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A Case for Career Development Core Course

Many of our incoming freshmen and transfer students have been driven by one core goal in their academic lives- getting into a highly ranked school and/or specifically getting into the University of Colorado Boulder. Once achieved, that singular, driving purpose must be replaced by new aspirations or students flounder. In terms of retention and timely progress towards graduation, the exploration and setting of career goals can help to provide students with the motivation and drive needed to continue. Considering how many of our students leave school in good academic and financial standing, lack of direction must be addressed.

Literature in the field of career development offers a rich depth of support for career programming with students, particularly in the area of career development coursework. Included below is an annotated list of articles related to career development and career classes. To summarize, here are the highlights of that research.

Career development interventions have been correlated with improvement in….

- Retention and persistence to graduation
- GPAs; grade satisfaction
- Adaptability in adjusting to stress
- Time management
- Financial management
- Stabilization of career choice
- Self esteem
- Educational self-efficacy
- Commitment to school and career goals
- Contact with faculty; academic engagement

In addition, career development coursework has been correlated with improvement in…

- Career readiness, especially in STEM fields
- Career planning and self-knowledge
- Cognitive complexity
- Vocational development
- Professional development skills
- Persistence
- General and career-related decision making
- Solidification of major
- Progress towards graduation (graduating faster)
- Graduating with fewer hours
- Number of course withdrawals

Adding career development coursework to the core curriculum will ensure that all students take these positive strides towards academic and career progress. Elective coursework tends to draw those who are already making positive persistence decisions. With solid evidence for the effectiveness of career development courses, and recommendations on content from additional literature, the addition of this coursework or the embedding of career development content into freshmen coursework, could have wide-reaching impact with our students.

Respectfully Submitted, Lisa Severy, PhD, Director of Career Services

Career Planning & Retention Research Abstracts

General

Berger, J.B. (2001/2002). **Understanding the organizational nature of student persistence**
Journal of College Student Retention, 3(1), 3.
This article builds on the assumption that colleges and universities are organizations and subsequently that the organizational perspective provides important insights for improving retention on college and university campuses. A review of existing organizational studies of undergraduate persistence serves as the basis for ten empirically-based recommendations for practice that are designed to help campus leaders improve the effectiveness of retention efforts on campus:

1. Provide students with information and clear lines of communication about campus goals, values, policies, and procedures.
2. Provide opportunities for students to participate in organizational decision-making.
3. Provide a campus environment characterized by fairness toward students.
4. Provide balance between structure and responsiveness.
5. Actively engage students in political activity on campus.
6. Provide students with advocates.
7. Build shared meaning through authentic symbols that are used with integrity.
8. Pay attention to structural and symbolic connections with the external environment.
9. Understand the nature of the organizational environment on campus.
10. Assess student perceptions of organizational behavior on campus.

Braxton, J.M. & Mundy, M.E. (2001/2002). P**owerful institutional levers to reduce college student departure.** *Journal of College Student Retention, 3(1), 91.*
Classifies 47 recommendations gleaned from the articles appearing in this special issue according to their consistency with Tinto's three principles of effective student retention:

- First Principle: Effective retention programs are committed to the students they serve.
- Second Principle: Effective retention programs are, first and foremost, committed to the education of all, not just some, of their students.
- Third Principle: Effective retention programs are committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members.

This project outlines recommendations related to effective retention:

- Provide student with information and clear lines of communication about campus goals, values, policies, and procedures.
- Provide opportunities for students to participate in organizational decision-making.
- Actively engage student in political activity on campus.
- Provide students with advocates.
- Build shared meaning through authentic symbols that are used with integrity.
- Pay attention to structural and symbolic connections with external environment.
- Clarify institutional values and expectations early and often to prospective and matriculating students.
- Conduct a comprehensive examination of the student experience inside and outside the classroom.
- Consistently use good practices in teaching, learning, and retention programs.
- Intentionally tie the curriculum to students' lives outside the classroom to bring students into ongoing contact with one another and with campus resources, especially after the first year of study.
- Design service-learning programs in such a way that psychological growth occurs along the following dimensions: approach/avoidance coping strategies, locus of control, academic and social self-efficacy.
- Design learning communities/freshman interest groups in such a way that psychological growth occurs along following dimensions: approach/avoidance coping strategies, locus of control, academic and social self-efficacy.
- Design freshman orientation programs in such a way that psychological growth occurs along following dimensions: approach/avoidance coping strategies, locus of control, academic and social self-efficacy.
- Design mentoring programs in such a way that psychological growth occurs along following dimensions: approach/avoidance coping strategies, locus of control, academic and social self-efficacy.
- Effective methods for the communication of rules and regulations important to students should be developed.
- Rules and regulations governing student life should be enforced in a fair manner.
- Remove obstacles to student success associated with disciplinary cultures.
- Residential colleges and universities should require that all first and second year students live on-campus.
- Commuter colleges and universities should develop social environments for commuter students and students who live off-campus.

