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Developing an Undergraduate Career Conference: Leveraging Mentorship to Promote Career Discovery

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Abstract

Are students ready for jobs when it comes time to graduation? This is a common question, and one that is often addressed in the media (e.g., Collie, 2019). Despite psychology being one of the most popular degree plans for undergraduate students (e.g., Higher Education Research Institute, 2008), many students in undergraduate psychology programs fail to see the relevance and value of their degree (Borden and Rajecki, 2000). In this work, we designed, delivered, and assessed a career *conference* for students in psychology. Intentionally different from a career fair where students seek jobs, this event applied a mentorship-based conference model. In this conference model, in addition to professional development training, industry mentors who work in professional fields related to psychology were invited to provide personal insight on their careers in a small-group format. Critical to this model, students were encouraged and able to ask questions that may not be appropriate for a job *fair* where hiring is happening. Further, this career model involved intentional connections with our Career Services office, allowing for programmatic delivery of career-based content within the domain-specific event. We provide early empirical evidence that this method of career development supports students in learning about career paths that psychology can lead to, identifying skills that will assist them in finding a career, feeling confident in their ability to network effectively, and feeling more connected with professionals in careers related to psychology. We suggest that this model may be beneficial across disciplines.

Est-ce que les étudiants et les étudiantes sont prêts à se lancer sur le marché du travail après qu'ils obtiennent leur diplôme? Ceci est une question que l'on se pose fréquemment et dont on parle souvent dans les médias (p. ex. Collie, 2019). Bien que la psychologie soit le projet de diplôme le plus populaire parmi les étudiants et les étudiantes de premier cycle (p. ex. Higher Education Research Institute, 2008), nombreux sont les étudiants et les étudiantes de premier cycle inscrits dans un programme de psychologie qui ne comprennent pas la valeur et la pertinence de leur diplôme (Borden et Rajecki, 2000). Dans cette recherche, nous avons conçu, mis en oeuvre et évalué un colloque sur la carrière à l'intention des étudiants et des étudiantes en psychologie. Intentionnellement différent des salons de l'emploi au cours duquel les étudiants et les étudiantes sont à la recherche d'un emploi, ce colloque a mis en application un modèle de colloque basé sur le mentorat. Dans ce modèle de colloque, outre la formation en matière de développement professionnel, des mentors de l'industrie qui travaillent dans des milieux professionnels liées à la psychologie ont été invités à fournir un aperçu personnel sur leur carrière à de petits groupes. Élément essentiel de ce modèle, les étudiants et les étudiantes ont été encouragés à poser des questions et ont posé des questions qui n'auraient pas été appropriées lors d'un salon de l'emploi où l'on embauche. De plus, ce modèle de carrière implique des connexions intentionnelles avec notre bureau d'orientation professionnelle et permet la fourniture programmatique d'un contenu axé sur la carrière dans le cadre d'un événement spécifique à un domaine. Nous fournissons les premières preuves empiriques que cette méthode de développement de carrière aide les étudiants et les étudiantes à comprendre les carrières vers lesquelles la psychologie peut mener, elle permet d'identifier les compétences qui les aideront à trouver une carrière, à avoir confiance dans leur aptitude à réseauter de manière efficace et à se sentir mieux connectés avec les professionnels dans des carrières liées à la psychologie. Nous suggérons que ce modèle pourrait être bénéfique dans toutes les disciplines.

Keywords
career, career development, career readiness, mentorship, higher education, professional development; carrière, développement de carrière, préparation à une carrière, mentorat, enseignement supérieur, développement professionnel

Psychology programs are currently among the most popular for undergraduate students (Higher Education Research Institute, 2008). According to the American Psychological Association (APA) and Statistics Canada, psychology is consistently ranked in the top 10 most popular university degree programs (American Psychological Association, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2011). Interestingly, despite the significant interest in psychology undergraduate degree programs, many students in undergraduate psychology programs fail to see the relevance and value of their degree (Borden & Rajecki, 2000). Indeed, when comparing against alumni in other degree programs, psychology graduates reported the lowest perceptions of relatedness between their training and career. For example, when asked if their university degree was directly related to their career, only 20% to 25% of psychology alumni reported a correspondence (Borden & Rajecki, 2000).

Although some students report a mismatch between undergraduate training in psychology and careers, other research shows that students with undergraduate training in psychology report high workforce readiness. For example, when asked about their preparedness and competency regarding workforce readiness, alumni from psychology programs indicated competency and a high perceived level of workforce readiness (Landrum, Hettich, & Wilner, 2010). Thus, data appears to be mixed on whether graduates from psychology are well prepared for the workforce.

