

A Kaleidoscope: Using True Colors™ and the Holland Scale for Career Exploration

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Problem

Many students in higher education institutions present themselves as undeclared majors and over time these students become high risks for academic failure. Noel (1985) claimed that, “uncertainty about what to study is the most frequent reason that talented students give for dropping out of college” (p. 12). Anderson (1985) concurred and suggested that uncertainty and indecision about career plans is a negative personal barrier to persistence for the undecided. Current studies have shown that one out of every four college students will drop out after his/her first year (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). For this reason many higher education institutions consider retention to be a very high priority.

Research has shown that the first step in any major career decision-making process is self-knowledge. Many students begin their collegiate careers with a large measure of career uncertainty and require guidance from faculty advisors and mentors.

Purpose

The major focus of this study was improved self-knowledge for our undeclared students which would result in more carefully-focused career decisions. The Pre-Major

Academic Advising Center works on a continuing basis with over 1700 undecided students. Students in this exploring phase require more than one hour of scheduled advisement and this may not always be humanly possible. This study examined the relevance and success of three highly informative and career-specific workshops, based on the True Colors Model™ of personality types coupled with the Holland Scale of Career Themes, for one-hundred fifty undecided students at three different times during the academic year (September 2010, November 2010, and February 2011).

The True Colors™ Model has evolved as a very user-friendly version of the work of Karl Jung, Katharine Cooke Myers, and Isabel Myers Briggs. By utilizing color as a metaphor, the True Colors™ Model effectively defines personality types/ learning styles and in conjunction with the Holland Scale assists in directing students' career choices.

Relevant Literature

The Ridgell and Lounsbury study (2004) concluded that the predictors of academic achievement consisted of non-cognitive measures, such as personality traits, as well as cognitive measures. In a similar study, Dyer (1987) determined that specific personality traits in addition to strong cognitive acumen predicted the possibility of strong academic performance. Within the last 20 years a number of research studies have addressed the link between students' cognitive ability and personality traits and the same students' performance and success in higher education (Dyer, 1987; and O'Brien, 2000). From these studies, research suggests that personality may be a factor that is worth consideration when predicting the academic success of a given sample of collegiate students. Because of the diversity which exists there is no one proven methodology which works best with every undecided student (Steele & McDonald, 2000).

Methods

In preparing and scheduling the three True Colors™/Holland Scale workshops, critical times for undeclared majors during the academic year were chosen. These included: a) the beginning of the school year, b) the week after midsemester examinations, and c) the month after final grades had been released. To gather campus-wide interest and attendance, flyers and emails were generated across the entire campus for several weeks prior to the event.

The workshops were three hours in duration and afforded opportunity to gather data before, during and after the presentations. The Career Decision Scale Pre/Post Tests were used in addition to a locally-prepared qualitative instrument with general and open-ended probes addressing the student's level of career uncertainty. All data collection instruments were used in anonymity.

During the workshop itself the students responded favorably to the True Colors™ presentation and readily identified their types/styles. Additional activities and group discussions guided the students in transferring their newly-acquired self-knowledge to the descriptions of careers which worked well with their personal strengths, needs, and values. This was the most productive part of the experience and the students readily related to the careers which embraced their personality style and type.

Results and Conclusions

Each of the workshops was scheduled at a time during the academic year when students might be stressing over their course work or experiencing academic failure. The

number of students responding was much greater than those in attendance on a given day. These results were consistent with many of these undecided students' inability to follow through on academic commitments related to their career-direction options.

There was a strong degree of positive feedback from the students who attended the workshops and many students reported much more focus in their choosing and fewer instances of career indecision. These examples of qualitative data were useful and the research continues into the next academic year. In the gathering of quantitative data the instrument of choice had been the Career Decision Scale which the students completed at the beginning and end of each workshop experience. These data were analyzed during the spring of 2011 to determine the effectiveness of these particular career interventions with this population. The students' analyzed responses were distributed among three distinct categories: invalid, intervention needed or additional assessment needed. These designations proved to be too general for the purposes of the research and the ability to assist students in specific ways.

Recommendations

Every student who attended a workshop rated it as being very informative and helpful. The general consensus supported two workshops in the future as the students wished for more information with a reflective period of several weeks separating the events. In the data collection the qualitative probes proved to be very effective in targeting new themes for future workshop opportunities. The quantitative instrument yielded results that were too general to assist individual students and will be replaced with a newer and more practical assessment contained within the 2011 True Colors™ Career materials. This instrument will provide specific guidelines and supportive information for

future workshops and advisement sessions using the True Colors™ Model which worked very well with our students. The workshops yielded very positive results with our students and may suggest the possible introduction of a 1 credit course as another alternative for those students who desire more engagement and additional information.

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