- Recruitment activities and publications should accurately portray the characteristics of the college of university to prospective students.
- Programs and practices should encourage prospective students to visit the campus.
- Some financial aid should be given to all students to demonstrate financial needs.
- The techniques of cooperative/collaborative learning should be the focus of faculty development workshops and seminars.
- Active learning should be the focus of faculty development workshops and seminars.
- Some weight in the faculty reward structure should be giving to faculty members to use teaching practices that foster retention of students in college.
- Academic advisors should encourage their advisees to consider the teaching practices of faculty members in the selection of courses.
- Determine the effects of proximal peer groups on persistence decisions.
- The teaching skills of organizations and preparation and instructional skill and clarity should be appraised on student course rating instruments and by colleagues conducting classroom observations.
- Student course rating forms, colleague assessments, self-reports, and teaching portfolios should include indices of active learning.
- Orientation programs should develop multiple opportunities for first-year students to socially interact with their peers.
- First-year students should be assigned to residence halls in a manner that encourages a sense of community in each residence hall.
- Residence halls should provide opportunities for residents to interact socially.
- Student Affairs offices should conduct workshops on coping with stress.
- Student Affairs offices should conduction workshops on educational and career planning.
- Student Affairs offices should conduct programs that honor the history and cultures of different rational/ethic groups on campus.
- Engage and involve parents through such programs as Parents' Weekend, a Parents' Office, and through written communication such as newsletters benefits students by keeping parents connected to their children's collegiate experiences as well as to the institution in which their children are enrolled.
- Faculty, staff, academic advisors, and administrators should attend to the holistic development of the student- both academic and co-curricular- by promoting growth and learning not only in the classroom but in the university community as well.
- Promote student awareness of and access to appropriate co-curricular programs and resources- i.e., support groups, peer counseling, mentoring programs, faith-based groups, residential colleges and community services groups- that connect and support students in their incorporation into the university community.
- Conduct trainings for faculty, staff, and administrators to promote awareness and knowledge of appropriate resources in both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs that connect and support students in their transition process.
- Conduct assessments of the student transition and adaptation process for the perceived at-risk students by appropriate well-trained faculty and staff to ascertain whether referrals or interventions are necessary.
- Provide specific services (i.e., tutoring or day care) and address student concerns (i.e., excessively high attrition rates or exceedingly low transfer rates) to foster students' perceptions of the institution as supportive and caring.
- Provide a balance between structure and responsiveness.
- Understand the nature of the organization environment on campus.
- Assess student perceptions of organizational behavior on campus.

Engle, C.C.; Reilly, N.P. & Levine, H.B. (2003/2004). **A case study of an academic retention program** *Journal of College Student Retention. 5(4), 365.*
A 12-week retention program designed to assist at-risk students with test-taking, study and career skills through individual and group counseling was examined. Sixty-nine percent of the program participants attained a cumulative GPA [greater than or equal] 2.0 by the end of the intervention compared to 43% of the control group. Further, 55% of the original program participants remained successful through the following semester compared to 28% of the control group.

Gohn, L.; Swartz,J.; & Donnelly, S. (2000/2001). **A case study of second year student persistence.** *Journal of College Student Retention, 2(4), 271.*
Most colleges/universities emphasize retention efforts during the first year. However, most campuses lose as many students through attrition from the second year to graduation as are lost from first to second year. Researchers at a major university in the mid-south studied second year students. Major factors relating to attrition or persistence for second year students included:

1) adjustment to stress, 2) grade satisfaction, 3) time management, 4) financial management, and 5) stabilization of career choice.