Interestingly, when exploring workforce readiness through a programmatic lens, an important paradox arises: (some) students in psychology report failing to see relevance and value in their degree when it comes to careers, but employers explicitly desire attributes directly related to training in psychology. According to a survey of employers conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2016), the most desirable attributes in job candidates included skills related to leadership, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, work ethic, initiative, adaptability, and analytical and technical skills (Stewart, Wall, & Marciniec, 2016). There is a large degree of overlap across a variety of measures of employer-desired attributes. For example, the skills most preferred by Canadian employers in 2013 were: verbal communication skills, teamwork skills, analytical skills, strong work ethic, and problem-solving skills (Smith and Lam, 2013), and the Royal Bank of Canada projects that the top 5 skills to be in demand are active listening, speaking, critical thinking, reading comprehension, and monitoring (Royal Bank of Canada, 2018). There is a high degree of consistency in these desired attributes -communication, working in a team, critical and analytical thinking, and problem solving are consistently desired, and they are also consistently taught across programs in psychology. Indeed, demonstrating benefits of training in psychology, there is objective evidence that social science graduates are successful, financially, post-graduation: Canadian data demonstrate relatively steady financial growth for psychology graduates over time (Finnie, Dubois, & Miyairi, 2018).

Unfortunately, many inaccurate and harmful myths exist about what psychology is and is not (e.g., Lilienfeld, 2012). For example, despite being a science, psychology is often left out of lists of STEM (i.e., science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields, members of the public have historically viewed psychology as less rigorous than other disciplines, and it is sometimes viewed as a field of "common sense" (Lilienfeld, 2012). Thus, one critical issue for the discipline to address is the beliefs of both students and employers with respect to skillsets that students are equipped with. Indeed, when considering the most desirable attributes from employers in light of the American Psychological Association's (2013) five primary learning goals for undergraduate students enrolled in psychology programs, the relevance of training in psychology for a variety of careers becomes abundantly clear: students with training in psychology have knowledge, skills, and attributes that employers desire (see Table 1). Given the widespread

misunderstanding of psychology as a discipline, we intentionally include a table of the American Psychological Association's learning goals:

Table 1
American Psychological Association Learning Goals for the Undergraduate Psychology Major

Goal	Learning Outcomes
Goal 1: Knowledge Base in Psychology	1.1 Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology 1.2 Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains 1.3 Describe applications of psychology
Goal 2: Scientific Inquiry & Critical Thinking	2.1 Use scientific reasoning to interpret psychological phenomena 2.2 Demonstrate psychology information literacy 2.3 Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving 2.4 Interpret, design, and conduct basic psychological research 2.5 Incorporate sociocultural factors in scientific inquiry
Goal 3: Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World	3.1 Apply ethical standards to evaluate psychological science and practice 3.2 Build and enhance interpersonal relationships 3.3 Adopt values that build community at local, national, and global levels
Goal 4: Communication	4.1 Demonstrate effective writing for different purposes 4.2 Exhibit effective presentation skills for different purposes 4.3 Interact effectively with others
Goal 5: Professional Development	5.1 Apply psychological content and skills to career goals 5.2 Exhibit self-efficacy and self-regulation 5.3 Refine project management skills 5.4 Enhance teamwork capacity 5.5 Develop meaningful professional direction for life after graduation

In light of employer desired attributes, especially given risks of employers misunderstanding the nature of training in psychology, an obvious goal is to educate employers on

the knowledge, skills, and abilities that training in psychology provides. This is a critically important goal that requires collaborative and comprehensive communications across industries. A second goal also emerges: it seems clear that despite overlap with employer desired attributes, at least some psychology students do not see the connections between their undergraduate training in psychology and their readiness for the workforce. This is an important call to action for educators in psychology: psychology undergraduate degree programs, especially because of their focus on scientific and data literacy, are directly applicable to many careers.

Activating is a term colloquially used in careers contexts to communicate the need for students to identify ways in which curriculum-based knowledge applies in the context of careers. There are several ways that educators might "activate" curricular knowledge in the context of careers. For example, some programs offer specific courses that address domain knowledge in the context of careers (e.g., Landrum, 2014; Norris, 2019), online modules and videos are available to support students in job seeking (e.g., Appleby, 2018; Budnick & Barber, 2018; Nast, 2015), and many, many books have been written (e.g., Kuther and Morgan, 2019; Landrum & Davis, 2013; Norris, 2019; Super, 2008; Sternberg, 2016). A method of "activating" this knowledge that is not often addressed is by leveraging relationships with professionals in the community to engage students in career development.

A Mentorship-Based Model of Career Conference

Given the discrepancy in student beliefs about the value of undergraduate training in psychology, there appears to be a need to provide students in psychology with training about the relevance of their training for possible career opportunities, and also to provide students with the tools and insights for activating this knowledge when it comes time. This need fits with a broader demand for career training: despite 74% of Canadians being fully employed who hold a Bachelor's degree (Statistics Canada, 2018), recent research has demonstrated that many undergraduate students are concerned about employment after obtaining their Bachelor's degree. Working to fill this gap, some academic programs are quite active in promoting career options for their students and connecting their students with potential employers. For example, many business schools host career fairs where potential employers set up booths to interact with, recruit, and interview students. Some career fairs are targeted to students in *all* majors because many employers hire across all majors rather than focusing on specific departments. Surprisingly, despite the popularity of career fairs, there appears to be little scholarship regarding the influence of career fairs on student *learning* about careers. This lack of research could be because the primary goal of most career fairs is to connect students with potential employers rather than promoting professional development and career exploration.

