

Room for Improvement: Processes and Practices for Assisting Youth with Selecting Career Paths

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World Future Forum 2019

BACKGROUND

This poster begins by introducing some of the challenges undergraduate students are faced with when it comes to deciding on a professional path. We point out that these conflicting views require careful guidance at the secondary, as well as post-secondary levels of education. After foregrounding these challenges, the authors provide a number of possible solutions that are worth considering, with an emphasis on purposeful coaching.

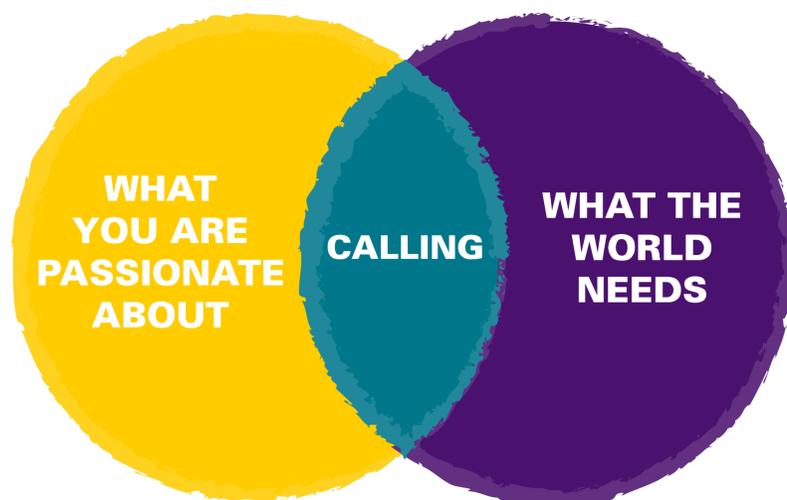


Figure 1. The “calling” concept can be a powerful foundation when providing guidance to exploring students (Dik & Duffy, 2009)

CHALLENGES

How students explore majors and careers prior to attending post-secondary education poses challenges for career services professionals as well as faculty and staff in general.

- Students are choosing majors based on influence and assumption, rather than an understanding of themselves, their goals, and their personal values
- Students live in a “noisy world,” one that is fast-paced, rapidly-changing, and constantly-connected
- A lack of time for guidance due to large caseloads and additional responsibilities

Research and practical experiences of career services professionals make clear that there is a great need to address the process and practices through which educators assist young people on finding and selecting collegiate majors and career paths.

An All Too Common Conversation:

Student: I am no longer interested in business.
Me: How did you decide on business as a major?
Student: Well, in middle school, I took an assessment that showed me I was good at business. So I was told to follow the business track in high school.
Me: In middle school?!
Student: Yes.
Me: So you took a bunch of business courses throughout high school?
Student: Yeah. I took a lot of business classes and I received some transfer credit for a couple of them.
Me: Did you take any other courses besides business courses?
Student: Not many. A few math classes, a couple science courses, English, Spanish, and a history class.
Me: So you took an assessment in middle school, the assessment indicated you might have an interest in business, which led you to take a number of business courses all throughout high school, and from there you decided you would major in business because you already had a couple credits that would transfer in. Would you say this is how you chose your major?
Student: Yeah, I guess so.
Me: Gotcha. Do you even like business?
Student: Not really.
Me: Did you like it in high school?
Student: Sort of. Not a lot.
Me: If you really didn't like it in high school and don't like it now, why would you major in it?
Student: I don't know... My parents strongly encouraged it and I heard you could make quite a bit of money in business. Someone else also told me that I could do anything I wanted with a business degree.

PURPOSEFUL COACHING

Students can benefit from more purposeful career coaching. This is accomplished by providing time for students to reflectively think, and then act upon, who they are as an individual in a more holistic sense. Because so many students have seldom been given a chance to look inward at their true selves, they frequently have difficulty articulating their interests, values, skills, and passions. Purposeful coaching can help with this articulation.

PURPOSE

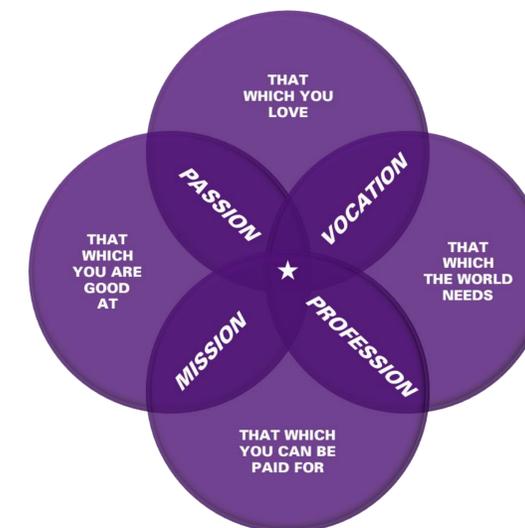


Figure 2. Chart depicting purposeful coaching as one potential tool for working with exploring undergraduates. Chart modified from Garcia & Miralles (2017)

There is, perhaps, no college decision that is more thought-provoking, gut wrenching and rest-of-your-life oriented—or disoriented—than the choice of a major. ~ Eric St. John

IMPROVED PRACTICES

A number of possible improved practices at the collegiate level are worth considering, some which are already being implemented. These improvements include:

- 1-on-1 career coaching
- Further emphasizing the career-related curricular benchmarks and standards
- Better collaboration with community stakeholders, including K-12 partners
- Re-align liberal arts and general education requirements for exploratory purposes

SELECTED REFERENCES

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