

Career Research Paper

COUN 5110

Leslie Meyer

University of Toledo

Introduction

I had the opportunity to engage in self-assessment and explore a career of personal interest to me: academic advising. I learned more about the profession by reading several journal articles, reviewing the Occupational Outlook Handbook, and reviewing a career guidance system called O*Net. In addition, I conducted an informational interview with an academic advisor to learn more about the personality and skills needed to be successful in this role. I gained first-hand experience in utilizing strategies and resources that counselors might use with clients during career counseling.

Assessment

Self-Directed Search

The purpose of the Self-Directed Search is to determine one's Holland code to help them find careers that are a good match for both their interests and abilities (Osborn & Zunker, 2012). The thought behind the Self-Directed Search is that individuals can loosely fall into six different groups or personality types called Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (Holland, 1994). The first letter of the code is the type that one most resembles, the next letter indicates the type one resembles a little less, and so on. The types that are not included in one's three-letter code are those groups one resembles least of all. My summary code was SEC, meaning that I like social jobs like teaching and counseling, enterprising jobs such as managing and selling, and conventional jobs such as bookkeeping that utilize clerical skills. This code can be used to help me locate groups of occupations to consider that resemble my interests, self-estimates, and competencies (Osborn & Zunker, 2012). I used *The Occupations Finder* (Holland, 1996) to locate every possible ordering of my three-letter Holland code. Some occupations of interest to me in this search were director of student affairs, career-

guidance technician, child development specialist, and personnel manager. In addition, *The Educational Opportunities Finder* (Holland, 1997) allowed me to look up educational programs that matched my summary code.

I thought that the Self-Directed Search was very accurate in identifying my interests and abilities and I liked the fact that it only took 15 to 20 minutes to complete. I wished I had taken an assessment like this years ago when I was unsure about my career choice. It has taken years of working in many different careers to discover my interests and skills and how they might fit with certain occupations. Many hours of self-reflection on my part seemed to be summed up very accurately by taking this short self-assessment. The Self-Directed Search confirmed the skills that I enjoy using such as my social and people skills, my energy and enthusiasm, my optimism, and my intuition.

The part that I found most interesting is that my summary code, SEC, was not a direct match to my aspirations summary code, which was SEA. Occupations I have considered when I think about my future include academic advising, career counseling, owning my own dating company, being a life coach or a real estate agent, recruiting, and occupational therapy. While I have the conventional skills of being organized, orderly, efficient, and conscientious, based on my past work experiences I get easily bored if my organizational abilities overtake the time that I could otherwise spend connecting with people. I found it very helpful to use *You and Your Career* (Holland, 1994) to look more closely at the interest types and occupation types for each of the six categories and do my own self-rating, which was SEA, a direct match to my aspirations summary code. *You and Your Career* also explained how a hexagon is used to show the similarities and differences among the different types (Holland, 1994). The fact that SEC and SEA are closely related on the hexagon means that there is a close fit between me and social

and enterprising occupations, but that I also have skills and abilities in the conventional and artistic groups. I can see the value in a client talking with a career counselor about their assessment results and whether or not they felt they were accurate and met their expectations.

FOCUS

FOCUS is a self-paced career and education planning tool that is available to students online (“FOCUS,” *The University of Toledo Career Services*, n.d.). FOCUS allows students to explore career readiness in terms of career and educational goals, academic strengths, status of career planning, and personal development needs. In addition, the tool assesses students’ work interests, personality, skills, values and leisure time interests, and gives student a chance to take a closer look at careers that match these results.

The FOCUS assessment was very user-friendly. I liked the summary portfolio that I could print out. In addition, it allowed me to combine the results of multiple assessments (i.e. work, leisure, skills, personality, and values) and only display occupations that would require a certain level of education. I scored very high in the area of self-assessment, which speaks to the large amount of time and effort I have invested previously in considering a career change. I liked how FOCUS provided me with a number of occupations to explore based on the results of my assessments in the different categories. The tool included a lot of valuable information such as a job description, the majors that are related to a particular occupation, and the national average salary. In addition, you could click on links to additional information such as job duties, skills, values, outlook, advancement, and professional organizations. The fact that this information was presented in an organized format was also ideal. FOCUS was like having access to a career library at my fingertips. My results from FOCUS were fairly consistent with my results from the Self-Directed Search and this confirmed that my interest in academic

advising will likely be a good fit for my skills, personality, interests, etc. My work assessment profile on the FOCUS, however, categorized me as social, enterprising, and artistic, whereas the Self-Directed Search categorized me as social, enterprising, conventional. On the FOCUS, I actually scored a zero in the conventional category. I, again, saw the benefit of a student taking the time to meet with a career counselor to discuss the results of the assessment.