Rather than promote specific *jobs*, and in contrast to the goals of having students secure a position, the intention of the proposed career *conference* model is *not* to help students in securing a job through this event itself. Rather, the intention is to enhance awareness of knowledge and skills developed through training in psychology, promote learning and discovery about the many career paths that are open to undergraduate students in psychology, and to connect students with industry mentors across a variety of industries who can share experiences and insights about their own career paths. Benefits of mentorship are well-known: mentorship can support advancement of professional skills, increased confidence, development of professional identity, and academic productivity (Johnson, 2002). Applying mentorship in a career conference model is understudied, but not new: early work demonstrated efficacy for a mentorship-based career training model.

Specifically, a career conference in 1973, not linked with any one discipline, used a mentorship-model approach to career training, inviting industry professionals to act as mentors for female undergraduate students. The goal of the conference was to expose students to various career opportunities, to allow students to meet mentors and discuss their careers, and to assist students in navigating resources available on campus regarding career opportunities. Paramount to this conference was using professional women as role models to speak to female students in small groups. Overall, this conference had positive outcomes with overwhelmingly positive feedback, and students appreciated the ability to interact with professionals in an interactive setting (Plotsky & Goad, 1974).

The Current Project

A career conference was designed to: a) support students in recognizing knowledge and skills developed through training in psychology, and to facilitate methods for using these in careers; b) promote learning and discovery of a variety of accessible career paths; and c) leverage the benefits of mentorship. This career conference was developed with the following components: formal professional development training through Career Services, a keynote address discussing an invited guest's career journey, small-group mentorship sessions with mentors across disciplines and industries from in and out of academia, and open networking time. This pilot project analyzes the efficacy of this career conference model based on conferences which ran in-person in March of 2018 and 2019.

Overview of Career Conference Programming

Morning Programming

The initial session of the conference addressed the first learning goal: to enable students to identify their skills, to discover the skills that employers value, and to understand how their skills *match* employer desired attributes. Leveraging resources on campus, the Campus Career Services team supported the delivery of this content. Topics covered included: professional development, developing an elevator pitch, and networking. These topics are not often covered in traditional undergraduate courses. This dedicated professional development time allowed students the opportunity to identify and assess the skills that they already possessed, and to begin developing new skills related to professional activities. This hands-on training session encouraged students to reflect on these skills, focusing on their strengths and areas in which they could improve.

Lunch Programming

Addressing the needs for students to explore a variety of career paths, and to connect with mentors, lunch programming involved a presentation by an invited keynote speaker who discussed their career trajectory and shared their story, explaining their current career and the steps and setbacks that led them to their position. This session concluded with an open question and answer period, allowing students to speak directly with the keynote speaker.

Afternoon Programming

The itinerary for the conference was designed so that students would have an opportunity to develop skills and knowledge with respect to their own training, and to have an opportunity to learn from a keynote speaker, before connecting students directly with mentors. The intention was to scaffold learning throughout the day so that students would be equipped for positive engagements. The afternoon session consisted of small-group sessions where students met with industry mentors and the keynote guests for approximately 30 minutes in groups of approximately 8 individuals. Following these formal sessions was an opportunity for networking by way of informal chatting, with food provided. Past research has demonstrated that inviting alumni to connect with current students encourages collaboration, partnerships, and builds community across generations (Miller, 2010). Thus, in addition to professionals working in careers in and adjacent to psychological science broadly defined, several alumni also working in these industries were intentionally invited to the conference as mentors. This helped to highlight the relevant and realistic career paths that other people with similar backgrounds have pursued, serving as useful and personally relevant examples for current students.

Method

Undergraduate students in the psychology department were invited to attend the now-annual Career Conference in March of 2018 and March of 2019. Approximately 100 students were registered for each conference. Each conference included professional development activities, keynote speakers, round-table mentorship sessions, and networking opportunities. Primary objectives included: promoting student awareness of the many ways in which training in psychology can be relevant for a variety of careers, highlighting diverse careers related to undergraduate training in psychology, and leveraging mentorship to build connections between students and professionals in careers related to psychology.

Participants

Participants were 24 undergraduate students, primarily psychology majors, at a mid-sized Canadian university who attended the career conference in either 2018 or 2019. All participants included in this analysis provided consent and completed pre- and post-surveys related to their perceptions of the career conference. Although data from 94 career conference attendees was collected, post-conference consent was received from only 24. Thus, only data from those 24 attendees is reported in this manuscript.

Procedure

Pre- and post-surveys were completed by student conference attendees.
Phase 1: Pre-Conference. Immediately prior to the beginning of the career conference, students completed a pre-survey regarding their awareness of careers available for those with a degree in psychology, whether they felt they had the skills to find careers that interest them, their confidence in their networking abilities, their connectedness to psychology professionals, the relevance of their psychology training in future careers, their goals for the careers conference, what sparked their interest in the event, and their feedback on the registration process.

