

**The Effects of College Career Courses on Learner Outputs and Outcomes: Technical  
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By

Byron Folsom, Ed.D.

&

Robert Reardon, Ph.D.

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**The Center for the Study of Technology in Counseling and Career Development**

University Center, Suite A4148

The Florida State University

Tallahassee, FL 32306-2490

850-644-6431 (voice) 850-644-3273 (FAX)

<http://www.career.fsu.edu/techcenter/>

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<sup>1</sup> Byron Folsom, Ed.D., is a consultant with MGT of America in Tallahassee, Florida. Robert C. Reardon, Ph.D., is Professor and Director for Instruction, Research, and Evaluation in the Career Center at Florida State University. The authors thank Dr. Janet Lenz, Ms. Corey Reed, Dr. Gary Peterson, and Dr. James Sampson, Jr. for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

## Executive Summary

This review of career course literature briefly traces the history of career courses in colleges and universities and reviews 46 reports of the effectiveness of the various career planning courses offered in institutions of higher education throughout the country. More than 16,320 students were involved in these studies from 1976 to 2001. This review has been framed in terms of the *outputs* and *outcomes* of career course interventions. We reviewed 38 studies of career course *outputs*, such as career thoughts, career decision-making skills, career decidedness, and vocational identity, which are theoretically related to *outcomes* of career interventions, such as persistence (retention) in college, and job satisfaction or satisfaction with field of study. In this analysis, we found 34 studies (90%) reporting positive gains in measured output variables, and 4 studies (10%) reporting no changes in output variables. We reviewed 15 studies of career course outcomes and found nine studies (87%) reporting positive gains in measured outcome variables, and two studies (13%) reporting no changes in outcome variables. These findings are similar to the studies regarding output variables and the effects of career courses. The paper concludes with an analysis of this body of research and implications for further research in this area.

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The practice of using career development courses in colleges and universities to assist students with educational and career planning has a surprisingly long and robust history. In colonial times, instruction about work might have been the subject of a college wide convocation, along with discussions of health, morals, deportment, and other life adjustment topics. Maverick (1926) reported that freshman orientation courses, which appeared as early as 1911, included several hours of instruction on vocational guidance. One of the early career courses was offered for women at Barnard College, Columbia University in 1921 with the title “Professional Occupations: Their Scope, Functions, and Newer Developments” (Maverick, 1926). In general, courses emerged at the turn of the century as one way of delivering comprehensive career services in colleges and universities.

But what do we really know about career courses as career interventions, and to what extent are courses used as learning events that offer more than help in finding a job after graduation or choosing a major field of study? What do we know about the impact of career courses in helping students to develop new ideas about work, education, life planning, and other outcomes? Do career courses affect student retention in college? Do career courses help students develop new ways of thinking about themselves and the world in which they will live and work? What kind of research is being done on career courses, and who is doing it? The purpose of this article is to provide some answers from the research literature that will help us answer these questions and others.

We begin this study with an overview of career courses, and then move to an analysis of the outputs and outcomes of career courses in terms of accountability. Next we examine the literature on career courses, and conclude with some observations about the effects of career course interventions. Our overall purpose is to provide material that might be helpful to practitioners in developing a career course and in securing academic credit for such a course at their postsecondary institution.

### **An Overview of Career Development Courses**

As Maverick (1926) found, career-related courses have been used in higher education since the early 1900s. In our review of the literature, we found and have referenced more than 80 articles or chapters reporting career course development activities and course results across U.S. colleges and universities. In this section, we first review general surveys of the prevalence of career courses in higher education institutions. We then examine courses focused on a particular discipline or academic unit, followed by a review of meta-analyses of career courses. We conclude this section with an examination of some features of career courses that may be of special interest to practitioners.

## Surveys of Career Course Prevalence

Hoppock (1932), assisted by the National Vocational Guidance Association, located catalog descriptions of 18 college career courses in the early 1930s. These courses were offered in all kinds of colleges, e.g., two-year, liberal arts, professional, and in a wide variety of disciplines. Later, Stevens and Hoppock (1956) surveyed 303 (about 33%) of schools in the 1952 American Council on Education directory of colleges and found career courses at 11 institutions. They provided brief descriptions of these courses and noted that five were taught by placement officers, five by professors, and one by a dean of women. They also noted that full academic credit was given for most of the courses.

Carter and Hoppock (1961) suggested that Edgar J. Wiley, who included a unit on occupations as part of a contemporary civilization course in 1923, had developed the first career course. However, Borow (1960) was one of the first to describe a comprehensive course, “Vocational Planning,” which was offered in the General College at the University of Minnesota in 1932. Indeed, Borow and Lindsey (1959) eventually co-authored a text for that course, Vocational Planning for College Students, which was published by Prentice-Hall.

Career courses in higher education became more prevalent over the next few decades. Journal articles provided reports on such courses from 1930 to 1960, and there was evidence that 33 institutions of higher education were offering full academic credit career courses in the early 1960s (Carter & Hoppock, 1961). In a related report, Calvert, Carter, and Murphy (1964) estimated that over 100 two- and four-year colleges were providing courses in this area.

Later, Devlin (1974) conducted an extensive survey of college placement offices to determine the extent to which career development courses were being offered. Results indicated that approximately 75 responding institutions were offering career development courses with another 123 institutions indicating that they were planning to propose such a course. Devlin pointed out that many of the career development courses of this era covered three major areas: (1) career choice factors, (2) career information, and (3) job-seeking techniques (Devlin, 1974). This triad of topics probably continues to define the contents of a comprehensive course.

As an explanation for the emergence of career planning classes during the early 1970s, Ripley (1975) suggested that it was primarily due to a combination of a restricted job market and a growing desire within higher education to contribute to the holistic development of students. Ripley discussed the advantages of large career development classes comprised of over 100 students, including the maximum utilization of career development staff, greater institutional impact, and the ability to reach more students. Additional information on this topic was provided in a study by Reardon, Zunker, and Dyal (1979). These authors recounted an assertion by Goldstein (1977) that institutions of higher learning reject the concept of career education as inappropriate within an academic setting. (This was labeled “creeping vocationalism” by some faculty.)

Reardon, Zunker, and Dyal (1979) surveyed 458 colleges and universities across the nation to learn more about the role and function of career services, including courses. Part of the

interest in conducting this national survey was to determine the extent to which the career education concept was being discussed on campuses at that time. Of 299 respondents, approximately 29 percent (87) indicated that a career planning course for credit was available at their campus. Further, 33 percent noted that the issue of career education was being studied at their school. The authors concluded that in spite of Goldstein's (1977) pessimism about the acceptance of career education on college campuses, the survey results indicated some positive response to the idea.