Research on Academic Advising

Academic advising is a career that I think would be a great match because I enjoy connecting with and helping others and sharing my positive outlook and enthusiasm. Coaching, motivating and encouraging others to pursue both personal and professional goals are my passion.

*O*Net Online* was a valuable tool for further exploring the skills, values, work activities, values, and education required for academic advising. Advisors prepare students for educational experiences by challenging and supporting them as they explore learning opportunities and persevere with challenging tasks (“Educational, guidance, school, and vocational counselors,” *O*Net OnLine*, n.d.). They counsel students regarding educational issues such as course and program selection, scheduling and registering for classes, adjusting to the campus environment, and career planning. The knowledge needed in academic advising entails areas such as psychology, customer service, clerical skills, and computers and electronics. It is important that an academic advisor possess skills in active listening and being aware of others’ reactions and understanding why they react the way they do.

An academic advisor has a strong orientation toward service and must consider the costs and benefits of potential actions in decision making (“Educational, guidance, school, and vocational counselors,” *O*Net OnLine*, n.d.). Academic advisors establish and maintain

relationships with students and are constantly organizing, planning, and prioritizing their work. Advanced communication and organizational skills are required because the work environment is one that includes much face-to-face discussion with students and follow-up by phone and electronic mail.

More often than not, academic advisors must have a master's degree and the median wage is \$25.67 per hour ("School and career counselors," *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, n.d.). Employment is expected to grow by 19% from 2010 to 2020 due to increasing enrollment at colleges and universities. An experienced advisor may advance to the position of Director of Academic Advising and coordinate and supervise programs and services related to academic support services ("FOCUS," *The University of Toledo Career Services*, n.d.). Academic advising is a social occupation that involves working with, communicating with, and teaching people. Other related occupations include areas such as social work, counseling, and teaching.

Student retention and graduation are of high priority at colleges and universities and academic advising plays an important role in retaining students (Hale, Graham, & Johnson, 2009). Efforts to increase student retention should include an evaluation of student perceptions, desires, and satisfaction with academic advising. There are two common styles of academic advising: developmental and prescriptive. Developmental advising is based on a personal relationship between the student and advisor and includes academic, career and personal goals, rather than a sole focus on academic goals. Prescriptive advising, on the other hand, is impersonal and authority-based and does not take into account individual development. Prescriptive advising may be an efficient way to register students for classes; however, prescriptive advisors are not as effective in helping students integrate both academically and socially within an institution. Research indicates that students want a personal relationship with

their advisor and desire more from an advisor than simply help with course selection and scheduling. Increasing the percentage of developmental advisors may lead to a higher level of student satisfaction with academic advising.

One study that focused on improving academic advising with students in their first two years of their engineering programs revealed that students desire more information on how specific courses are taught because the course descriptions in the college catalog are very brief (Sutton & Sankar, 2011). In addition, students felt that it would be helpful to have access to course feedback from students who had previously taken the class. Students in the study also indicated that they may be interested in changing majors. Advisors could work closely with faculty to identify other majors in the science, technology, engineering, and math areas that the student could pursue and then meet with the student to review the recommendations. This research study showed the importance of advisors and faculty working in collaboration to increase student satisfaction.

Summary of Informational Interview

I had the opportunity to meet with Kim Pollauf, the Director of Adult and Lifelong Learning at The University of Toledo. Kim is actually my husband's academic advisor and he has such high respect for her and feels that I would love her job. Kim's background is interesting because she did not follow a traditional path into academic advising. She holds a bachelor's and master's degree in anthropology and worked in advising and admissions while completing her undergraduate work at the University of Austin. She has worked in a variety of roles at The University of Toledo over the past 21 years and she is passionate about her role in working with non-traditional students. She touched on how important it is that the administration supports and believes strongly in advising. She said that she spends a great deal

of time trying to prove the value of advising versus the cost of advising to administration. She shared that it is often difficult to secure a full-time position as an advisor because in today's tough economy higher education institutions are trying to do more with less people. Kim shared the importance of diversifying one's skills as an advisor and how it can take years to advance in the profession. She encouraged me to gain as many different experiences as possible in advising during my internship, including learning about transfer evaluations, graduation audits, and assessment. She sees the role of an academic advisor as being similar to a coach. She said that as an advisor she helps students with choosing a major, scheduling for classes, and balancing their role as a student with their other personal and professional commitments. She said that The University of Toledo utilizes a decentralized approach to advising where each college has their own select group of advisors. Lastly, she talked about taking the time to get involved in professional organizations because it provides a wealth of professional development opportunities and a chance to connect with other professionals to learn about best practices. She specifically recommended that I look into the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) as a great way to learn more about the profession.

