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Exploring Alumni Stories Through Qualitative Research

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Abstract

This presentation describes a project designed to connect current psychology undergraduates with alumni from the same program. Purposive sampling was used to recruit diverse alumni following different career paths (i.e., graduate school or straight to work), representing alumni who identified as first generation, nontraditional, Latina/Latino or as a student of color. Semistructured interviews were conducted to understand alumni career paths and gather information about decision-making, barriers, supports, and advice for current psychology majors. Interviews were audio-taped and are currently being transcribed. Some alumni agreed to participate in an "Alumni Profile," which highlighted specific alumni by name, shared details of individual's specific story, and were made publicly available. The current presentation will share the experiences of the undergraduate researchers exploring qualitative research, learning about career options available after graduation, and benefits for current students.

Prior Research

•Career advising has become an increasingly important issue (Atchley, Hooker, Kroska, & Gilmour, 2012; Roscoe & Strapp, 2009).

•One of the biggest questions facing undergraduates is what happens after college. Should they get a job or go to graduate school? (Briihl, 2001).

•Alumni are a valuable resource for providing information about jobs, graduate school, and for countering the myth that you can't get a job with a bachelor's degree in psychology (Landrum, Hettich, & Wilner, 2010).

•Alumni assessments of psychology graduates typically provide detailed quantitative data (i.e., annual earnings, the frequency of specific job titles) (Strapp, Granov, & Dixon, 2011), however, information about career paths (i.e., changes in employers and careers across time), as well as practical questions (i.e., how did you find your first job?) are more readily answered with a qualitative approach to assessment.

•When little is known about a phenomenon being examined, qualitative methods allow for an inductive approach (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

•Qualitative methods are recognized as an essential contributor to career development research, especially when examining understudied populations (Blustein, 2006; Koegel, Donin, Ponterotto, & Spitz, 1995).

Project Goals

•Connect current Western Oregon University psychology undergraduates with alumni from the same undergraduate psychology program.

•Understand alumni career paths, including decision-making, barriers, and supports.

•Develop a tool for communicating information about careers in psychology.

 Provide current Western Oregon University undergraduates with practical experience interviewing, and networking.

•Increase knowledge about diversity of career opportunities, barriers for psychology student career development, and realistic career planning.

Exploring Alumni Stories through Qualitative Research

Participants

Western Oregon University Psychology Alumni (N = 60) from the class 1999-2013 were purposively sampled. Alumni met one or more of the following criteria:

- Identify as First Generation College Student (N = 25)
- Identify as Latino/Latina or Student of Color (N = 16)
- Completed undergraduate studies (no graduate work) (N = 21)
- Earned graduate degree in clinical/counseling psychology (N = 13)
- Earned graduate degree in something else (N = 25)

Materials

Materials Completed	
Consent Form: Agreed to be interviewed and have aggregated responses included in study.	Tell you
Demographic Questionnaire: Assessed age, gender, racial identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status. Assessed involvement at WOU and current work experience.	Tell time step for f
Additional Alumni Profile Consent Form: A subsample of alumni consented to having career story connected to personal identity. Alumni Profile Survey: Asked about hometown, hobbies, favorite class at WOU, dream job, influence of psychology on personal life, advice for current students.	Whe 10 y Wha you Wha und "

Step 1

Alumni interviews were conducted by students. Some interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, or via Skype.

Interviews were transcribed and de-identified. Deidentification included removing names, job locations, graduate schools, and other identifying titles.

Procedure

Step 2

Some alumni agreed to an alumni profile. These profiles were put together to highlight their schooling and career paths, as well as advice for current students.

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Semi-Structured Interview: Developed to Elicit Career Story (Sample Questions)

- me about changes in your work life and Ir decision-making.
- me about your experience ending your ne at WOU and figuring out your next ep. (Anticipated work, plans, preparations first job, difficulties).
- nere do you see yourself in the next 5 years?
- nat barriers and supports have impacted in your career development?

hat advice do you have for dergraduates interested in your " (current career) ?