In a larger study, Haney and Howland (1978) found evidence of a growing proliferation of career development courses in the 1970s in an extensive survey of 2,400 two- and four-year institutions. Of the respondents, 38 percent (353) reported offering career courses for credit. Additionally, these researchers described the importance of career courses providing academic credit because of the value and respect attributed to courses within higher education that offer academic credit.

Mead and Korschgen (1994) randomly surveyed two colleges from each of the 50 states in order to learn about current practices with career courses. They obtained responses from 61 schools in 32 states, and 62% offered some kind of career course. Three broad types of courses were offered, including those geared either toward career decision making, job search preparation, or specific disciplines. Students enrolled were almost equally distributed across the four college years. They reported that 95% of the respondents granted from one to three hours of credit, and 5% of the courses were graded pass/fail.

In the most recent national survey we found, Collins (1998) surveyed 1,688 college members of the National Association of Colleges and Employers in 1997 and obtained responses from 26.8%. She found that credit-bearing courses were offered by 30% of those responding, a figure that has held steady since 1981, while 24% offered noncredit-bearing courses. Halasz and Kempton (2000) conducted an e-mail survey using various listservers and found that 70% (28 of 40) of responding institutions reported having a career course. They noted that the course was most usually offered for one credit, and that the presence or absence of administrative and faculty support was a key issue in offering a career course. Halasz and Kempton (2000) found evidence that the long battle between student and academic affairs was still being waged in regards to offering credit for career courses.

### Specialty Career Courses

In research focused on career courses in a specific school or college in a university, Montana (1989) surveyed business schools across the nation and found that 64 percent (N = 120) of the respondents offered some type of career planning and development instruction, and nearly 50 percent offered formal instruction. In 43 percent (N = 81) of the schools, the career planning and placement staff provided the instruction. Using a different approach that involved a case study, Heppner and Krause (1979) described a course offered at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) that consisted of two hours of academic credit. The course was designed such that each academic department or college could offer the course within the department and use departmental faculty to teach the course. The authors suggested this course system could be an

efficient use of career counselors' time through employing the use of academic department faculty to increase student career development competencies. In a report on career course development in the speech department at the University of Rhode Island, Erhart and Gilmore (1977) discussed some of the issues encountered by career professionals in obtaining approval from academic committees to award credit for career development courses. In spite of these obstacles, a credit course on interviewing, including job hunting, was successfully launched at the upper division level. Finally, Dodson, Chastain, and Landrum (1996) described the development and operation of a junior/senior team-taught credit course for psychology majors. They noted that the course was graded pass/fail, student journaling was required, graduate school options were emphasized, no written papers or text were used, and quantitative assessments were used to evaluate the course.

Over the years, various authors have described alternative strategies for developing and managing career courses. To assess alternative methods of instruction in a career course, Salinger (1966) reported a four year course development project at Ferris State College. Beginning with a highly structured approach, the course evolved to one that featured small group discussion on career topics and the extensive use of outside resource persons. A similar course development activity intended to increase an awareness of gender roles in career planning was reported by Gerkin, Reardon, and Bash (1988). Bradley and Mims (1992) reported how family systems and birth order were used as the basis for a college career decision-making course. Filer (1986) discussed varied issues in grading student performance in career courses. Four other articles by Barkhaus and Bolyard (1977), Lee and Anthony (1974), Swails and Hess (1977), and Ramsey (1975) were published in the Journal of College Placement in the 1970s that described the development of comprehensive university-level career courses. The latter course was designed especially for women.

Swain (1984) described the development of a comprehensive, three-credit course developed at the University of Illinois. This course, Ed Psych 250 Career Development Theory and Practice, was jointly offered by the Educational Psychology Department in the College of Education, the Career Development and Placement Center, and Division of Counseling Psychology (counseling center). Ed Psych 250 was theory based, open to students at all undergraduate levels, taught by graduate students supervised by a faculty member, and offered in 5-10 sections per semester.

More recently, Brooks (1995) described two career courses offered at North Carolina State University in the business area. Using a case study approach, Brooks offered suggestions to other professionals interested in teaching career courses. Brooks reported that career course participants tended to begin their career planning earlier, develop greater self-awareness, grasp realities of the job market, and write their resumes before graduation. She also reported positive evaluations by employers. A post-course evaluation form developed by the author and completed by students formed the basis for comments as to the value and usefulness of these courses.

#### Meta-analyses of Career Course Results

In an effort to learn more about the impact results of career courses, several meta-analyses provide insight into the effects of career-related courses. Spokane and Oliver (1983) reported that group or class interventions were more effective than individual counseling or other interventions. Later, Oliver and Spokane (1988) reported an analysis of 240 treatment-control comparisons in 58 studies comparing 11 different types of career interventions. They found that career guidance classes produced the largest effect size with regard to client gains resulting from the assortment of career interventions considered. Classes also involved the largest number of hours and sessions, but were the most expensive intervention according to Oliver and Spokane (1988). Hardesty (1991) also conducted a meta-analysis consisting of 12 studies that evaluated career development courses offered for credit. Results of this meta-analysis confirmed previous research findings as to overall positive effects of undergraduate career courses on increasing both career decidedness (48% more certain) and career maturity (40% more capable of making a realistic decision) of college students. However, Hardesty noted that the long-term effects of career courses, e.g., within a year or two or longer after completion of the courses, had not been established.

A more recent meta-analysis by Whiston, Sexton and Lasoff (1998) examined 47 studies conducted between 1983 and 1995, including nine studies of career classes. Whiston et al. (1998) found that career classes were the third most effective career intervention out of eight different categories of interventions examined. Career classes followed individual and group counseling in effectiveness, but were ahead of group test interpretation, workshops, computer interventions, counselor-free interventions, and other nonclassified interventions. The researchers found classes followed counselor-free interventions and computer interventions as least costly. These findings are similar to those reported by Oliver and Spokane (1988) ten years earlier, except for the matter of cost.

Brown and Krane (2000), in reviewing a series of meta-analyses, concluded that demonstrably effective career interventions, including career courses, have five components: (1) allow clients to clarify career and life goals in writing; (2) provide clients with individualized interpretations and feedback, e.g., test results; (3) provide current information on the risks and rewards of selected occupations and career fields; (4) include study of models and mentors who demonstrate effective career behavior; and (5) assistance in developing support networks for pursuing career aspirations. Brown and Krane suggest that persons designing and evaluating the impact of career courses should assess the extent to which at least three of the five components are included in the course.