It was awesome to have the chance to meet with Kim and I appreciated her candid nature. She shared what she enjoyed most about advising and what she found most challenging and/or frustrating. I was surprised to hear her say that many colleges are utilizing part-time advising staff and that it is very difficult to secure a full-time position. Learning about the difficulty in advancing in the profession stressed to me the importance of using my master's program internship and practicums to gain experience in many different facets of student affairs so that I do not limit myself to only being qualified as an academic advisor. Overall, I found the informational interview very encouraging.

Discussion / Evaluation

I feel that academic advising will be a great fit for my desire to connect with and help others in meaningful ways. My top three interests from the FOCUS assessment were social, enterprising, and artistic. This means that I prefer to work with others, tend to be verbal, enjoy influencing others, and like to be expressive. These skills will all be useful to me in academic advising. I do not prefer a lot of structure and conformity so advising may be challenging in terms of all of the policies and procedures I will need to be aware of and follow, but I think the pros outweigh this con. My personality is such that I enjoy focusing my attention on the people around me and motivating them to take action. I appreciate others and enjoy helping them reach their full potential. Several of my values include doing things for the greater good, helping others, and doing things where I can see the results of my work. These values will prove useful in my role as an academic advisor. The cons that I see are that it can be challenging to secure a full time position and advance to higher levels in advising.

When I decided to leave my full-time professional career in communications last summer and begin the master's program in College Student Personnel at Bowling Green State University, I knew it was a huge leap of faith. I was thankful for the support and encouragement of my husband, family, and friends as I made the decision to pursue a career area that I felt passionate about. Without this type of support system, I honestly do not think I would have successfully made the transition from professional to student and intern. Each of my past work experiences have influenced the path I am now pursuing. I grew up in a family where education was valued and my parents always told me that I would never regret pursuing higher education. This thought process has helped me to realize that I should not compromise pursuing my dreams just to stay in a job that seems comfortable, but that I do not find fulfilling.

Yearly Personal Plan

Over the next year, I want to gain experience in many different areas of student affairs through my internship in academic advising at Owens Community College and my practicum experiences in career services and new student orientation. In addition, I have several courses to complete will graduate in May of next year. I want to attend several professional conferences and continue to develop a portfolio of artifacts that reflect my experience in the student affairs competencies. In addition, I want to write my personal philosophy of advising because committing my thoughts to writing will help me to be intentional.

Career Counseling

The process of completing this career paper could easily relate to my practice as an academic advisor or counselor. Having the opportunity to take several self-assessments allowed me to experience what I will ask and encourage students to do in order to learn more about their skills, interests, values, personality, etc. The assessments made me stop and self-reflect and confirmed for me the path that I am pursuing. I think all clients at any age and in any life role could benefit from this process and having the opportunity to talk through assessment results with a career counselor and share my thoughts on what I found through research would be instrumental. A counselor could assist by using a holistic approach to see how my personal concerns are intertwined with my career development and decision-making and vice versa. I also found value in using several websites to research more information about advising skills and reading the research literature to discover current issues and trends in the academic advising profession. I believe that informational interviews also provide invaluable knowledge and an opportunity to actually determine if one's perceptions of a profession is accurate before investing time in pursuing a career to only much later find out that it did not meet one's expectations.

References

- Educational, guidance, school, and vocational counselors. (n.d.). *O*NET OnLine*. Retrieved June 5, 2012, from <http://www.onetonline.org/link/details/21-1012.00>
- Focus. (n.d.). The University of Toledo Career Services. Retrieved June 4, 2012 from http://www.utoledo.edu/utlc/career/pdfs/Focus_instructions.pdf
- Hale, M. D. Graham, D. L. & Johnson, D. M. (2009). Are students more satisfied with academic advising when there is congruence between current and preferred academic advising styles?. *College Student Journal*, 43(2), 313-324.
- Holland, J. L. (1994). *You and your career*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.
- Holland, J. L. (1996). *The occupations finder*. Lutz, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.
- Holland, J. L. (1997). *The educational opportunities finder*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.
- Osborn, D. S. & Zunker, V. G. (2012). *Using assessment results for career development* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- School and career counselors. (n.d.). *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition*. Retrieved June 5, 2012, from <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Community-and-Social-Service/School-and-career-counselors.htm#tab-1>
- Sutton, K. L., & Sankar, C. (2011). Student satisfaction with information provided by academic advisors. *Journal Of STEM Education: Innovations & Research*, 12(7), 71-85.