Career Resources Centers

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A CAREER RESOURCES CENTER collects, organizes and provides access to as much information on general career guidance as possible and as much information as possible on specific careers. This would embrace data on the generic, overall career of a sales person to the specifics of sales work involved in selling computers, caviar or time-share vacation spots. The career resources center and its staff provide as much information and guidance as possible to the job seeker or to the student attempting to choose career paths. In addition to basic information on specific careers, the comprehensive career center also includes guidance counselors; opportunities to take personality and interest inventories, as well as tests of skills, ability and creativity; group and individual work areas; and more. In fact, the career resources center should provide a logical step-by-step developmental procedure to help one identify interests, to determine if these interests are supported by appropriate abilities and commitment, to provide general direction for one to investigate career possibilities. And the personnel of the career materials center provide guidance in using the resources—including people—for the individual to define career goals and career direction. This must be a highly individualized procedure with the individual moving at his or her own pace, aware that guidance and counseling support is available.

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It cannot be overemphasized that career education centers ought not be limited to technical/technological information. College catalogs, professional careers information, and even post-graduate information should be available in a career resources center. In our constantly changing work environments, the route to a career, at any level, should not be predetermined by the constraints of information which is or is not available or which has been selected. Many people who must now retool began with a fairly traditional college background which they must now enhance with newly recognized skills. Many of those with technical backgrounds need to acquire a liberal arts background or a scientific specialization in order to improve or maintain a successful career. Information on any career holds a legitimate place in a career materials center. In realistic terms—because of space and monetary considerations—the career information available in a particular center may be limited to the career preparation available in that community college. But traditional college educational materials should always be provided.

Community colleges have always had a strong commitment to advising and counseling. In fact, that was one of their original six functions. With the rising interest in career education, the constantly fluctuating demands of state-of-the-art career preparation, and the greater number of students attending community college classes—many of them part-time—the need for expanded guidance and counseling services became obvious. Providing students with direction in appropriate course selection and in identifying areas of interest began to be less significant than developing within students a basic career orientation. This might be defined as an awareness of potential careers available within a generally identified interest area. For example, one who has strong interests in working with children and who has appropriate abilities in nurturing, patience, kindliness, creativity, and enthusiasm may be exposed to several career choices: teacher's aide, child care worker, playground supervisor, parks and recreation employee, camp counselor, or guide in an educational support section of a theme park like Busch Gardens or Disney World. In addition, the advantages and disadvantages of particular work environments need to be identified— i.e., benefits, employer expectations, job demands of large $v.$ small organizations. Students also should be made aware of continuing education requirements or opportunities, licenses needed, various routes for entering careers, and growth opportunities.

Perhaps the increasing need for the development of career resources centers has been most influenced by the changing characteristics of

community college students. Rather than opting primarily for college transfer programs as in the past, community college students have steadily become more interested in career education programs and—the euphemistic term for "terminal education"—occupational and/or skills training. Robert Baron,[1] Jack Friedlander,[2] and J. McCurdy[3] have each shown that career programs have been more popular, in terms of student enrollment, than transfer programs since the 1970s. There is reason to believe that this change in direction of career goals will continue.

Ever since the boom days of returning World War II GIs in the 1940s, college transfer courses in community colleges have been those which enrolled the greatest number of students. The growing need for post-secondary education, the government's interest in reeducating its servicemen through the GI Bill, and the U.S. supremacy as a world power, all combined to fill college classrooms throughout the country. And even though there was a growing need for technical expertise, the college degree became an end in itself. The considerable earning power which a college graduate could expect was repeatedly stressed to high school students throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In that period, there was no shortcut to success: the four-year college degree was the necessary foundation for a "successful" life.

In fact, one might consider that these events provided the cornerstone for the community college's coming of age. After all, the original junior/community college concept was built on the thesis that the typical freshman and sophomore years of undergraduate study were extensions of high school study and were attempts to produce knowledgeable, well-rounded students. This feat was to be accomplished before the serious business of entering a major field and becoming a scientist, a teacher, a musician—even a mother. Many students across this country were scurrying to obtain college degrees to guarantee their futures, with no clear idea of the demands or rewards of getting an education. Nonetheless, the need to acquire college credits spurred the growth of junior and community colleges, establishing many "feeder" schools for private and public universities alike.