### Special Features of Career Courses

In reflecting on the research available at the time, Gimmestad (1984) provided an insightful discussion about the use of instruction in career planning. He pointed out the benefits of a systematic approach to delivery of career services provided by career course interventions. The course provides for efficient use of staff and delivery of services. Even more important, when academic credit is involved, the sponsoring institution almost always stands to benefit due to commonly used funding formulae that are based on the generation of student credit hours.

Indeed, credit career courses are somewhat unique among other career interventions, e.g., individual counseling, in that students actually pay for the intervention prior to service delivery.

Sounding a recurring theme in this literature, Lent, Larkin, and Hasegawa (1986) noted that the efficient delivery of career services to large numbers of students is a major advantage of career planning courses. The growing interest over the past few years in career development courses has become international in scope. For example, The Open University has introduced a university wide optional for-credit module on personal career development (Watts & Hawthorn, 1992). Additionally, Peng (1996) reported on the positive effects of a career education course on career related decision-making among business college students in Taiwan.

In concluding this overview of career courses, we might note that our check of Amazon.com, an online bookstore, revealed more than 50 books that could be used as texts for college level career courses. It is apparent that there is a strong interest in writing and publishing career course textbooks, which probably is a response to a strong market demand for such materials.

### **Outputs and Outcomes**

A review of the impact of college career courses can be framed in terms of accountability, or the outputs and outcomes of this career intervention. These two concepts are part of the five basic elements of accountability in human service interventions, i.e., diagnosis, prescription, process, output, and outcome, which were discussed by Peterson and Burck (1982) in proposing an accountability model for human services programs. *Outputs* refer to the skills, knowledge, and attitudes acquired by participants as the result of an intervention (Peterson & Burck, 1982). Specific examples include more positive career planning thoughts, and increased career decidedness, vocational identity, internal locus-of-control, and career maturity. In contrast to output variables, *outcomes* of career service interventions refer to the resultant effects occurring at some later point in time. Examples of outcomes of a career planning course are job performance ratings, course satisfaction, level of personal adjustment, deciding on a major, timely graduation from college, and cumulative GPA.

In reviewing the research literature on the effects of career courses, an understanding of the distinction between *outputs* and *outcomes* is helpful in evaluating the studies. For example, most of the research we found was focused on outputs, e.g., changes in level of vocational identity or career maturity, or improved decision-making skills. In contrast, only a few of the studies were concerned with an outcome variable, and it was retention in college. This matter led Fretz (1981) to worry that in evaluation studies “So many career interventions are focused on students in the educational system that outcomes more appropriate to persons already in or about to enter the world of work have been neglected” (p. 85). Moreover, Fretz urged that evaluations of career service interventions should employ outcome rather than output criteria to the extent possible. In like manner, Peterson and Burck (1982) stated, “By using the attainment of competencies to connote output and their resultant efforts as outcomes, a sharper perspective on human service work is gained that may well lead to more effective decision making that will in turn result in more effective, efficient, and worthwhile programs” (p. 495).



Research on both the outputs and outcomes of career courses is needed, but the ultimate value of career courses in higher education will probably be most affected by outcome research that documents the impact of courses on student retention in college and the quality of work and life roles after college. However, outputs remain important in our understanding of outcomes, as they are inextricably linked or related. In this regard, Tinto (1993) noted that indecision with regard to career goals, an output variable, is one of the factors that may influence student retention, an outcome variable. Tinto suggested that prolonged career uncertainty by students leads them to call into question the reasons for their continued presence on campus (Tinto, 1993). Sounding a similar theme, Noel, Levitz, and Saluri (1984, p. 12) summarized the matter this way: “My experience indicates that the second major theme of attrition, uncertainty about what to study, is the most frequent reason talented students give for dropping out of college.”

To summarize this discussion of the outputs and outcomes of career courses, Tinto and Noel suggest that output variables, such as career indecision, may have a direct effect on outcomes, such as retention in college. This understanding is helpful in evaluating career courses with respect to accountability.

### **Studies of Career Development Course Outputs**

It was not until the 1970s that formal research on career courses began to appear in academic journals. For the most part, career services professionals could only guess as to the effectiveness of these courses prior to this time (Gimmestad, 1984). Many of the studies before 1980 were plagued by methodological shortcomings, such as the failure to employ adequate controls for extraneous effects upon outcome measures (Lent, Larkin, & Hasegawa, 1986). In spite of these problems, the early studies of career courses conducted in the 1970s provided an indication of the effectiveness of these courses which was later confirmed by more methodologically sound research.

The study of career development courses has continued into 2001. In this review of literature we found 46 studies that reported outputs and outcomes (see Table 1). Fourteen (3%) of the studies cited are dissertation reports (Baldwin, Bash, Broley, Folsom, Kilk, Lisansky, Montolio, Oreshnick, Peng, Robinson, Wachs, Weist, Wiseman, and Williamson) and one is unpublished (Schmidt). In the following paragraphs, we will briefly describe the dependent variables used as outputs and major findings in the studies we reviewed. We begin with the earliest studies.

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 Insert Table 1 about here  
 Summary of Studies of Career Course Outputs and Outcomes  
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Table 1 includes more than six outputs that are measured by standardized instruments. In this paragraph, we introduce the most frequently used outputs, generally in the order of their presentation in the table. The career maturity output reported in several studies was measured by

the Career Maturity Inventory (CMI; Crites, 1973) and reflects subjective reactions toward making a career decision along with other cognitive variables involved in a career choice. A related instrument, The Career Development Inventory (CDI; Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, & Myers, 1981), assesses statements of occupational preference, knowledge of self and career, and career planning orientation. Internal locus of control refers to increased autonomy and self-reliance with career planning and decision making as measured by Rotter's Internal-External Locus-of-Control Scale (Rotter, 1966). The career decidedness or decreased career indecision output is intended to capture those studies that either reported increased career decidedness or reduced career indecision. This output is often measured by the Career Decision Scale (CDS; Osipow, Carney, Winer, Yanico, & Koschier, 1976). Career decision-making ability refers to skills at making career decisions with a more rational career decision-making approach. The vocational identity outcome is concerned with clarity of vocational goals, interests, and personality and is measured by the My Vocational Situation (MVS; Holland, Daiger, & Power, 1980). The career thoughts output is measured by the Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI; Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1996).