Hull-Blanks, E.; Robinson Kurpius, S.E.; Befort, C.; Sollenberger,S.; Nicpon, N.F.; & Huser, L. (2005). **Career goals and retention-related factors among college freshmen.** *Journal of Career Development, 32(1), 16-30.*
The relationships of four types of career goals (job related, school related, value related, and unknown) with factors of school retention, academic performance, self-esteem, educational self-efficacy, and school and career commitment are studied among 401 first-semester college freshmen. Students reporting job-related goals are more likely to make positive persistence decisions than students reporting unknown goals.

Margaretha, L. & Hunt, P. (2001/2002). **Career exploration of academically dismissed students.**
Journal of College Student Retention, 3(4) 319.
This study was undertaken to investigate identity, self-esteem, and career development of 164 academically dismissed college students. The results showed that these students needed career information and that the degree of identity development correlated positively with career development variables for upper class level students.

Monks,K.; Conway, E.; & Dhuigneain, M.N. (2006) **Integrating personal development and career planning: The outcomes for first year undergraduate learning.** *Active Learning in Higher Education, 7(1), 73-86.*
This article describes the way in which colleagues from the Business faculty, the Careers Service and the Library at Dublin City University collaborated to design and deliver an integrated approach to personal development planning (PDP) with the aim of motivating first year undergraduate students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, development and career planning. The article describes the approach adopted in the introduction of the PDP module and the measures used to evaluate its outcomes. There are indications from the research that undertaking PDP benefits students in several ways. In particular, it appears to impact on student retention by clarifying career goals and increasing motivation towards the chosen degree program.

Pascarella, E.T, Seifert, T.A. & Blaich, C. (2010) **How effective are the NSSE benchmarks in predicting important educational outcomes?** *Change, 42(1), 16-22.*
The National Survey of Student Engagement's broad-based national use makes it reasonable to query whether the good practices in undergraduate education that it measures actually do predict important educational outcomes. The scant valid evidence with respect to the predictive validity of the NSSE is a serious concern if participating postsecondary institutions are meant to consider the NSSE benchmark scales as a proxy for student growth in significant areas. The writers discuss their study of institution-level data from the first year of the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, which measured the validity of the NSSE benchmarks in predicting seven traits and skills considered outcomes of a general liberal arts education.

Perry, S.R.; Cabrera, A.F. & Vogt, W.P. (1999/2000). C**areer maturity and college student persistence**
Journal of College Student Retention. 1(1), 41.
The study examined the role of career maturity on the college persistence of traditional-aged college freshmen enrolled at a public four-year institution. Career Maturity was found to be positively associated with a number of variables important to college persistence (e.g., GPA, Academic Integration, Faculty Contact, and Encouragement).

Pizzolato, J.E. (2007). **Impossible selves investigating students' persistence decisions when their career-possible selves border on impossible.** *Journal of Career Development, 33(3), 201-223.*
Through study of 32 students' narratives about coping with external threats to their career goals (e.g., denial of admission to the major of their choice), this study examines the following issues: (a) the coping mechanisms student use when faced with threats that loom large, (b) the relation between coping methods employed and whether the goal is retained, and (c) what seems to facilitate student use of coping strategies that support goal achievement. Findings suggest that threat attributions and coping strategies led to either exiting or recycling through the career development process. The ability to jointly consider career goals and goals unrelated to career, while allowing career goals to guide the coping process, was most strongly related to retention or revision (rather than abandonment) of the career-possible self.

Sandler, M.E. (2000). **Career decision-making self-efficacy, perceived stress, and an integrated model of student persistence: A structural model of finances, attitudes, behavior, and career development.** *Research in Higher Education, 41(5), 537-580.*
In response to the extraordinarily diverse adult student population present in college today, a new structural equation model of student retention was adapted with the addition of three variables: career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), perceived stress and financial difficulty. The study examined the persistence of students 24 years of age or older studying in two-year and four-year degree programs, by combining data from a survey questionnaire and institutional records. Of the twelve variables of a new integrated model of student persistence, CDMSE, a career development construct related to the perceived vocational futures and career-related tasks of adult students has the widest range of influence.