However, as the costs of education to the individual increased, as the pool of eighteen year olds decreased, as a college education no longer guaranteed upward mobility, and as more and more specialized careers materialized, college-parallel education did not appear the only route available on the road to success. As more and more undergraduate institutions competed for four-year-degree-oriented students, the demand for college-parallel transfer programs in community colleges began to decrease.

At about the same time, the interest in less traditional course offerings increased. In the 1970s and now in the 1980s, many students in post-secondary study do not aspire to college degrees. This may be explained in several ways. The students may already have a degree that is not helping them in the job market. They may not like school and/or they do not have the time or money to commit to a four-year undertaking. They want or need to work as soon as possible and they often do not have the academic skills to enter traditional college classes. In addition, the community college is uniquely able (or willing) to respond quickly to new and innovative course offerings, to respond to the needs of its students. As a result of these factors and others, interest in technical/technological or career education has mushroomed.

The increasing interest in nontraditional experiences and the increasing heterogeneous characteristics of community college students make advising, counseling and career direction an awesome and overwhelming challenge. Even with the best intentions and superlative counselor/advisers, it is not possible for the typical counseling staff to respond adequately to these expanding demands. At such a point, a career resources center becomes a logical development.

Career resources centers, because of their potential use and because of the materials maintained, are natural candidates for inclusion within the community college's library or learning resources center. If the career resources center cannot be housed within the LRC, it should be as physically proximate as possible so that demands made for access to career materials can be most readily served. Because the LRC is likely the campus facility which is open the greatest amount of time and because professional direction is most often available in the LRC, access to and usage of materials will be fostered. No one would dispute that a clerk or student assistant in a career resources collection would be able to provide directions in the locations of materials, and, possibly, in the relationships among various careers. But the LRC librarian in addition would be able to provide guidance in identification of educational or training experiences, in noting agencies which offer such opportunities, in indicating organizations to which one would write for additional information, and in suggesting other career choices which share similar preparations. The librarian, in conjunction with the counseling staff, is in the enviable position of being aware of various informational resources: directories, manuals, biographies—with which even some guidance personnel may be unfamiliar.

What a boon for students: to have appropriate information available to them at almost any convenient time with a knowledgeable staff

to provide direction and guidance! Naturally, no one would suppose that librarians should or could usurp a counselor's authority or position. But working together, these professionals are able to open many previously unavailable or unknown alternatives to students seeking career information.

The advantages of such an arrangement for the LRC are equally desirable. Students who enter the library/LRC seeking career information will absorb some understanding of a basic library function—supplying information. The LRC will be seen as providing information beyond curriculum support or research materials for the "brains" in college parallel courses. (Such library stereotypes may seem ridiculous to practitioners, but actually do reflect many adults' view of libraries and their resources.) If the career resources materials are adequately selected in a variety of formats, the library's provision of information in nonprint materials also will undoubtedly win a convert or two. It cannot be overemphasized that, despite zealous efforts by librarians and media people, the average person still sees the library and its resources as serving the scholar.

In yet another vein, library users of career resources materials will be exposed to the relatively pleasant surroundings of most LRCs. At least since the 1970s, librarians have labored to make them more attractive, to decrease the number of "quiet" areas, to emphasize lounge and conversational spaces, to bring the outside in. These efforts have included hanging plants; large, open windows; natural lighting; lounge areas; comfortable furnishings; and attractive, cheery surroundings. This type of environment may be a surprise for community college students who rarely, if ever, use other libraries and who may not have entered any library in ten to fifteen years. Research reveals that the same characteristics of an attractive library seem to be beneficial in a career/counseling environment. A career center which is busy and bright, and which offers a great deal of information, is most likely to encourage vocational exploration as well as to encourage the inquirer's interest in returning to the center.[4]

In the interests of overall community college and LRC budgets, the cooperation between the counseling area and the LRC makes significant sense. With such a sharing of materials, no matter the unit which finally claims ownership, the need for duplicating materials is substantially reduced. A counselor's office on the other side of campus makes it necessary to acquire multiple copies of some items. With both areas under one roof, the duplicates are often not necessary. With greater and greater demands being made at a time of shrinking budgets, conservative fiscal responsibilities must probably become a way of life. Such

savings in physical resources should free a greater amount of money for acquisition of additional materials. With the increasing diversity of course offerings in most community colleges and the continuously changing career picture, career information to serve the various needs of students must reflect a wider breadth of information.