At this point, we want to add an additional word about the Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI; Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Sanders, 1996). Since its publication in 1996, investigators such as Kilk (1997) and Reed, Lenz, Reardon, and Leierer (2001) have begun to examine the role of thinking in career problem solving and decision making. The CTI is based on Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) theory (Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991; Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, & Lenz, 1996). Three construct scores are included in the CTI assessment: Decision Making Confusion, which is characterized by inability to begin or continue the career decision-making process; Commitment Anxiety, which is characterized by reluctance to commit to a single career choice; and External Conflict, which denotes negative thinking concerning the balancing of one's own career perceptions against those of significant others (Sampson et al., 1996). In a criterion-related validity study, Sampson et al. (1996) reported that the CTI accurately discriminated between clients (those seeking career services) and nonclients, with clients always indicating more negative or dysfunctional career thoughts.

#### Career Course Output Studies, 1970-1979

In one of the earliest studies in the 1970s, Babcock and Kaufman (1976) used two experimental groups and one control group to study outputs of a career course. The student body of the academic departmental site used in this study consisted of mostly females, and thus men were omitted from the study. One treatment group was composed of members of a career development class, "Career Environment and Individual Development," and a second treatment group was composed of students not in the class that had requested individual career counseling. The control group consisted of a group of students who received neither of the treatments. The primary measuring instrument used in the study was a revised version of the CDI (Super et al., 1981). Results indicated that the career development course was more effective than counseling or no treatment at facilitating vocational development of the women in the study.

Touchton, Wertheimer, Cornfeld, and Harrison (1977) created a career course at the University of Maryland based on cognitive development theory (Knefelkamp & Slepitzka, 1976).

This model sought to move students from a dualistic level of thinking to a more complex level identified as multiplicity. The two sections of the experimental course were based on a developmental theory of instruction and cognitive development, the two traditional sections were taught by instructors with no knowledge of developmental instruction, and one section was taught in a mixed format. Touchton et al. (1977) reported that the experimental course produced the largest gains in cognitive complexity with respect to careers.

Evans and Rector (1978) conducted a study similar to many others of this time period that established the value of a career guidance course in increasing the career decidedness of participating students. The independent variable in this study was a college credit course, "Decision Making for Career Development." The dependent variable was students' vocational development as determined by pre- and postcourse scores on the Vocational Decision Checklist (VDC; Harren, 1978), as well as another questionnaire developed for the study by the researchers. Results provided evidence of the effectiveness of the course in facilitating the vocational decidedness output of students who completed the course.

Indicative of increased rigor in the research methodology of these studies was an evaluation of a career development course conducted by Ganster and Lovell (1978) that used a quasi-experimental design. The sample consisted of both students taking a business management class and students enrolled in a career development seminar. A 2 x 2 factorial design was employed in order to control for both initial comparability of the control and treatment groups and for any possible re-testing effects. The measuring instrument was the CMI (Crites, 1973). This instrument assesses subjective reactions toward making a career decision along with other cognitive variables involved in a career choice. Results demonstrated the effectiveness of this career development seminar in increasing the level of career maturity of college students.

Locus of control was the output variable of interest in a study conducted by Bartsch and Hackett (1978). A pretest, treatment, posttest design was employed in administering Rotter's Internal-External Locus-of-Control Scale (Rotter, 1966) to participants in a course entitled "Effective Personal and Career Decision Making." The study involved use of two experimental and two no-treatment control groups. A primary finding of the study was that students who had participated in this two-credit course altered their locus-of-control beliefs toward greater internality which is believed to lead to increased autonomy and responsibility with career planning and decision-making.

Williamson (1979) sought to evaluate the effectiveness of a career planning and decision-making course intended to assist freshmen and sophomore college students with career decision making. A comparison group was used in this study. The career planning decision-making output was measured using Harren's (1978) Assessment of Career Decision Making. This instrument was used in numerous studies during this time period to test effectiveness of career counseling or instructional interventions (Williamson, 1979). The study also examined the internal-external decision orientation of students who had completed the course using Rotter's (1966) Locus-of-Control Scale. Results of this study indicated that those students who completed the course, compared with those who did not, demonstrated higher levels of career

decision making concerning choice of a future occupation. The two groups were found to be similar in terms of internal-external decision styles (Williamson, 1979).

### Career Course Output Studies, 1980-1989

Several studies of career courses found limited or no positive outputs from career courses (see Table 1). For example, Weist (1980) examined the effects of a life career-planning course on self-esteem, career maturity, and sex-role stereotypes and found little evidence to indicate that participation in a career-planning course would lead to changes in the outcome variables of interest. Also, Baldwin (1981) reported on a study of the effects of a career development course on career maturity levels using the Career Development Inventory (CDI; Super et al., 1981). For the most part, results showed a lack of increase in career maturity as measured by the CDI. Only the "Resources for Exploration" scale of this instrument showed a significant pretest to posttest increase.

As was the case with Ganster and Lovell (1978) earlier, Smith (1981) used the CMI (Crites, 1973) to evaluate the outputs of a career guidance class. This study included two career guidance classes and a control group comprised of randomly selected students living in a residence hall who did not participate in the course. Smith was also interested in comparing the two career guidance classes relative to some philosophical and methodological differences used in teaching the course. In examining the results, Smith (1981) found that the more highly structured class significantly exceeded the less structured class and the control group in measures of career maturity. These findings suggest that the effect of a career course may be dependent on a high level of class organization or structure.

Ware (1981) conducted a second study of a career course using the CMI (Crites, 1973) as a primary measuring instrument. The objective of this study was to evaluate the outputs of a career development course for upper level psychology majors. The experimental group consisted of upper division psychology majors enrolled in a career development course and the control group consisted of psychology majors who did not enroll in the course. Results provided evidence that the course appeared to be effective in increasing students' career maturity and level of self-knowledge.

Another study of this period that used effective control measures in evaluating career development courses was conducted by Barker (1981). This researcher evaluated the effectiveness of a pilot career planning and decision-making college course, which was developed by the Division of Career Guidance at Appalachia Educational Laboratory. The study involved field testing the course at 14 participating colleges. A nonequivalent control group design was employed utilizing 15 experimental and 15 control classes. The control classes were similar to the experimental classes in terms of class structure, organization, student composition, and student desire to participate in a career guidance class. However, control group classes consisted of academic classes that did not deal with career development issues. Students were pre- and posttested using both the Assessment of Career Decision Making (ACDM; Harren, 1978) and a researcher-developed post-course evaluation survey. The ACDM is based on the career development theory of Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963) and assesses style of decision making and

level of progress in completing several college-related career development tasks, including adjustment to college, major selection, and occupation selection (Barker, 1981). A student survey developed by the researcher had been previously validated through pilot and field testing. It was designed to test the following outcomes: self-knowledge, knowledge of career milieu, and decision-making ability (Barker, 1981). Analysis of the data indicated differences in many of the criteria that were examined between experimental and control groups, including a positive effect on career decision-making ability and selection of a major. Barker (1981) reported the summative evaluation indicated the effectiveness of this pilot course as a career development intervention.