Phase 2: Conference Activities. The conference opened with a welcome. The Career Services Team then facilitated several professional development activities, placing an emphasis on networking skills. For example, students were given an opportunity to practice a "one-minute elevator pitch" with peers, and to practice approaching one another in a mock networking session. Professional development activities were followed by a keynote luncheon where speakers shared personal career paths and also held interactive question-and-answer sessions. Following the keynote address, there were interactive round-table sessions in which students had the opportunity to select a mentor and hear about their career, educational requirements for their position, and were able to have a personal conversation in a small-group environment. There were 10-15 mentors at the conference each year with diverse backgrounds and careers (e.g., forensic psychology, social work, marketing, education, occupational therapy, and genetic counselling).

Phase 3: Post-Conference. The conference concluded with a final, informal networking session with the invited industry mentors, allowing students to apply the skills they had gained in the earlier training session to network with mentors and each other. Students completed a post-survey at the end of the day measuring changes on relevant beliefs as a result of the conference, and reporting on key lessons they would take away from the conference (i.e., the most helpful aspects of the conference and any changes they would make to the event).

Measures

Pre- and Post-Conference Measures

The following items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale measuring how much respondents endorse each statement. Responses ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). These items were measured on the day of the conference, with pre-items being measured just prior to the event beginning, and post-items being assessed as the conference concluded.

Subjective Knowledge. This item measured the participant's subjective knowledge of different career paths related to the field of psychology. This item was phrased as: "I know a lot about the career paths that psychology can lead to."

Subjective Skills. This item measured the participant's self-reported belief that they possessed sufficient skills related to career search. Participants were given the statement: "I have the skills to find careers related to my interests."

Confidence. This item measured the participant's confidence in their ability to network effectively. Participants were given the statement: "I am confident in my networking abilities."

Connection to Industry Professionals. This item measured the participant's self-reported connectedness to industry professionals in fields related to psychology. Participants were given the statement: "I feel connected with professionals in careers related to psychology."

Relevant Training. This item measured participant belief regarding the relevance of their training in psychology for future careers. were given the statement: "My training in psychology will be relevant for my future career."

Pre-Conference Measures

In addition to the quantitative survey items, the following open-ended items were assessed only on the pre-conference survey: "What goals do you hope to achieve during the Psychology

Careers Conference?", "What was it that sparked your interest in this event?" and "Do you have feedback on the registration process?"

Post-Conference Measures

The following items were assessed only on the post-conference survey form. Data were collected immediately following the conference on the day of the event.

Perceived Value of the Conference. This item was framed as: "This career conference was a worthwhile way to spend my time."

Likeliness to Attend Again. This item was framed as: "I am likely to attend future events similar to this."

Open-Ended Responses. In addition to the quantitative survey items, students were posed a series of open-ended questions: "What are 2-3 key things that you will take away from this conference," "The most helpful part of today was…" and "What would you change about this event?"

Results

Data analysis only included participants who completed both pre-conference and post-conference surveys in addition to the consent section of both surveys ($N = 24$). A repeated measures MANOVA was conducted with the continuous quantitative pre- and post- conference data to examine the overall effectiveness of the conference.[1] All pre-conference and post-conference dependent variable scores were included simultaneously in the model.

Comparison of Pre-and Post- Conference Assessments

Quantitative results support statistically significant increases on most indices measured. These are displayed in Figure 1.

Pre-Conference Open Ended Responses

In addition to quantitative pre-conference responses, conference attendees also responded to open-ended items. Recognizing the pilot nature of this assessment, each item was coded by tallying the key themes from each set of responses. Common ideas were grouped together to identify recurrent themes. If an idea was mentioned by more than two participants, the idea was made into a new category. If some responses mentioned multiple ideas, each distinct idea was coded separately. If an idea was only mentioned once, it was not created into a theme. Ethics clearance did not include allowance for publishing of individual comments, and as a result of the descriptive nature of this data, graphs representing key themes are provided below.