Step 3

- Collected data from interviews will be shared through the department's website.
- Alumni profiles will be displayed to provide a useful tool for communicating
- information about careers in
- psychology.

Step 4

Transcriptions will be analyzed with consensual qualitative research technique (CQR; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997).

The research team will develop codes, core concepts, and categories; analysis is reviewed and revised to reach agreement.

	PROGRAM MANAGER VIDA INTEGRATVE MEDICINE: Addiction Medicine Department			
	Andrew Davis, MSW, LCSW, MAC, CADC III			
Care	er Path			
	Worked as a Linn County Mental Health specialist, Department of Corrections treatment program			
3	Mental Health and Addictions Counselor, Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde			
- 5	Currently Program Manager, Addiction Medicine at VIDA			
fo at	NOIL			
ife at				
	asses that helped with career: Research Methods, Cognitive Psychology, and omental Psychology, Abnormal Psychology			
VOU a	ctivities: Teaching Assistant, WOUPSA, Psi Chi			
iggest	influences: Experience as a TA, which pushed him out of his comfort zone.			
urren	Job			
ypical	day: In addition to managing the Addiction Medicine department, Andrew			
	isis screening and intervention, assessments for mental health and addictions			
	He provides training and supervision for addiction treatment staff, facilitates			
roupt	herapy, individual therapy, staff meetings, and documentation.			
teps t	get into the field: Andrew recommends six steps for a career in addictions			
ounse	5			
 Investigate ACCBO's requirements for alcohol & drug counselor certification (CADC) in the State of Oregon. 				
2.	Do a practicum or two, as it is important to see if this career field is for you.			
3. Prepare yourself for working with crisis (suicide, dangerous situations, abus				
Δ	etc.). Take classes that are DSM based.			
	Attend and receive therapy. Most graduate schools in this field require you to			
10000	participate in therapy.			
6.	Stay on top of your certification and/or licensure requirements.			
	meaningful about his job? Being in the helping industry and being part of the process for people.			
n na i ng C	process of people.			
	Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Worker: http://www.onetonline.org/			

Senior Research Associate Oregon Health Sciences University

Career Path				
Received AAOT then transferred to WOU Graduated in 2000 from WOU				
	Special focus in learning and memory and how it is media molecularly in the brain	ted		
	Awarded postdoctoral position in wet lab at Oregon Health So Jniversity after graduate school	tiences		
100	Current position is Senior Research Associate of an animal we Dregon Health Sciences University	t lab at		
Life at	wou			
	lasses that helped with career: Quantitative Methods, Resea ive Psych.	arch Methods, and		
WOUa	activities: Research Assistant and Psi Chi			
Bigges	t influences:			
 He 	lping in interpreting data and the media.			
 Ab 	ility to research and question sources of information has bee	n invaluable.		
 Be 	ing a woman in science.			
Curren	t lob			
	l day: Denesa's role in the lab shifts between administration a	and the conduction		
6.	eriments. These tasks can include writing and editing manusc			
10	, research approval, and experiments with the mice. Denesa	24 Mill 102 Mill 102		
	ments on the mice herself. This task includes monitoring and			
well. W	vhen experiments on the animals are done, tissue is harveste ted by Denesa and her team.	Contraction of the second second		
Stens t	o get into the field:			
For the research branch of psychology, chemistry and math classes are extr		are extremely		
important. Extracurricular activities like Psi Chi are indicative of dedication to different areas of the field or task. Network with others when attending meetings, conferences, c presentation—it can lead to future job opportunities.				
				, esch
allows	she loves about her job? Denesa enjoys when interns or new her to teach and reinforce the importance of why they are co ch and working in the lab.			
	http://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/19-1042.00			
		Western		
14//	DU PSYCHOLOGY ALUMNI CAREER PROFILES	AN OWNER		
	DRY CAPTURED 2014-2015			