Johnson, Smither, and Holland (1981) evaluated two career development courses at Johns Hopkins University to see what kind of interventions were helping which students. The courses were listed as seminars and included a variety of interventions, e.g., inventories, workbooks, written assignments, individual counseling, and students were asked to evaluate each activity. The seminar was offered five times, with the first three providing less structure and the last two were more structured and organized around a specific career decision-making model. Johnson et al. (1981) found a strong impact of the course on increasing vocational identity as measured by the MVS (Holland et al., 1980).

Stonewater and Daniels (1983) reported the development of Guidance 100, a first year two-credit course at Southern Illinois University—Carbondale designed to help students acquire knowledge and skill in career planning. In a comparative study of this course and an introductory psychology course using an instrument developed by Knefelkamp and Slepitzka (1976) and the Student Development Task Inventory (Winston, Miller, & Prince, 1979), Stonewater and Daniels found that students in Guidance 100 made significant gains in cognitive development from the beginning to the end of the course.

Rayman, Bernard, Holland, and Barnett (1983) used the My Vocational Situation (MVS; Holland, Daiger, & Power, 1980) to evaluate effects of a career course on undecided college students. The vocational identity output as measured by the MVS is concerned with the clarity of vocational goals, interests, and personality. A pretest, midterm, posttest procedure was conducted using a relatively large sample of 255 students in 11 sections of a one credit course. Results indicated that the treatments included in the course had a positive effect on vocational identity as measured by the MVS. Moreover, these gains did not appear related to the sex of the instructor, sex of the student, tentative major, age of the instructor, educational level of the instructor, or commitment to teaching the course on the part of the instructor. However, gains in vocational identity were not consistent across the 11 week term, because men showed gains in the period leading up to midterms and women had gains in identity scores following midterms.

Remer, O'Neill, and Gohs (1984) used a rather complex research design intended to gauge multiple outcomes of a life-career development course. This study consisted of eight career-related inventories administered pre- and postcourse including 12 sub-scales to assess the impact of the course. Given that a randomly assigned control group was not feasible, a modification of the institutional cycle design was used (Cook & Campbell, 1979). This is a type of cohort design that uses "cohort similarity" to control for several threats to validity not

otherwise possible with a simpler pre-post design absent a control group (Remer, O'Neill, & Gohs, 1984). Among the positive results reported, course participants became more certain about career choices, more rational in their career decision-making process, and clearer in their vocational identity.

Carver and Smart (1985) reported that students in a career and self-exploration course reduced their career indecision as measured by the Career Decision Scale (CDS; Osipow, Carney, Winer, Yanico, & Koschier, 1976). This instrument was initially designed to measure the level of academic and career indecision of college students. In addition, the CDS has been shown to be quite sensitive to changes in college student career decisiveness fostered by career development programs, and test-retest reliability and criterion validity have shown the CDS to be good (Osipow et al., 1976). Carver's methodology included use of a quasi-experimental design which sought to strengthen content validity by controlling for such extraneous variables as class level, age, sex, level of financial aid, college residence, and undecided status. In addition, Carver and Smart (1985) used a pre- and immediate postcourse assessment procedure with the CDS. They suggested that future research address longer-term affects of career development courses, such as retention.

A second study conducted by Ware (1985) used the My Vocational Situation (MVS; Holland et al., 1980) in addition to the CMI (Crites, 1973) as the measuring instruments to assess the outputs of a career development course on upper-level psychology students. A pretest-posttest design was used. No significant differences were found concerning the CMI measures, but significant pretest to posttest differences were found with each of the three MVS sub-scales (vocational identity, need for occupational information, and barriers to career planning). Ware (1985) concluded that these results indicated the course was achieving desired objectives with upper division students, particularly with the increased levels of vocational identity that were indicated.

Lent, Schmidt, and Larkin (1985) reported the development and impact of a career course in science and technology for returning adult students at the University of Minnesota. This work involved the adaptation of an existing 2-credit course, Introduction to Careers in Science and Technology, for students with an interest in technical careers. Occupational information related to science and technology occupations consumed about 60% of the course. Lent et al. (1985) found that the students improved in career decision making as measured by the Career Decision Scale (Osipow et al., 1976). They also noted that they students reported increased self-knowledge in relation to careers, knowledge of career information, and career-information seeking behavior outside of the class. They suggested that such targeted career courses might also be effective in other fields, e.g., social services, business, the arts.

Wachs (1986) conducted a study aimed at assessing the effects of a career planning course on Holland's construct of vocational identity (Holland et al., 1980). A comparison group was composed of students enrolled in non-career related courses. Both groups were pre- and posttested using the MVS (Holland et al., 1980). Results demonstrated that women who had completed the career planning course had higher scores in vocational identity as measured by the MVS than their counterparts in the comparison group, but this finding was not true for men.

Wachs (1986) postulated that this difference in treatment output according to gender may have been due to the fact that pretest vocational identity scores for the women in the treatment group were significantly higher than pretest vocational identity scores for men in the treatment group. In general, studies of career course outputs have not reported gender differences in the results.

Similar to the study by Bartsch and Hackett (1978) earlier, Broley (1986) evaluated the effect of a career development course on the locus-of-control of female undergraduate students. The experimental group consisted of 22 female students enrolled in a career development course and the control group consisted of 22 female students enrolled in a psychology course with no career-related content. Results indicated that the students who completed the course had significant increases in internality of locus-of-control relative to career decision-making in comparison with those students who did not complete the course.

Using the previously discussed CDS, (Osipow, Carney, Winer, Yanico, & Koschier, 1976) and CMI (Crites, 1973) as measuring instruments, Davis and Horne (1986) compared the effects of a small-group counseling and a career course on career decidedness and maturity. A pretest, treatment, posttest design was used. The study did not use a control group due to practical constraints. Results indicated no significant difference between the group counseling and career course treatments, although both the CMI and CDS measures indicated significant pretest/posttest increases in scores following the interventions. The researchers concluded that career development courses may be just as effective as small group career counseling at effecting positive changes in career decidedness and maturity of college students. However, they noted that career development courses were the more cost-effective intervention.

Lent, Larkin, and Hasegawa (1986) completed a study that sought to depart from the shortcomings of past studies failing to use adequate controls for extraneous variables. Their study employed a quasi-control condition in order to account for general occupation objectives, age, GPA, and class level. The sample included science and engineering students. The CDS (Osipow et al., 1976) was used as the measuring instrument, and the commonly used pretest, treatment, posttest design was employed. Results indicated that students who completed the career course reported significantly less postcourse career indecision than did the quasi-control group.