Students attended the conference with primary goals of discovering career paths, networking, and learning (Figure 2).
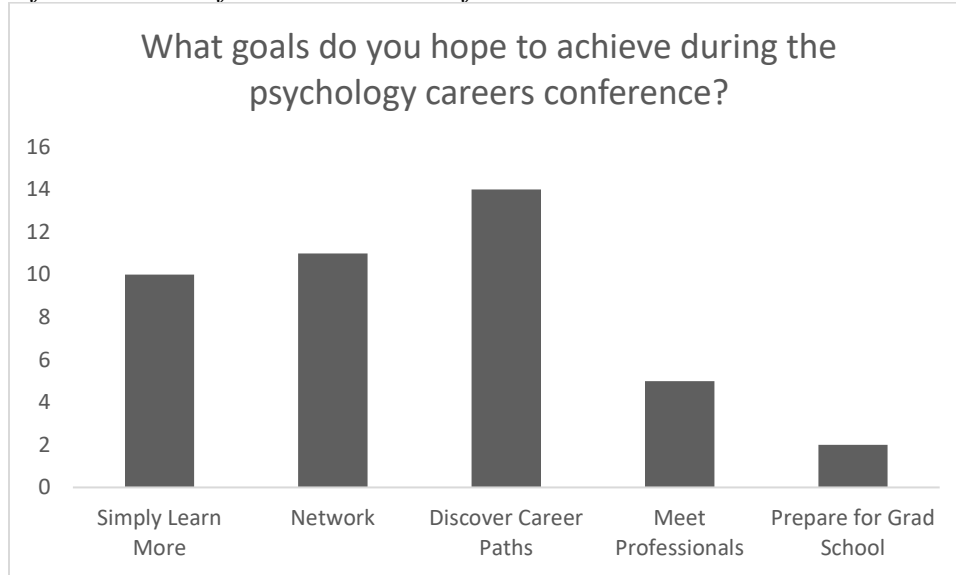
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[1] The conclusions drawn were the same when the data was tested using paired-samples *t*-tests.

Figure 1

Student Pre- and Post-Conference Beliefs Regarding Psychology and Careers.
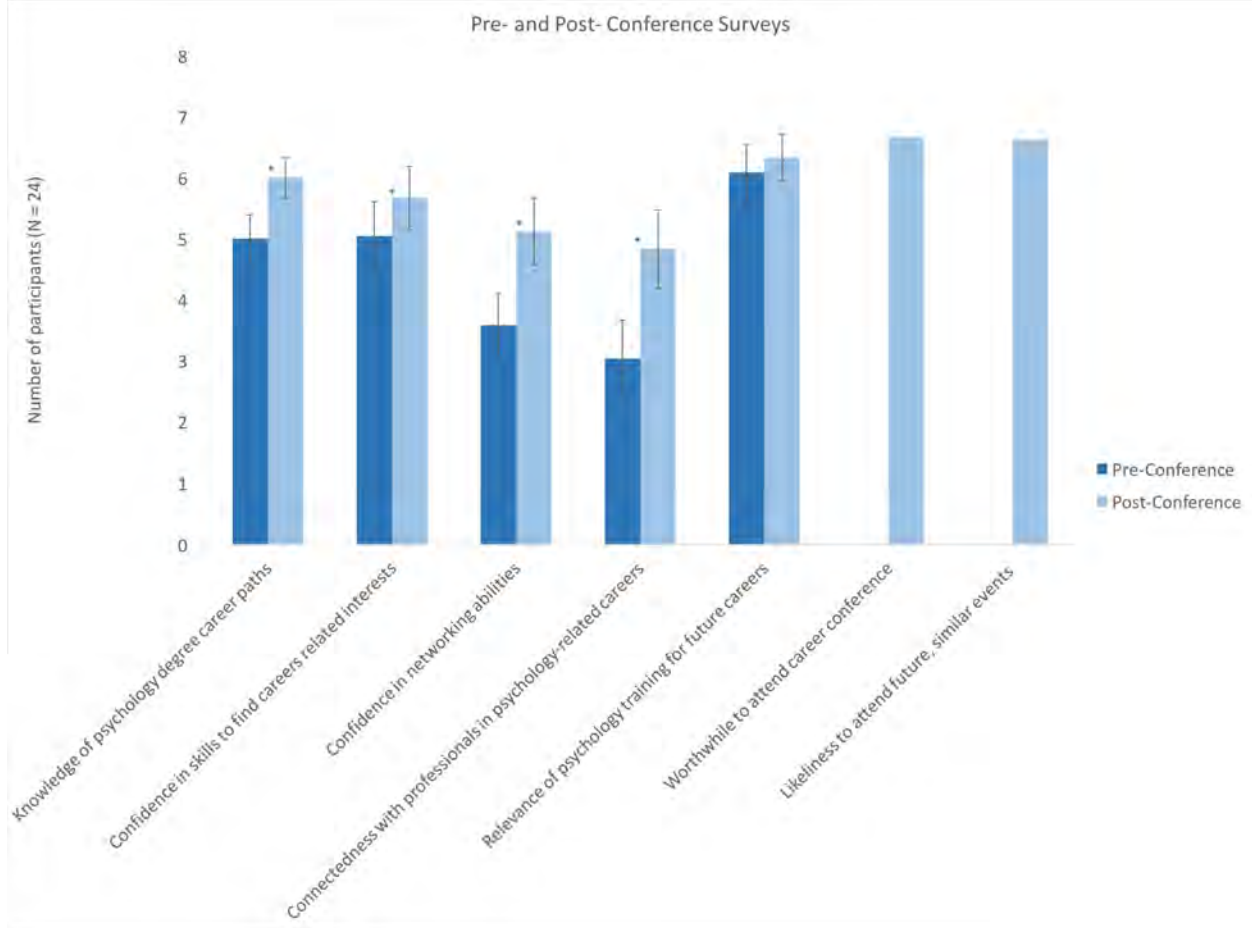
Note. Error bars reflect 95% confidence intervals. * $p < .05$. $N = 24$.
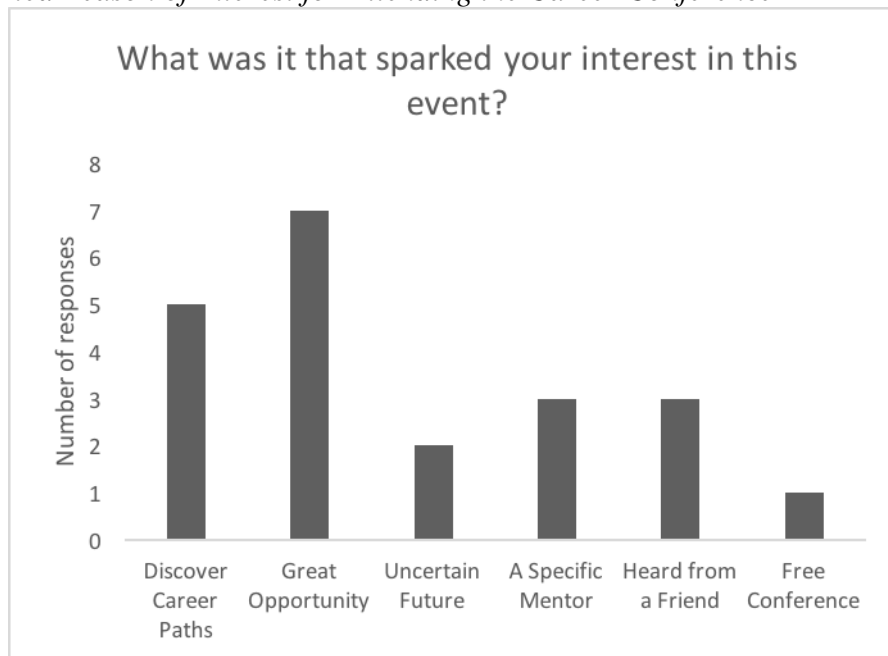
Figure 2.
Student Pre-Conference Goals for the Career Conference