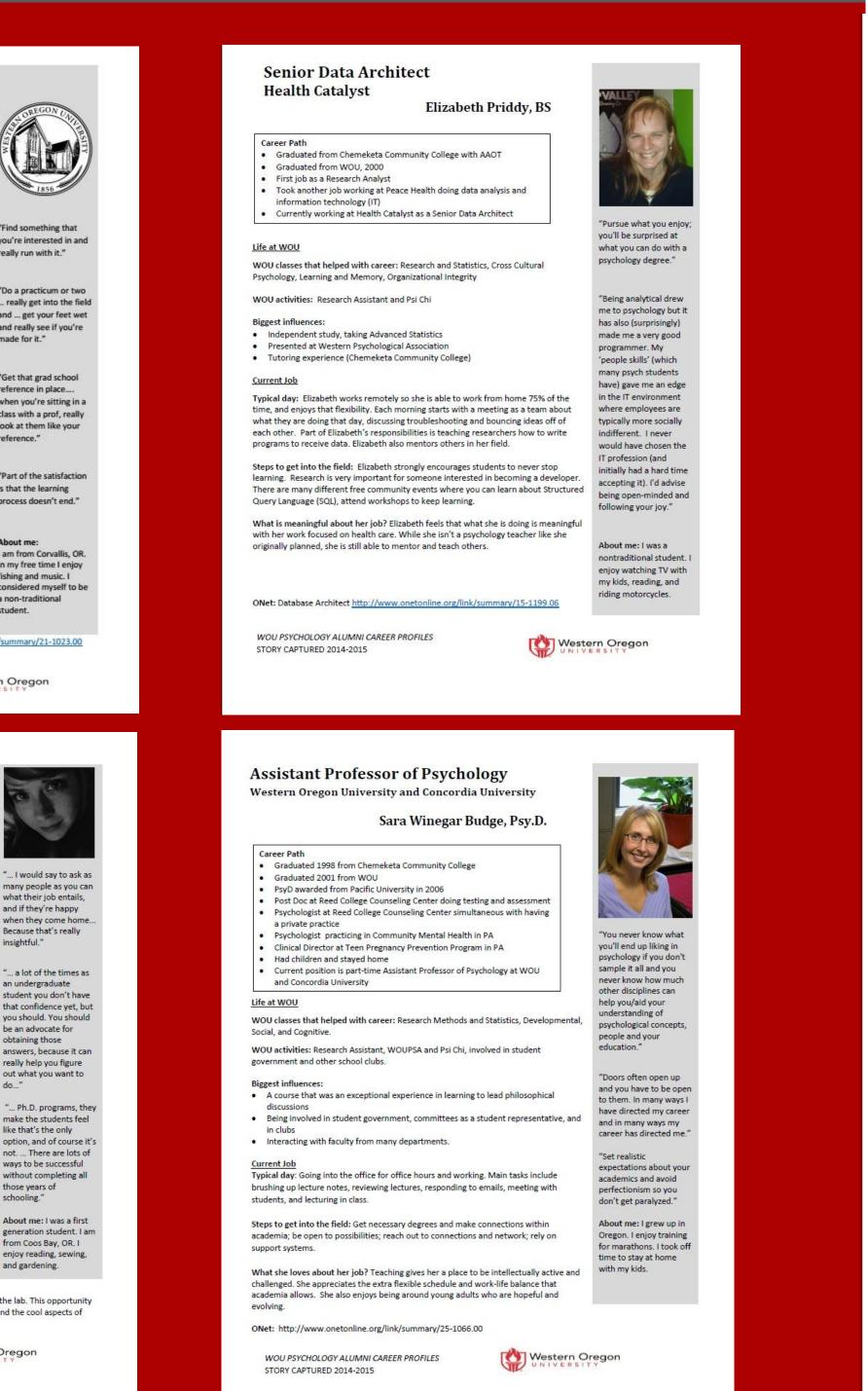
Current students develop practical experience working with qualitative research, broaden research skills, networking, increased knowledge about diversity of career opportunities, and increased knowledge about barriers and realistic career planning. Benefits for alumni include the opportunity to mentor current students, and an increased sense of connection to their alma mater. Faculty benefit from increase contact with alumni, and acquire detailed information about career paths in psychology to be shared with current and prospective students.

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Results: Alumni Profiles



Project Outcomes

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