Bash (1987), in a pretest-treatment-posttest design study of a career course, sought to examine changes in irrational beliefs, vocational identity, consistency in interests related to Holland's (1997) theory, and career decision making certainty/satisfaction. Posttest results indicated that vocational identity measured by the MVS (Holland et al. 1980) increased from pretest levels, and certainty/satisfaction with vocational choice increased the most for students with the lowest vocational identity at the pretest. Bash (1987) suggested that students with the lowest vocational identity had the most to gain in completing the career course.

Another study addressing effects of a career and life planning course on vocational identity and college adjustment was reported by Montolio (1988). The "Vocational Identity Scale" from the MVS (Holland et al., 1980) was administered pre- and postcourse to both a treatment group (class participants) and a control group consisting of randomly selected students

from residence halls, the Greek system, and 13 students who registered for the career and life planning course, but subsequently dropped. Results showed that students who completed the career and life planning course had significantly higher scores on the vocational identity scale of the MVS and better adjustment to college.

During this period, two studies failed to show positive change in output variables used in a study of a career course. Weisman (1988) used the CDS (Osipow et al., 1976) and the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (Taylor & Betz, 1983) to study the influence of a career course and a career course cognitive restructuring combination on self-efficacy, career decidedness, and career indecision. A pretest-posttest design with a control group was used. The results indicated no significant changes in the outcome measures effected by the interventions used in this study.

Taking a slightly different approach, Quinn and Lewis (1989) reported an effort to incorporate career instruction into an existing upper-division business personnel and organization behavior course. The career instructional materials included use of SIGI PLUS, development of a job campaign strategy, writing a resume, and attending employability presentations. Using a matched control group and the Career Decision Scale (Osipow et al., 1976), Quinn and Lewis found career certainty increased for the course treatment group. They suggested that career counselors could work as consultants with academic faculty in incorporating career instruction into traditional courses.

#### Career Course Output Studies, 1990-2001

Garis and Niles (1990) conducted a study that involved students in career planning classes at both Penn State University (PSU) and the University of Virginia (UVA). The study involved 112 students who completed the Survey of Career Development (SCD; Rayman & Super, 1978), the Self-Assessment of Confidence and Progress in Educational/Career Planning (SACP; Garis, 1982), and the Career Decision Scale (CDS; Osipow et al., 1976). The study also involved a control group and other treatment conditions involving SIGI and Discover. Garis and Niles found significant positive results for the career courses. On the SCD, the career course compared to the control group produced higher scores at both universities; on the SACP, the course produced significant differences at UVA; and on the CDS, the course scores were significantly lower than in the control condition at PSU. They concluded that the career courses were highly effective in positively affecting career output measures.

In a second study, Kern (1990) examined the effect of a career planning and decision-making course on career indecision and self-concept. The experimental group included students that had enrolled in a "World of Work" course and a control group of students that had enrolled in a sociology course. The CDS (Osipow, et al., 1976) was used as the instrument to measure career decidedness. In addition, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965) was used to measure changes in the nature of students' self-concept. A pre- posttest procedure yielded results indicating that students who participated in the career planning and decision-making course did not experience a decrease in their career indecision and actually had higher levels of career indecision than the comparison group at the end of the course. This finding was partially



explained by the fact that students with higher initial levels of career indecision chose to enroll in the career planning and decision-making course. In addition, results indicated no significant within group change or difference between the two groups with regard to the self-concept output variable.

Lisansky (1990) sought to evaluate the effects of a life and career planning course on the cognitive style of decision-making and level of career decidedness of undecided freshmen college students. An experimental group and a control group were used. The previously discussed CDS (Osipow et al., 1976) was the measuring instrument used in this study. CDS score results did indicate that the experimental group had more rational, less dependent career decision-making styles, and showed an increase in the level of career decidedness.

Oreshnick (1991) reported results of a study indicating enhanced career decision making resulting from a university career course intervention. A control group was used in this study. The measuring instrument was the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE; Taylor & Betz, 1983), which is an instrument designed to assess students' career decision-making expectations. Results indicated significant pre-posttest increases in career decision-making self-efficacy for the treatment group compared to the control group.

A more recent output study which also employed the use of a control group was conducted by Johnson and Smouse (1993). Researchers sought to control for common factors including age, gender, ethnicity, college class, and GPA. The measuring instrument was the Career Decision Profile (CDP; Jones, 1989), which includes six sub-scales related to career decision: decidedness, comfort, self-clarity, knowledge of occupations, decisiveness, and choice importance. This multi-dimensional assessment revealed greater specificity as to which career-decision problems may be best treated by a career planning course. The instrument was administered during the second week of the course and again during the final week of class. In comparison with a control group, students in the career class indicated a significant increase in career decidedness, comfort, and self-clarity as measured by the CDP.

Henry (1993) examined the impact of three different kinds of credit courses on the vocational identity of 64 undergraduate and graduate students in a medical/dental preparatory program. The overall program was intended to increase the number of qualified applicants underrepresented in the medical profession. The courses were an orientation seminar, a medical seminar, and a clinical experience. Significant increases were made on the three scales of the MVS (Holland et al., 1980), indicating higher vocational identity, less need for occupational information, and fewer barriers to vocational plans by students in the course. No control group was used in this study.

Robinson (1995) reported on a pre-posttest study of the effects of a career course on the career maturity of undergraduates. The measuring instrument was the Career Development Inventory (CDI; Super et al., 1981). The CDI was developed in response to the unidimensional feature characteristic of previous measures of career maturity such as the CMI (Crites, 1973). It is rooted in developmental theory and characterized by principals such as "mature individuals select and pursue goals" (Thompson et al., 1984, p. 2). According to the results of Robinson's

study, participation in the career course by students appeared to positively affect the output of thinking about career planning as indicated by more positive career attitudes.

A similar study by Peng (1996) used a treatment and control group design with the CDS (Osipow, et al., 1976) as the pre- posttest measure. The design of the study included two experimental groups and one control group. Results confirmed prior research by indicating that students who had completed the course demonstrated greater certainty and decreased indecision on CDS posttest results than did the control group students. Peng (1996) did not find differences on the Career Beliefs Inventory (Krumboltz, 1991).

In an unpublished study, Schmidt (1999) analyzed the pre-posttest measures of a sample of 378 students who completed the career course at California State University—Long Beach. Students were tested on Rotter's (1966) ten-point Locus-of-Control Scale and the CDS (Osipow et al., 1976). On the Locus-of-Control Scale, results indicated a statistically significant increase in pre-post course gains in internality of locus-of-control. Likewise, results indicated a statistically significant increase in career decidedness by students who completed the course as measured by the CDS.