Note. N = 24.

Students attended the conference largely because it was considered to be a great opportunity (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Student-Reported Reason of Interest for Attending the Career Conference

Note. N = 24.

Post-Conference Responses

Post-conference quantitative data showed that students believed the event was a worthwhile way to spend their time ($N = 24$, $M = 6.67$ on a 7-point scale with higher numbers reflecting positivity, $SD = .82$), and they also reported that they would be likely to attend a similar event in the future ($N = 24$, $M = 6.63$, on a 7-point scale with higher numbers reflecting positivity, $SD = .97$). Post-conference open ended surveys were coded in the same way as pre-conference responses. Open-ended data showed that students left the conference with skills related to networking and messages that it is okay for career plans to change (Figure 4). They also reported that the round-table sessions were the most helpful part of the day (Figure 5), and though most students reported that they would not like any specific changes, length and diversity of mentors are important areas for future development (Figure 6).
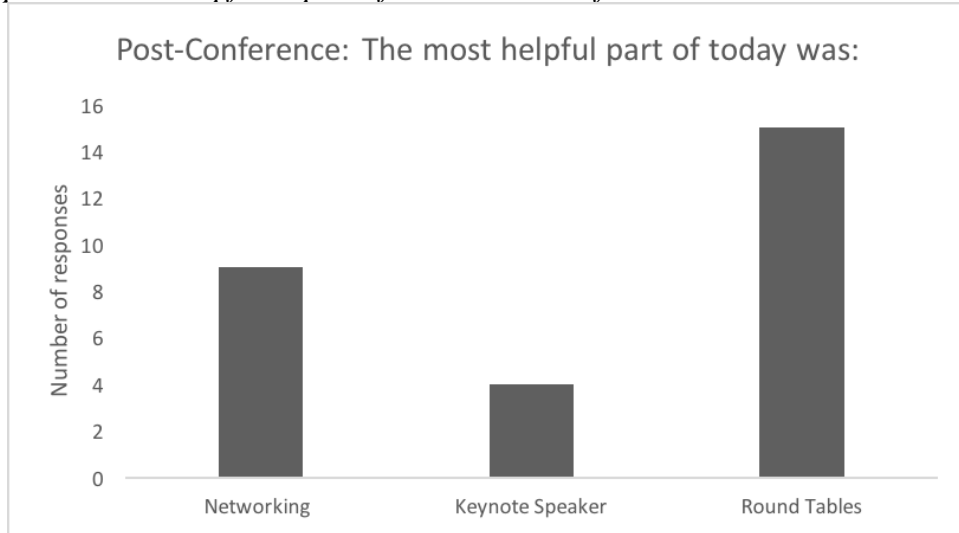
Figure 4
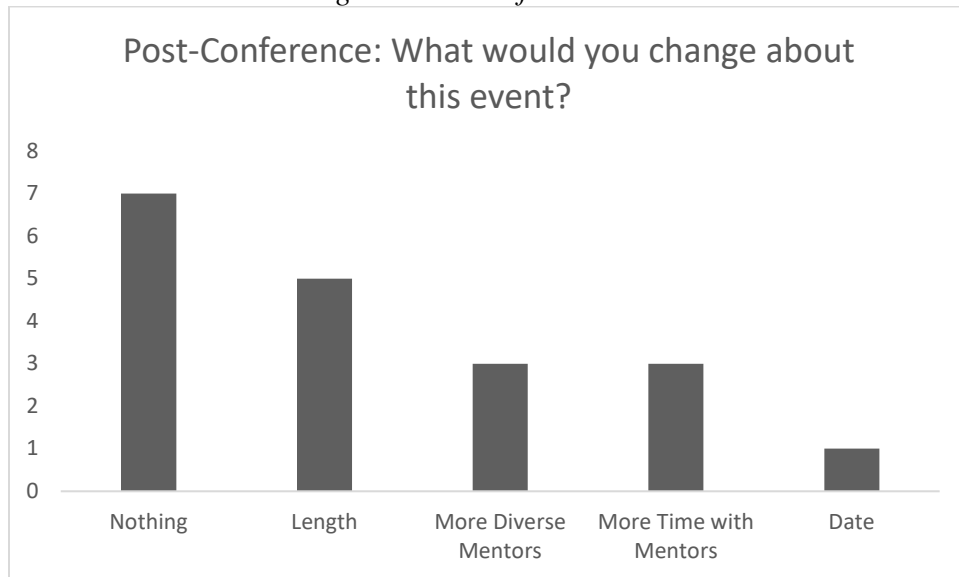*Student-Reported Take-Away Messages from the Career Conference*

