11, 12, and 13. Items 2 (Employment Outlook) and 3 (Employment Statistics) having modes below 4 are indicative of the Specially Oriented Students (SOS) typically enrolling in proprietary, vocational programs. They are aware of the career field and its potential for employment before they select the program and do not need it re-emphasized after enrollment.

Item 4 (Specific Skills) is plotted below 4 by Admissions. This may be interpreted that their sales orientation assumes as a fact that the students will be taught all skills needed while they are enrolled. Items 11 (Additional Knowledge/Degrees), 12 (Job Obstacles) and 13 (Job Changes) may require further study. A possible interpretation of some of the modes falling below 4 is the short-term, fast-fix nature of the vocational programs in general. These programs and the personnel who work with the students who enroll and graduate from them have a specific,

immediate goal of placement in entry-level employment. The concepts of promotion and the skills needed for such may be an inherent problem of the short-term career program and not encountered until actual employment in the field.

Questionnaire - Section III

The third section of the questionnaire was developed to determine where and how often the information was presented to the student. This section was used to design a unit of instruction for the career management course and to point to changes in personnel training and inservice work. In Table 4.4, the responses by populations were tallied and tabulated. Because a respondent could circle more than one area, the frequencies of presentation by department varied item by item which is shown in the cumulative frequency column.

The information provided by this table can be used to coordinate efforts among personnel populations to assure conformity of information presented from the enrollment process through training and on to placement. The effects of the frequency of presentation, as well as the comprehensiveness of the presentations will have to be examined in a follow-up study of graduates after implementation of the unit on career management.

TABLE 4.4 Departments Presenting Career Information

	Admis- sion	Place- ment	Coord- inator	Career Mgmt	None	Frequency
Salary	28	56	29	27	0	140
Emp. Outlook	41	39	13	43	0	136
Emp. Stat	63	31	0	31	0	125
Skills	6	6	83	24	0	119
Attitudes	0	13	24	81	0	118
Letters	0	110	0	8	0	118
Resumes	0	109	0	9	0	118
Interviews	0	82	0	52	0	134
Co. Systems	0	59	0	35	24	118
Job Search	0	106	0	12	0	118
Degrees	0	0	0	51	67	118
Obstacles	0	20	0	32	66	118
Change Jobs	0	17	19	33	49	118

Summary

This chapter presented the responses obtained from the completed questionnaire instrument. Those involved in responding were Commonwealth College personnel including Admission Representatives, Program Coordinators, Career Counselors and Instructors, as well as 1984 - 1985 Commonwealth College graduates.

The information was obtained in three categories:

Presentation of career information; Importance of career information; and Areas/frequency of career information presentation. This information was extracted and presented in graphic and paragraph style.

The respondents indicated that information was presented in varying degrees by various departments. In general, each population concurred that most information was important to have accurately and comprehensively presented. An exception to this are Items 2 and 3, Employment Outlook and Employment Statistics. The theory of the Specially Oriented Students enrolled in vocational programs is a probable explanation for this exception.

The next chapter (Chapter Five) is devoted to the recommendations and conclusions for designing a unit of study on career research.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The problem presented in this study was to determine if a unit of instruction could be designed to facilitate aligning vocational student expectations of entry-level job entry and success with the reality of graduate experience. The study focused on traditional career search information as presented by Commonwealth College personnel and on its importance as perceived by Commonwealth College graduates.

A review of the related literature to this study revealed several issues particular to the "Specially Oriented Student" typically enrolled in vocational programs, particularly those enrolled in proprietary, short-term career programs.

A descriptive questionnaire form was designed for this study and was distributed to personnel departments of Commonwealth College as well as mailed to all 1984 - 1985 Commonwealth College, Virginia Beach Campus, graduates. The questionnaire was designed to obtain data on what information was currently presented; what information was considered important; and which departments were currently presenting this information.

The collected data was manually tabulated and presented in Chapter Four. A proposed, comprehensive unit of instruction for career search was developed.