Halasz and Kempton (2000) compared a credit career course, Exploring Careers, with two non-career related courses. Using both developmental and experiential instructional techniques to increase learning about careers in psychology, the researchers administered the CDS (Osipow et al., 1976) as a pre-posttest measure of course impact on career certainty and indecision. They found that students in the career course, in comparison to students in another psychology course and a communications course, indicated more comfort with their career decision-making situation and more certainty about their career choices.

Reed et al. (2001) evaluated the impact of a career development course on negative or dysfunctional career thoughts with a pretest, midterm, and posttest administration of the CTI. The midterm administration of the CTI took place in conjunction with an explanation of the CTI as a measure of dysfunctional career thinking which can be a barrier to productive career planning. Course instructors provided interpretive discussions of CTI scores with individual students. The course text (Reardon, Lenz, Sampson, & Peterson, 2000) includes a discussion of cognitive information processing theory and the procedures for reframing negative career thoughts. Results of the study indicated that posttest CTI scores were lower than pretest scores indicating that students completing this course reduced their negative thinking relative to career planning. This finding applied to all three CTI Scales, Decision Making Confusion, Commitment Anxiety, and External Conflict. Indeed, the largest decreases in negative career thoughts occurred with students scoring highest on the pretest (most negative career thoughts). Although test-retest bias combined with test familiarity may have been a factor in the improved CTI scores, researchers concluded from the results of this study that this career development course appears to have a positive effect on reducing negative career thinking, which should lead to more effective educational/career problem solving and decision making.

To summarize this section, we reviewed 38 studies of career course outputs. Output variables, such as career thoughts, career decision-making skills, career decidedness, and

vocational identity, are theoretically related to outcomes of career interventions, such as persistence (retention) in college, and job satisfaction or satisfaction with field of study. In this analysis, we found 34 studies (90%) reporting positive gains in measured output variables, and 4 studies (10%) reporting no changes in output variables. In the following section, we will review the studies that have examined the outcomes of career courses.

### **Studies of Career Development Course Outcomes**

As we noted earlier, *outcomes* of career service interventions refer to the resultant effects occurring at some later point in time. Examples of outcomes of a career planning course are job satisfaction, selecting a major, course satisfaction, time to graduation from college, and cumulative GPA. More specifically, selecting a major refers to students' choosing academic majors at increased rates following completion of a career development course. Retention as an outcome variable is intended to reflect both retention to graduation as well as retention to the next school term. In this section, we review 14 studies related to career course outcomes in historical order. Additional information about these studies is presented in Table 1.

#### Career Course Outcome Studies, 1970-1979

Touchton et al. (1977) compared three different types of career courses at the University of Maryland. The two sections of the experimental course were based on a developmental theory of instruction, the two traditional sections were taught by instructors with no knowledge of developmental instruction, and one section was taught in a mixed format. While overall student ratings of all the career courses were very positive, the developmental classes showed higher satisfaction ratings by students with respect to instructor performance, course organization, feelings of competence, and recommending the course to others.

The first study we found that considered retention as an outcome was reported by Bechtol (1978). The report began by noting the difficulty experienced by the institution in retaining undecided freshmen students. More specifically, Bechtol (1978) found that approximately half of the undecided freshmen did not return following the fall 1975 term. A course entitled "Orientation to Higher Education" was developed to address this concern. Three objectives of the course were (1) academic planning, (2) selection of an academic advisor, and (3) selection of a major and a tentative career plan. Results of the study indicated that undecided freshmen who completed the course returned for the following school term at a rate significantly greater than undecided freshmen that did not complete the course.

As noted earlier, Heppner and Krause (1979) developed a comprehensive, two credit course for undecided students at the University of Nebraska. In an outcome evaluation using student self-evaluations, individual interviews, formal and informal written feedback, they found that 100% of the students reported gains in self-awareness, self-knowledge, and knowledge of interests and skills. The same percentage (100%) reported increased knowledge about the world-of-work and job hunting.

In a similar course evaluation report, Gillingham and Lounsbury (1979) evaluated Humanities 397, a career exploration course at Central Michigan University. They used a post-course evaluation form completed by 104 students. Impetus for the development of the course emanated from a campus survey indicating that 33 percent of responding students reported a need for assistance with life planning. Of the responding students, 81 percent reported that the course “helped” or “helped some” in making career decisions, and 70 percent claimed to be closer to a career decision (Gillingham & Lounsbury, 1979).

#### Career Course Outcome Studies, 1980-1989

As noted earlier, Johnson et al. (1981) evaluated two variations on a career development course at Johns Hopkins University to see what kind of interventions were helping which students. While finding a strong main effect for increased vocational identity, they were unable to identify any systematic relationships between more than 15 course interventions and student preferences. The author’s noted several problems in trying to specify the best interventions: (1) each course is made up of different students and has its own mood and climate; (2) each intervention has multiple possible effects, e.g., SDS results could provide cognitive structure and emotional reassurance; and (3) there is little success in finding positive interactions in other areas of instruction. Johnson et al. (1981) suggested that practitioners focus on creating main effects by using a wide variety of interventions with less emphasis on student-treatment interactions. They further suggested that all treatments used in a course should be rated immediately after use, seminars led by two or more leaders should be compared to learn more about the role of the instructor, and logs should be maintained of the success or failure of each intervention for various students.

In an attempt to learn more about the academic credibility of career development courses in a university, Reardon and Regan (1981) conducted a study of student reactions to a career development course offered at Florida State University. These researchers compared scores from a standardized instrument for the career development course and other university courses taught in a standard classroom format. The comparison was based on five factors reported in the instrument: (1) level of instructor involvement, (2) level of student interest, (3) amount of student-instructor interaction, (4) extent of course demands, and (5) level of course organization. No significant differences in mean scores were found between the university wide courses and the career planning course with regard to levels of instructor involvement, student interest, and course demands; however, the career course received higher ratings in amount of student-instructor interaction and level of course organization. Hence, the researchers concluded that the career development course compared very favorably in terms of academic acumen with other courses in the academic marketplace, and better in terms of student-instructor interaction and course structure or organization.

At a national conference, Goodson (1982) reported on a longitudinal 10-year follow-up study of undecided students who took a non-credit career orientation class in the fall of 1966. A comparison group was composed of a random selection of undecided (academic major) students who did not take the career orientation class. Results indicated that a significantly higher percentage of undecided students that completed the course finished their college degree within

10 years than those undecided major students who did not complete the course. Goodson recommended that similar studies be conducted with regard to career academic credit courses to assess the longer-term effects of these courses.