Note. $N = 24$.

Figure 5

Student-Reported Most Helpful Aspect of the Career Conference

Post-Conference: The most helpful part of today was:

Note. N = 24.

Figure 6

Student Feedback on Potential Changes to the Conference

Post-Conference: What would you change about this event?

Note. N = 24

Discussion

The purpose of this pilot study was to assess the efficacy of a psychology career conference leveraging a mentorship-model. This career conference was developed in response to a need for career training for undergraduate psychology students. Key goals were: to demonstrate to students the value of their psychology degree in the workforce, to help students discover a wide variety of career paths available, and to employ a mentorship model to integrate the importance of

mentorship in career training. This intervention, overall, appears to have been positively received by participants.

Of important note is that the constructs measured (e.g., confidence in networking abilities) are not necessarily directly linked to employer's most desirable attributes, and thus the current data do not address whether the specific learning outcomes were attained. The conference was constructed to directly achieve the learning objectives outlined for the conference, and students completed work related to this at the conference; however, this knowledge was not assessed in the current data. The intention of this pilot assessment was to determine whether students believed this event to be worthwhile, and whether this event meaningfully shifted student beliefs about their career readiness. Important next steps include: assessing knowledge (rather than beliefs) with respect to careers, determining the degree to which knowledge and beliefs predict long term career trajectories, and determining the relative strength of knowledge, beliefs, and professional relationships in predicting long term career trajectories.

As noted, previous research has demonstrated that at least some students fail to see a connection between their training in psychology and careers (e.g., Borden & Rajecki, 2000). Interestingly, it is worth noting that students in the current data set had already perceived their psychology training as being very relevant for their future careers, and as a result, there was not a significant difference between pre-survey and post-survey responses to this question (see "relevance of psychology training for future careers" in Figure 2). This ceiling effect may likely be a result of a few possible reasons: 1) the relevance of their psychology training already was heavily emphasized in their program, 2) student attendees at the career conference were biased toward noticing the relevance in their psychology training, and/or 3) student perceptions of training in psychology have changed over time. Further exploration is needed to examine this shift in attitudes more closely.

With the exception of those with no change in beliefs about the relevance of psychology for careers, student responses suggest that students experienced positive shifts with respect to learning about career paths that psychology can lead to, identifying skills that will assist them in finding a career, feeling confident in their ability to network effectively, and feeling more connected with professionals in careers related to psychology. Thus, we believe that the overarching goals of conference, at least for those students who responded to the survey, were achieved: after attending the conference, students self-reported being better able to identify their skills that match onto employer desired attributes, feeling more confident in their networking ability, and the mentorship-model appeared to be successful in connecting students with industry professionals. Reinforcing the quantitative survey responses, the open-ended items from the post-conference surveys suggest that participants' main take-aways centered around key themes: the development of networking skills, and an understanding that career paths are nonlinear and that it is alright for plans to change. As noted, student self-reported beliefs are not necessarily reflective of skill and knowledge development. Future research should assess learning outcomes in a more direct manner to determine the degree to which student beliefs and knowledge are related, and the degree to which these both predict long term career activities.

