Transitions of Liberal Arts Graduates

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Objectives

- To discuss the beliefs/myths surrounding liberal arts graduates and career transitions

- To describe typical career patterns of liberal arts graduates and their impact on career satisfaction and beliefs

- To differentiate liberal arts graduates' experiences, satisfaction, and beliefs by type of major

- To suggest intervention strategies to aid these different groups in their transitions

Background

- Need research on the outcomes of liberal arts
  - Myths: Good liberal arts students go to graduate school, have no interest in practical problem-solving, have no technical skills,....etc..
  - Changes in the workplace: need for liberal arts colleges to link their strengths to new workplace demands
  - Integration of career theory and outcomes assessment (not just a marketing problem)

- Involved 21 colleges, 455 students initially; 205 returned follow-up 18 months later

Summary *They did what they said they would: (31% in school, 60% working, 4% unemployed, 5% combination)*

- ◆ Going to school: 87% school, 5% unemployed, 7% working
- ◆ Working: 84% working, 4% unemployed, 12% in school
- ◆ Undecided, but not actively looking: 78% working, 19% in school
- ◆ Undecided, but actively looking: 78% working, 15% school, 6% unemployed

Profile of Participants Who Are Working

- ◆ 79% female; 3.26 GPA; 49% have mothers with less than a BA; 51% come from families who make less than $50000
- ◆ Employment: Average length of employment was 11.2 months; average salary was $20,252; mean number of interviews was 5 (median 3); 17% interviewed with 10 - 60 organizations; almost 79% expected to work for more than one employer during the next 5 years.

- Strong belief that the first job will determine their career
- Expected to move in 3 years
- Confident in themselves
- Less confident in their college preparation than when they graduated
- Expected friendship in the workplace and were disappointed (except for natural science majors who expected little and found more)
- Very satisfied with jobs, especially if they thought their academic work had not prepared them well
- Received less feedback than they expected
- If they had internship, salaries were significantly higher
- Expected higher level of professional work than they actually obtained

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Natural Science Majors

MOST DISTRESSED IF THEY DID NOT HAVE THE "RIGHT" "JOB"

- The most focused on work
- They were the most distressed if they have not found a job
- Appreciated job fairs, on-campus interviewing, and other concrete connections with employers
- Value work and adjust well to it

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Social Science Majors

- Expected autonomy and got it
- Expected feedback, friendship, a variety of skills, and meaningful work, and got less than they expected
- Prefer career services interventions that included training in job-getting (interview training, resume workshops) but do not see additional schooling as important
- Feel that changing jobs may be a problem

WANT SECURITY

Humanities

- Most intellectual and least career-focused
- Considered where they worked very important
- Most likely to be looking for a secure job
- Have little focus
- Expectations for job (variety of skills, feedback, friendship, and value of work) all decreased significantly, even when they found work

Summary: They found some surprises in the workplace

- Those with confidence were satisfied with jobs and graduate work, but became less satisfied with their college preparation
- Organizational politics and socialization occurred easily
- They were frustrated about finding friends
- Internships mattered for salary level, but had little impact on students with low career orientation
- Skills needed that college had not taught them included computer skills (32%), flexibility (31%), and general knowledge (20%)

Future interventions

- Possible selves (intensely personal, motivating, anticipated affective experiences, means to reach goals, and a balance between expected and feared selves that increases motivational power): bringing the Humanities students beyond the classroom
- Faculty could be encouraged to talk about their own career-decision-making or that of former students
- Career development specialists could work with faculty on presenting seminars or workshops related to problem-solving in a work environment
- Career development specialists could design workshops combining endings and beginnings

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