Conclusions

Conclusions reached from evaluating the questionnaire information are as follows:

1. Admissions representatives presume all information is presented; however, concerns itself with the presentation only of facts helpful in sales --salaries, outlook, and statistics.
2. Placement personnel concentrate efforts on specific, entry-level job skills such as interview skills, resume and letter of application preparation; may not comprehensively cover job search methods, company hiring/evaluation systems, and employment skills and attitudes.
3. Coordinators are closely aligned in responses with placement. Overlapping dependency may be causing inadequate or narrow coverage of areas considered important by graduates.
4. Personnel departments converge in agreement on many areas of presentation and importance; Graduate responses diverge from personnel in many areas; this may indicate a coordination and concentration of efforts may be beneficial for personnel departments.
5. All respondents agree that coverage of employment outlook and employment statistics may be de-emphasized.
6. Graduates rated Items 4 (Skills), 5 (Attitudes), 8 (Interview skills), 9 (Company Systems), 10 (Job Search), 11 (Degrees), 12 (Obstacles), and 13 (Job change) as low in presentation. Items 4 (Skills), 8 (Interviews), 9 (Company systems), 10 (Job Search), 11 (Degrees), and 12 (Obstacles) as high in Importance. These ranks indicate special areas for the new unit on career search.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are indicated by the results of the questionnaires conclusions:

1. A comprehensive unit on career research should be presented in the Career Management Course (Appendix C).
2. Efforts between personnel departments should be coordinated and consistent.
3. Training for new personnel should include an overview of the career search information to maintain consistency within the departments.
4. Program Coordinators should be responsible for presenting generic career information in the Career Management course to assure uniform coverage.
5. Placement personnel should emphasize specific entry level career search information.
6. A unit on career search information should include life-long goals of continued learning for promotional skills.
7. Admissions personnel should be aware of entry level job obstacles and counsel incoming students on problems to be overcome during college tenure.
8. Company hiring, evaluations, and termination systems should be covered in a unit of career search instruction.
9. Entry level skills and attitudes as well as promotion skills should be researched in a unit of instruction.

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Appendix A

Commonwealth College

Virginia Beach Campus 4160 Virginia Beach Boulevard Virginia Beach, Virginia 23452 (804) 340-0222

October 20, 1985

Dear _____ :

Commonwealth College has always had as its mission to help each student who enters their school obtain the skills and attitudes necessary to go to work upon graduation. Our employer and graduate surveys provide us with critical information to update and revise our career curriculum on a regular basis.

This survey is being conducted to help us ascertain the information our graduates need in order to choose and obtain their jobs.

Please take a few minutes of your time to help us review this process. Your feedback as an alumni of our school is important to us and critical to those who follow you. The responses will be tabulated and presented in group form so your complete confidentiality is assured. You do not need to sign your name to the survey -- it has been coded by number so we can determine who responded; however, the coding will not become part of the public study.

We have provided you an addressed, stamped return envelope which will enable you to return this form promptly. Thank you for your cooperation.

Please remember that our placement office is continuously available to Commonwealth graduates should you wish to change your job or update your resume.

Sincerely yours,

Sally K. Shield
Academic Dean

Appendix B

Commonwealth College

Virginia Beach Campus 4160 Virginia Beach Boulevard Virginia Beach, Virginia 23452 (804) 340-0222

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED IMPORTANT AS CAREER PREPARATION. THIS SECTION OF THE FORM IS TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER THIS INFORMATION WAS PROVIDED TO YOU WHILE YOU ATTENDED COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE. PLEASE CIRCLE THE RESPONSE WHICH MOST CLOSELY MATCHES YOUR OPINION.

	Strongly Disagree	1
	Disagree	2
	Neutral	3
	Agree	4
	Strongly Agree	5

Specific information was provided on:

1. Expected entry-level salaries/wages.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The long term career outlook.	5	4	3	2	1
3. Local, regional, and national employment statistics.	5	4	3	2	1
4. Specific skills needed for entry-level employment.	5	4	3	2	1
5. Attitudes/personal characteristics most desired by employers.	5	4	3	2	1
6. Preparing letters of application	5	4	3	2	1
7. Constructing a personal resume.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Interview questions and techniques.	5	4	3	2	1
9. Company hiring practices and evaluation systems.	5	4	3	2	1
10. Alternate avenues for the job search process (want ads, etc).	5	4	3	2	1
11. Additional courses/degrees for promotion.	5	4	3	2	1
12. Obstacles preventing entry to job field.	5	4	3	2	1
13. Ways to leave or change jobs.	5	4	3	2	1

PART II

THIS SECTION IS TO ASCERTAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INFORMATION YOU RECEIVED (OR DID NOT RECEIVE) IN YOUR CAREER RESEARCH. PLEASE RANK EACH ITEM IN ITS IMPORTANCE TO OBTAIN THE FIRST JOB AFTER GRADUATION FROM COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE.