Limitations & Future Directions

Consistent with applied research, there were limitations associated with this research project, especially those related to experimental control. These limitations highlight the need for

further research, and also shed light on new research opportunities. We hope these also serve as a call-to-action for empirical career research within psychology.

A critical concern with this research is the small sample size ($N = 24$) that was available for statistical analysis. The intention of this data collection was primarily for program evaluation, and academic research benefits were secondary to evaluating the efficacy of this event for internal use. The sample used for research reflected only the students who chose to complete both pre-conference surveys and post-conference surveys, and who consented to have their data used for research by generating a code that was written on the top of both surveys. There were, however, approximately 100 students signed up to attend the conference each year, resulting in a very low response rate for publication. One obvious question is whether this data suffered from response bias: it could be that only those students who enjoyed the conference responded to the surveys and provided the code to indicate consent. In the future, rather than paper surveys on tables for feedback that require a code generation, we will use electronic surveys for pre- and post-conference measures. This will help to increase accessibility for students who may have had to leave throughout the day, and to also promote anonymity for those who may have felt uncomfortable responding at the event itself.

Another limitation of this study was that we did not conduct a follow-up survey with participants after the conference itself, as the post-conference surveys were conducted at the end of the day of the conference. Attendees may have left the conference feeling an elevated sense of inspiration and motivation, which may dissipate over time. As such, administering a follow-up survey several months after the conference would allow for the measuring of longer-term, lasting effects of the conference. It would also be interesting to assess whether the *mentorship* component of the event mediated positive student evaluations as a result of its social nature.

Consistent with earlier notes, the current research explored student beliefs rather than assessing specific knowledge and skills related to the learning objectives of this conference. Future research should specifically assess the degree to which both *knowledge* and *beliefs* have changed as a result of this conference, and explore the degree to which each of these variables impact long-term career behaviours. This approach provides an opportunity to more fulsomely explore factors that mediate "success," and also to broaden definitions of career success. For example, in addition to salary and position as indicators of success, other factors to explore might include working in a preferred geographic location, quality of life, overall job satisfaction, etc. Indeed, demonstrating the importance of longitudinal work in this field, an individual's preferred metrics of success may change over time.

When considering generalizability of this event to other disciplines, it is important to recognize that this conference was conducted with students who are taking courses in psychology. Career training in psychology tends to be underrepresented within the discipline, and so students in psychology may find greater benefit in events like this compared to students in other disciplines where career training may be more embedded within the curriculum (e.g., business). Further, skills in a "bench-focused" discipline like chemistry might vary greatly and not lend themselves to professional development in the same manner. There is a clear need for multidisciplinary work to develop a more comprehensive theoretical framework for career development efficacy.

Often not considered, it is worth exploring unintended benefits of involving mentors that may arise from career conferences. For example, it is hoped that there are positive benefits for any mentors who volunteer in this capacity, and there may be program benefits that result from maintaining close ties with alumni. These, among other benefits, are worth investigating to have a deeper understanding of the overall benefits of this career conference.

A challenge with the event, not linked with the research methodology used here, is that despite approximately 100 sign-ups each year, the actual attendance is less. This could be due to numerous reasons. For example, students may have decided that they did not have time to attend the conference, they forgot, etc. To help promote day-of attendance, future conferences may involve a more intensive sign-up procedure, and reminders sent in the weeks prior to the conference reminding students that they have registered for mentor time with campus guests.

In the time of COVID-19, and even beyond, mentorship-based career conferences can be adapted to an online environment to promote accessibility. For example, in 2021 a condensed version of this event was held online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of limited capacity during a tumultuous time, data were not systematically collected for analysis, which is unfortunate. Anecdotally, this event ran extremely well online. Additionally, the Canadian Psychological Association, in collaboration with the Canadian Society for Brain, Behaviour and Cognitive Science, held a virtual career fair in November of 2020 which brought together students and mentors in psychological science from across Canada. Capitalizing on benefits of virtual events, online career conferences increase the variety of industry mentors who can attend, and also promote accessibility for students who may be off-campus (e.g., distance students).

Conclusions

This pilot data provides initial positive evidence for a career conference in psychology that includes professional development, career-related talks from keynote speakers, round-table mentorship sessions, and networking opportunities. Specifically, students report that this type of event facilitates learning about career paths that psychology can lead to, identifying skills that will assist them in finding a career, feeling confident in their ability to network effectively, and feeling more connected with professionals in careers related to psychology. Going forward, this model for a career conference would benefit from more rigorous analysis of a) the key mediators of positive benefits, b) an exploration of long-term changes in career related behaviours as a result of attending career conferences, c) a comparison of outcomes between traditional career fairs and career conferences such as this event (where no job prospects are being discussed), and d) consideration of the broader positive impacts that may result from these types of initiatives. Further, as a result of adaptations required due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a career conference with this model has successfully been hosted online. Research should explore the degree to which creating accessible online career conferences can promote positive career behaviours for those who are unable to attend face-to-face conferences, broadening the impact of such events.

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