Although the career materials center is often housed in the LRC and sometimes is under the direction of the LRC staff, if the career resources center is successful, it probably will become a discrete unit of its own—apart from the LRC physically and administratively. In this case, success does breed severance. The entire operation—because it is responding so well to demand—outgrows the need for place and nurturance within the LRC. The pattern often follows the one seen in provision of developmental and remedial programs. The greater the demand and the greater the success in responding to that demand, the more likely it is that remedial or developmental materials and resources will grow into separate units of their own.

One of the grave concerns of community college education today is retention of students. Because government support is often predicated on the numbers of FTE (full-time equivalent) students, the efforts of community colleges are hampered or enhanced by the percentage of students that can be kept in school. The reality is that many community college students do not expect to remain in school or to complete a degree or certificate. They may see no hope of continuing their education because of economic constraints or they may not have the academic skills to be successful. One method which may increase student retention is a more effective guidance system, with the career resources center a significant part of this effort.[5] For Black students, career guidance and counseling are crucial.[6] Displaced homemakers, those retooling for new careers and those interested in nontraditional careers all need guidance toward realistic goals.

To be truly functional and successful, the career materials center must have the support of the entire community college community.[7] It is not sufficient to have a dedicated guidance/counseling staff and enthusiastic support of the center among library personnel. The entire community—faculty, administrators, students, and the public—must be aware of the center, its purposes and its needs. The best publicity for initiating use and for sustaining the value of a career resources center is everyone's being aware of its goals. Administration must see its short- and long-term effects to be willing to provide financial, physical and staff support. Faculty must appreciate the connection between classroom activities, the evidence of cooperative, communicative and training skills with appropriate work habits and expertise. And students

must see the positive direction toward lifetime careers in examination of individual interests, training and ability. Community members must realize the methods the community college uses to produce competent, aware, motivated members of the community. The public must be convinced of the value of such career direction so that some of its members will be willing to serve as resource people when needed.

The commitment of the total organization for the career resources center is the first step in the planning process. Several guides are available which provide both theoretical bases for the initiation of a career resources center and step-by-step procedures for the establishment of such a service.[8] Kidd and Embry have described in detail the procedures needed to develop a career planning [career resources] center; their directions delineate the processes to follow in three situations. Those are: (1) a community college with no career resources facility at all; (2) a community college which has set aside a special location and an employee (full- or part-time responsibilities) assigned to the facility; and (3) a community college which has several established career activities: personal counseling and assessment services and a minimum of one professional devoted to the center full time.[9]

In planning for a career resources center, one of the first responsibilities is to access needs by identifying all resources for career education which are available. Surveys and questionnaires, as well as direct observation, can be used to gather this information. If one needs help there are commercial needs assessment instruments, such as the "Assessment of Career Development" which is available from Houghton Mifflin.[10] If one has an interest in career resources centers in other community colleges, several states have investigated the extent of career resources centers in their community colleges and the services offered.[11]

The usefulness of the career resources center depends on the appropriate materials being available, easy accessibility to them, and competent staff to assist the students with the materials. Both members of the guidance/counseling staff and of the library staff will be involved in identifying materials to be acquired. In addition to career-oriented information, career resources also would include materials on clothing suggestions, business etiquette, résumé preparation, and interview techniques. There is a plethora of sources available for career materials.[12]

Career information is produced by a wide variety of private and commercial enterprises, covering many formats. The challenge to acquire the most effective materials, especially in newly developing careers, is the watchword of collection development. The traditional care taken in selecting materials must be assiduously applied in identifying appropriate materials, especially those which carefully contain all

aspects of career awareness. These would include, for example, such characteristics as work environment, alternative ways to enter the specific career field, and advantages and disadvantages of nontraditional careers for either sex. Although it is always most convenient to acquire information which can be housed in the LRC or career resources center, one of the best sources for newly emerging career information is an individual actively involved in that particular emerging career. Because of changing demands, partially influenced by developing technology, the individual in the forefront of the field can best describe the demands, constraints and rewards of his or her career. The physical availability to interact with students seeking information and guidance will be limited by the demands of the individual's time; by the number of students who would benefit from such interaction; and by the changes within the career itself, the work environment and the changing preparations necessary to enter the field.