	Very Unimportant	1
	Unimportant	2
	Neutral	3
	Important	4
	Very Important	5

I consider:

1. Salary information	5	4	3	2	1
2. Career outlook	5	4	3	2	1
3. Employment statistics	5	4	3	2	1
4. Necessary skills to obtain job	5	4	3	2	1
5. Job attitudes and personal characteristics	5	4	3	2	1
6. Letters of application	5	4	3	2	1
7. Resume preparation	5	4	3	2	1
8. Interviewing skills	5	4	3	2	1
9. Company hiring/evaluation systems	5	4	3	2	1
10. Alternative job search methods	5	4	3	2	1
11. Knowledge/degrees for promotion	5	4	3	2	1
12. Job entry obstacles	5	4	3	2	1
13. Ways to leave or change jobs	5	4	3	2	1

PART III

THIS SECTION IS TO DETERMINE WHERE THIS INFORMATION IS PROVIDED. YOU MAY CIRCLE ONE OR MORE OF THE AVAILABLE DEPARTMENTS. YOU ARE PROVIDED WITH A "NONE" CHOICE IF YOU FEEL YOU WERE NEVER PROVIDED WITH THIS TYPE OF INFORMATION.

CARDEV -- Career Development Classes

COORD -- Program Coordinator

PLA -- Placement Officer

ADM -- Admission Representative

1. Salary information	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
2. Employment outlook	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
3. Employment statistics	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
4. Necessary skills	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
5. Desired attitudes	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
6. Letters of application	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
7. Resume preparation	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
8. Interview techniques	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
9. Company hiring/evaluation systems	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
10. Alternative job search methods	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
11. Knowledge/degrees for promotion	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
12. Job entry obstacles	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE
13. Ways to leave or change jobs	ADM	PLA	COORD	CARDEV	NONE

IF WE HAVE OMITTED ANY ITEMS YOU FEEL NEED TO BE ADDRESSED, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO ADD YOUR OWN COMMENTS.

1. What information could you have used that was not given to you while you attended Commonwealth College.

2. What information was given to you that was unnecessary or inaccurate.

Would you like a copy of this study's results? Yes _____ No _____

Appendix C

C A R E E R M A N A G E M E N T

I. Curriculum Foundations

A. Definition of the course area

Career Management is a first quarter, required subject for all career programs at Commonwealth System of Colleges, all campuses. It is an orientation course which includes areas of study pertinent to the personal, professional, and social success of the beginning college student and entry-level employee. It includes a myriad of educational units logically sequenced to introduce methods for effective adjustment during periods of transition. Students examine their career path in relation to their professional goals, personality characteristics, values, and physical and mental capabilities. The course lasts for one quarter term--12 weeks, and has 46 scheduled class periods of instruction.

B. Rationale for the study of Career Management

Beginning students at Commonwealth College have selected a career program prior to enrollment. Their reasons for selection are numerous and varied in factual knowledge. Often, it is a dream which they are seeking. Career Management is a required element of each career program because the units covered help the students gain a concrete, factual understanding of the career program they have chosen as well as the type of employment they can reasonably expect at the end of their studies.

The students, through teacher coordinated efforts, examine their personality characteristics, value systems, and personal philosophies

in relation to their career goals. They examine the personal attributes, both physical and mental, which are necessary for successful attainment of their goals. They learn to work with others and to develop interpersonal relationships with their peers and co-workers through research and teamwork projects.

In addition to examining themselves, students are given the opportunity to research their chosen career path in an effort to acquaint them with the reality of the job market. This is done through guest speakers, role playing, report research and presentation, use of Employment guides and salary surveys, and classroom visits by the Program Coordinators. The Career Management course should instill self-confidence and raise the self-esteem of all new students enrolled in the course.