Willcoxson, L. (2010). **Factors affecting intention to leave in the first, second and third year of university studies: a semester-by-semester investigation.** *Higher Education Research & Development, 29(6), 623–639.*
As most research into attrition and retention has focused on attrition during the first year of studies, we know little about the relationship between students' experience of subsequent years and their decisions to withdraw from university. This paper addresses this gap in research by examining the relationship between students' intention to withdraw from studies and their experience of university in each of the three years of studies. Factors influencing first year attrition:

- Lack of commitment to the institution
- Lack of commitment to a specific career direction or degree
- Lack of quality advising
- Social Disengagement
- Appearance of faculty as unsupportive and inaccessible

Factors influencing second year attrition:

- Health
- Finance
- Social integration
- Clarity of career direction
- Self-efficacy in relationship to academic capacity

Factors influencing third year attrition:

- Lack of sensitivity to their individual needs
- Adequate IT resources
- Planned progression to another university, especially for international students

Zurita, M. (2004/2005). **Stopping out and persisting: Experiences of Latino undergraduates**
Journal of College Student Retention, 6(3) 301-324.
This study examines the experiences that 10 Latino recent undergraduate students reported having at a large Midwestern university. Five persisted through graduation, and five stopped out. Both groups described similar home environments, a lack of social integration, and feelings of academic unpreparedness. Differences among groups were academic difficulties, home-to-school transition, high school segregation, anticipatory socialization, first contact with the university, and education and career goals.

<u>Career Classes</u>

Allen, I.H. & Lester, S.M. (2012). **The impact of a college survival skills course and a success coach on retention and academic performance.** *Journal of Career and Technical Education, 27(1), 8.*
Student retention is an ongoing concern of many postsecondary institutions (Kuh, 2008). Student engagement might be a key to addressing retention issues in terms of building relationships between students and their college. One technical college has found that attrition in learning support math courses contributes greatly to the overall college retention issue and that academic success in these courses has some influence. Drawing from current literature, the college addressed this issue by developing both a College Survival Skills course for learning support math students and by hiring a person to serve students in the role of Success Coach.
After a year of implementing both interventions, data has begun to show improvements in semester retention, persistence to graduation, and academic success.

Belser, Christopher T; Prescod, Diandra J; Daire, Andrew P; Dagley, Melissa A; Young, Cynthia Y. (2017) **Predicting undergraduate student retention in STEM majors based on career development factors**. *The Career Development Quarterly,* 65(1), 88-93.
A research gap exists with regard to examining the influence of career interventions and career readiness assessments on student retention in college majors related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). To address this gap, the authors examined 3 variables as potential predictors of retention in STEM-related majors: (a) a STEM-focused career planning intervention, (b) students' initial major declarations, and (c) changes in scores on a measure of career readiness. Results revealed that the focused career class was a significant predictor of retention.

Folsom, B. & Reardon, R. (2003). **College career courses: Design and accountability.** *Journal of Career Assessment, 11(4), 421–450.*
This article examines 46 reports of career courses offered in colleges since the 1920s. The authors located approximately 80 references regarding the design, development, management, and evaluation of such courses in colleges and universities. There were 38 reports of studies indicating positive changes in output variables, for example, career decision making. There were 15 reporting a positive impact in outcomes, for example, retention.

Folsom, B., Peterson, G.W., Reardon, R.C., & Mann, B.A. (2004/2005). **Impact of a career planning course on academic performance and graduation rate.** *Journal of College Student Retention, 6(4) 461-473.*
A study was conducted to assess the impact of a career-planning course in terms of time taken to graduate, graduation rate, credit hours taken, number of course withdrawals, and cumulative GPAs. Student course participants were compared to a matched sample of non-course participants after 5 years. The two groups were matched based on gender, race, and high school grade point average (GPA). The variance attributed to academic aptitude (SAT score), year in school, and initial year of matriculation were partitioned and thus controlled through covariance. We found the following:

- Course participants graduated at a rate of 81% compared to a rate of 69% for the general population of students.
- Course participants graduated with an average of 110 credit hours compared to 132 for the general population.
- Course participants executed fewer course withdrawals than nonparticipants.
- Female course participants graduated on average in 50 months, while female nonparticipants took an average of 61 months.