Video and audiocassette tape can, of course, be used to capture the worker's perception and analyses of opportunities, training and rewards. But care must be taken to provide constant updating of information in many areas. The same may be applied to women who enter traditional male work areas and to men who do the same in female-dominated positions. Despite the advent of opportunities in word processing, computer operation and health care, there are many individuals who—because of personal preference or location—wish to become secretaries, nurse's aides, child care workers, etc. Contrary to the past, however, these employees may be male.[13]

There are many publishers and producers which have career information available. These include: Vocational Biographies, Incorporated in Saul Centre, Minnesota; Chronicle Guidance Publications, Incorporated of Moravia, New York; Careers, Incorporated of Largo, Florida; and Science Research Associates of Palo Alto, California. Publishers producing career information include Richards Rosen Press, Vocational Guidance Manuals and Julian Messner.[14]

Of course, of immediate concern to library professionals involved in the establishment and growth of a career resources center is the managerial or organizational framework. C.H. Green's article[15] on managing career information; Vitale's data;[16] and cataloging directions by Lyle[17] and Clack[18] should provide some direction. Various considerations are important to evaluating career materials for purchase. The National Vocational Guidance Association has provided guidelines for preparing and/or evaluating career information.[19]

In addition to career information being available in standard print and media sources, a burgeoning amount of data is available in elec-

tronic format. Increasingly sophisticated electronic capabilities have influenced the methods available for obtaining career information. Since the student still must finally choose the most attractive, feasible career, many computer systems have been developed for the individual searcher. Detailed information on careers themselves, the means available for acquiring training and/or experience, the agencies which offer specific opportunities, expectations of salary and career advancement, and personal characteristics which are desirable in a given career is available. As the individual interacts with the system, he or she has the privacy and time to examine any career interest. The obvious attraction of these systems is that they give structure to the mass of career information available. In fact, one's fear might be that, given so much information and in such detail, the user may become overwhelmed and, possibly, incapacitated by the choices. But how much better than to feel that "there's nothing I can do!"

The basic purpose in searching a computer system for educational and occupational information is "to increase awareness of options and opportunities."[20] And more and more individuals and agencies are interested in providing just such information. The Federal Education Amendments of 1976 created the NOICC (National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee). Its latest funded programs are called career information delivery systems, emphasizing the importance of disseminating information. To decrease decentralization of information and policies, the SOICC (State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee) was created. The SOICC developed two systems for career guidance information: OIS, Occupational Information System (of occupational statistics); and CIDS, Career Information Delivery System, to "provide relevant, as well as accurate, occupational data to a state's users."[21]

There are basically two types of career information systems which allow user interaction. One online information system provides for storage and retrieval of information. Examples of such systems are CHOICES, CIS, COIN, CVIS, ECES, GIS, and SCAD. Each of these provides structured interviews between the user and the computer. Such searches or interviews help users anticipate the effects of their choices. The other type of online guidance system, while providing storage and retrieval, also supplies a greater amount of information, including guidance content. This second system will help the user determine his or her status of career development, will provide for computer-assisted instruction, and will provide simulation exercises to clarify values and decision-making. It also helps in classifying occupations. Examples of

this system are DISCOVER, EXPLORE and SIGI. A thorough description of these systems is available from Jacobson and Grabowski.[22]

Because of financial considerations, these systems may not be immediately available to a fledgling career resources center. But a cooperative agreement between libraries or among institutions in a state-supported system may allow access to a commercial system.

Most career resources centers provide information via several methods: (1) a computer system, (2) cross-referenced files, (3) bookshelf or filing cabinet materials, and (4) cross-referenced card files or notebooks. Complementing information filed in different locations is difficult to correlate and contributes to an underused collection. In response to this problem, Georgia Institute of Technology developed a system to help staff maintain inventory and control in their career library. The system is called the CALI (Computer-Assisted Library Index). The system helps students identify and locate career information as well as helping the staff maintain an inventory of career materials.[23] In one alphabetical index it provides access to all types of career sources: books, files, information systems, and audiovisual materials.

Many of the developments discussed previously may be well beyond basic career resources centers that are currently being established. Nevertheless, it seems clear from the field and from the great and diverse demands being made of community colleges that career direction and guidance will be a top service priority in the coming years. As more and more people need to retool or update their employment skills, the demands on community colleges will increase, as will the demands on library support services. Since the LRC is likely the facility which will encourage and, at first, support a career resources center, it behooves LRC librarians to become knowledgeable and to prepare for the challenge. After all, the provision of information which is timely, easy to identify and locate, and answers a need is the rationale for any LRC. As has happened so often in the past, the future has merged with the present; and community college LRCs are again at the cutting edge in responding to new demands.

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