C. Content Source - World of Work

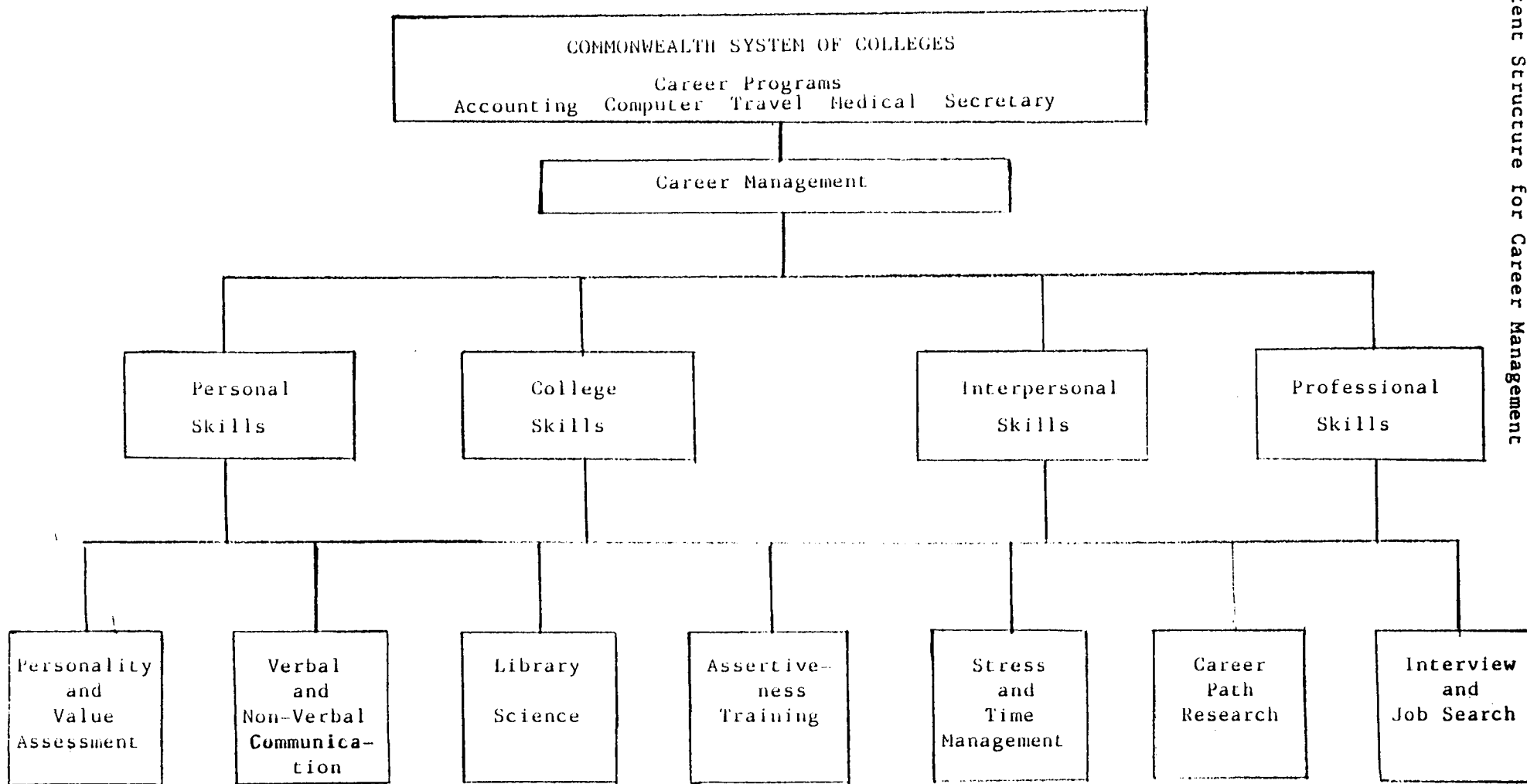
This course is constructed with input from the world of work. Various sources which contribute greatly to its eclectic content and to the quality of desired motivational outcomes include:

- National Placement/Employment surveys which obtain and delineate employer's needs. These have consistently stated that effective communication and interpersonal skills are among the most necessary ingredients for career success
- Commonwealth System of College's Career Search offices which are in direct contact with their local business communities, and who must respond to the requests of the business employers
- Commonwealth System-wide College Advisory Boards composed of local business people for each representative campus who discuss and recommend to the college the needs of the current job market and the skill requirements for successful entry level employment.
- College career counseling offices which document entry to college and entry to the work force as times of acute stressful adjustment and transition

--Research studies done on student morale, motivation, and retention which indicate the need for an orientation class designed specifically to reduce anxiety for the entry level student and to promote personal success.

D. Content Structure

(Please see next page)



E. Program Aim

To prepare each student for the successful attainment of personal and professional goals, and to ready them for the challenges and the responsibilities which accompany that success.