Fouad, N.A. & Ghosh, A. (2016) **Career exploration among college students.** *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(4), 460-464.
College is a significant time for undergraduates to declare majors and choose career paths. For many undergraduates, choosing both a major and a career path is challenging. Among the reasons why undergraduates experience difficulties in this decision-making process, are having too many options, not viewing enough options, and not feeling prepared to make that choice (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996). It is important for professionals in higher education to not only understand these difficulties, but also to develop and implement strategies to help students accomplish these developmental milestones. In doing so, higher education professionals can promote students' academic success and contribute to increased retention rates by encouraging students to engage in the behavioral and adaptive components of career exploration and planning. This study explored career planning courses focused on occupational engagement and student career construction. Results suggest that a career planning course had a significant effect on students' occupational engagement and student career construction, specifically occupational exploration, career decision-making, and skill building.

Hansen, M.J. & Joan S. Pedersen, J.S. (2012). **An examination of the effects of career development courses on career decision-making self-efficacy, adjustment to college, learning integration, and academic success.** *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, 24(2), 33-61.*
This study investigated the effects of career development courses on career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), college adjustment, learning integration, academic achievement, and retention among undecided undergraduates. It also investigated the effects of course format on career decision-making abilities and academic success outcomes and whether CDMSE significantly predicted academic success outcomes among students in the career courses. Results indicated that students reported significantly more adaptive self-efficacy beliefs in all five efficacy domains, college adjustment, and learning integration following the theory-based career courses. Undecided students enrolled in career courses had significantly higher retention rates and GPAs than a comparison group of undecided students not enrolled in career courses.

Honken, N. & Ralston, P. (2013) **Freshman engineering retention: A holistic look**. *Journal of STEM Education : Innovations and Research*, 14(2), 29-37.
The ability of colleges to retain engineering students contributes to the overall goal of increasing the number of engineers in the workforce. This case study takes a holistic look at a freshman engineering cohort to answer the following question: What, if any, are the differences between students who continue to study engineering, switch out of engineering, or leave the university after one year?

Hull-Blanks, E,. Kurpius, S.E. & Robinson. (2005). **Career goals and retention-related factors among college freshmen**. *Journal of Career Development*, 32(1), 16-30.
The relationships of four types of career goals (job related, school related, value related, and unknown) with factors of school retention, academic performance, self-esteem, educational self-efficacy, and school and career commitment are studied among 401 first-semester college freshmen. Differences in types of goals based on gender are also considered. Students reporting job-related goals are more likely to make positive persistence decisions than students reporting unknown goals. Men are more likely to report value-related goals than women, whereas women are more likely to report job-related goals than men. Implications of these findings for those working in college settings that help foster students' career development and academic success are discussed. Those first-semester freshmen without an identified career goal made less positive persistence decisions than did those with a defined job-related career goal. It is likely that without defined goals, students lack the motivation to make and follow through with persistence decisions.

Raque-Bogdan, T.L. & Lucas, M.S. (2016). **Career aspirations and the first generation student: Unraveling the layers with social cognitive career theory**. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(3), 248-262.
Undergraduate students who are the first in their immediate family to go to college represent a unique population on campus deserving special attention to their educational and career development needs. We explored career development characteristics of first-generation college students and compared them to those who are not first-generation, using Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1994) social cognitive career theory as a theoretical base. Findings indicated significant differences between the 2 groups, and the importance of college self-efficacy and college outcome expectations for the career aspirations of first-generation college students.

Reardon, Robert C Melvin, Brittany (2015). **The career course as a factor in college graduation**.
Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 17(3), 336-350.
Conducting research and engaging in discussions with administrators and legislators can be important contributions toward alleviating the trend toward lower graduation rates among college students. This study used archival data obtained from the university registrar to examine how engagement in a credit-bearing undergraduate career course related to college graduation from a selective southern university. Results suggested that the course was one of four factors predicting graduation rates, including grade point average, changes in major, and withdrawals. The study also found that traditional measures, SAT scores and high school grades, did not effectively predict graduation rates. Implications for best practices in student services and future research are discussed.