F. Course Goals

Upon completion of the Career Management course, the student will:

1. discover valuable insights to their career goals and life-long aims.
2. develop a firm understanding of their life value priorities and their eventual effect on career goal attainment.
3. analyze the necessary aptitudes, attitudes, and skill levels necessary for success in their career field.
4. research and analyze current, factual information concerning career opportunities in the career of their choice.
5. display basic skills in effective verbal and non-verbal communication.
6. develop and use associative memory skills to aid in immediate goal success.
7. develop an understanding of the principles and techniques of stress and time management which renders success a viable alternative.
8. develop an appreciation for effectual networking and interpersonal relationships with peers and co-workers.
9. learn to use the library as a friendly resource.
10. develop and practice valuable career search methods such as job opportunity search and interviewing techniques.

II. Curriculum Content

A. Scope

Although limited in time to a 12 week, 46 hour course, the breadth of this course is vast. The majority of the students enrolled in this course are already highly motivated and career goal oriented. The challenge lies in presenting the units of Career Management in a structured sequence with smooth transitions. Therefore, each unit is presented under the overall umbrella of the course Aim which guides the transition from unit to unit to maintain the thread of connection of each unit to the student's personal and professional success. In this effort, it is an imperative prerequisite that the course instructor be committed to the course aim and to the students' success.

The scope of this course includes units in development and assessment of personal skills, orientation to college skills, emphasis on the development of interpersonal relationships and their maintenance, and specific career search skills.

B. Sequence

The number of students in each Career Management course directly affects the length and breadth of unit development. The larger classes use more class periods to cover communications and memory skills, which inevitably must be compensated for by other units. Although unit goals remain constant and achievable, the sequence, time allotment, and methodology must be flexible and competently facilitated by the instructor. The following presents a tentative outline for an average class size of 25 to 30 students.

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UNIT NUMBER	UNIT TITLE	NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS
1	Course Introduction	2
2	Memory and Study Skills	4
3	Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication	8
4	Library Science	2
5	Personality and Life Values	5
6	Assertiveness Training	4
7	Stress/Time Management	6
8	Career Path Research	8
9	Interview and Job Search Skills	5
10	Course Summary and Evaluation	2
Total		46

C. Unit Specifications

(Please see next page)

CAREER PATH RESEARCH

UNIT 8: 8 CLASS PERIODS

GOAL: To have students develop a realistic, factual picture of their future entry level career position which will enable them to keep a concrete goal to actively pursue in the upcoming quarters of courses.

RATIONALE: Although entry to any college at any age can and should be a positive and rewarding experience, it is often initiated because of a fear of entering and/or dissatisfaction with the student's current job environment (or lack of one). For this reason, the college experience has riding upon it all of the student's dreams for a successful and prosperous future. Without a thorough introduction to the actual job "market", employment and salary conditions, and what is necessary for job attainment and job success, the student could spend all the time at college in a "dream world", and be as unprepared for the "real world" at the end of their new educational process as they were when they enrolled.

This unit attempts to bring the dream world into concrete focus and enable the student to begin preparation for the job on a quarter by quarter basis.

OBJECTIVES: The student will:

- examine entry level positions for current information on their career
- evaluate methods of obtaining career information and develop a strategy for their use
- know the importance of planning ahead for a career and the skill necessary for success and promotion
- understand and diminish the knowledge gaps between expectations and reality
- learn and practice the informational interviewing techniques
- set realistic job goals and develop activities for attaining them
- use self-knowledge gained in other Career Management units to evaluate career decisions

ACTIVITIES:

1. Group discussion to identify dichotomies in what is real and what students thought would happen.
2. Acquaint students with the "Salary Surveys" published by State Employment offices, College Placement Councils, etc.
3. Have guest speakers from the local employment office or from college placement to talk about entry level placement skills.
4. Student groups to develop an informational report on career choices by doing investigative research using formal reference material, personal interviewing, job site visits, etc.
5. Construct personal skill and qualification lists for successful job entry and promotion.
6. Create a list of potential employers for students.
7. Complete a written job goal complete with personal requirements and quarterly activities to be accomplished for successful attainment.
8. Group discussions on the obstacles to successful job entry and solutions for getting past the obstacles.
10. Have Commonwealth College graduates visit classes as guest speakers on what the student should concentrate on while in school.
11. Have employers of graduates be guest speakers on hiring systems, evaluation systems, desired skills and attitudes.

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