Carver and Smart (1985) evaluated a career planning course offered at the University of Northern Colorado and concluded that the course exerted at least some positive effect on the retention rate of enrolled students. However, they pointed out that this assumption needed to be verified by further research. They specifically recommended follow-up studies to view longer-term effects of the course on retention as had Goodson (1982) earlier.

#### Career Course Outcome Studies, 1990-2001

Besides examining the career decidedness output as noted in the previous section, Lisansky (1990) also sought to evaluate the effects of a life and career planning course on the retention of undecided freshmen college students. Both an experimental group (course) and control group were used. No significant difference between the two groups was found with regard to rates of retention.

Dodson, Chastain, and Landrum (1996) reported that psychology students changed the level of their postgraduate educational goals following the course intervention, e.g., from doctoral to masters level degrees, and became more planful regarding graduate school. Using a 10-point rating scale, with 10 indicating the highest possible satisfaction, students rated the course 9.50 and the instructors 9.65. "In summary, Psychology Seminar: Careers and Graduate Study in psychology is an effective way to inform students about the options for careers and graduate study in psychology (Dodson, Chastain, & Landrum, 1996, p. 239).

In an outcome study related to career thoughts, Kilk (1997) found that scores on all three CTI scales (Sampson et al., 1986) distinguished between students who had selected a field of study and students who had not selected a field of study. Her research also showed that the Decision Making Confusion scale differentiated between those students who had completed or who were enrolled in a college career course and those who had not completed a college career course. This finding could be considered an output of enrollment in a career course. There was also a significant difference in the DMC and EC scores between those students who had completed or who were enrolled in a college career course and the students who comprised the normative sample for the CTI instrument, further output results. In summary, Kilk (1997) showed that the CTI scales could differentiate among students with regards to the status of major indecision and enrollment in a career course.

As previously noted, an unpublished study by Schmidt (1999) also found several positive outcomes of a career development course. The four major topics of this comprehensive course included educational process, understanding human nature, the career search process, and the job search process. Working with the institutional research office at the university, Schmidt (1999) conducted a longitudinal follow-up study of three cohort groups of students enrolled in the course (fall 1989, spring 1990, fall 1990) to compare retention rates in 1993 between students who had completed the career class and students who had not. The analysis showed that students

in the career course were retained at a rate 7.7% greater than students who did not complete the career course. For African-American students, the rate was 22.1% greater for those completing the course and for undeclared majors the rate was 14.1%.

Folsom (2000) used an ex post facto design to examine five year outcomes for 544 students enrolled a career course between 1989-90 and 1993-94 at Florida State University. A comparison, matched sample of noncourse students was drawn in terms of gender, race, high school GPA, class year, SAT score, and initial year of matriculation. Folsom found no differences in academic data between the two groups with respect to graduate rate, time taken to graduate, cumulative GPA, or number of credit hours accumulated at graduation, but course students did have significantly fewer course withdrawals. However, in examining raw data, Folsom reported that career course participants graduated at a rate of 81% compared to 69% for students in general at FSU, and course participants graduated with markedly fewer credit hours than the general population of students (an average of 110 for course participants and 132 for the general population). This indication of higher rates of graduation and less credit hours taken to graduate by career course participants may have potential implications relative to University objectives for student retention and credit hour efficiency.

In a supplemental analysis of these data, Folsom, Peterson, Reardon, and Mann (2001) isolated the effect of the FSU career development course on outcome variables according to gender and minority or non-minority status. Female course participants graduated in fewer months than nonparticipants. Female participants took an average of 50 months to graduate while nonparticipants took an average of 61 months (a statistically and practically significant difference). Male participants in the course executed fewer course withdrawals on average (.9) than did male nonparticipants (1.2). This difference was statistically, but not practically significant. Finally, minority course participants on average took fewer credit hours to graduate (104) than did minority nonparticipants (115). This difference was statistically and practically significant. This study indicates that the career development course may positively affect gender and minority groups in ways that support University objectives of student efficiency in the pursuit of undergraduate degrees.

To summarize this section, we reviewed 15 studies of career course outcomes. Outcome variables associated with a career planning course include job satisfaction, selecting a major, course satisfaction, time to graduation from college, or cumulative GPA. In this analysis, we found 13 studies (87%) reporting positive gains in measured outcome variables, and two studies (13%) reporting no changes in outcome variables. These findings are similar to the studies summarized earlier regarding output variables and the effects of career courses.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This review of career course literature has traced 46 reports of the effectiveness of the various career planning courses offered in institutions of higher education throughout the country. More than 16,320 students were involved in these studies. Research in this subject area was scarce until the 1970s and early 1980s when activity increased. This review has been framed in terms of the outputs and outcomes of career course interventions, with seven studies examining

both outputs and outcomes. We found 38 studies addressing output effects and 15 studies addressing outcome effects. The clear majority of these studies focused on pre-posttest output measurement rather than longer term outcome effects of these courses.

Career courses are quite varied in design, scope, and function. Some are offered for credit, others are not; credit courses range from 1 to 3 hours, and some are variable credit. Some are designed for entering first year students and others are designed for upper division students already in their majors. Some courses are elective and others are required in a major. Some courses are highly structured and others are more open-ended in format. Some courses focus on self-assessment and career planning, and others include knowledge about labor markets, employing organizations, and employment. Some courses are offered in a more stand-alone format, and others are fully integrated into ongoing career services programs available on the campus. Some courses are taught by career counseling staff and others are taught by regular faculty.

In spite of this variability in career course design and operation, there is overwhelming evidence that career courses have a positive impact on the cognitive functioning of students, and these courses also appear to have a positive impact on student outcomes, including satisfaction with career courses and increased retention in college. Only 4 of the 38 studies involving career course outputs failed to show a positive impact of a career course, while 90% of the studies we reviewed showed positive gains in vocational identity, career decision making, or other output variables. Similarly, of the 15 studies involving outcomes, 13, or 87%, showed positive results.

The majority (33) of the 46 studies reviewed used control or comparison groups to strengthen methodological rigor. Most studies used suitable and well-established measuring instruments in terms of reliability and validity. The findings of the majority of these studies are impressive in establishing evidence that career development courses tend to positively effect desired career development objectives or output variables, e.g., career planning thoughts, career decidedness, career decision-making ability, vocational identity, internal locus-of-control, vocational/career development maturity.

It is apparent that comprehensive career courses offered for academic credit represent a cost-effective intervention that could be described as a “mega-dose” of career services. Such courses may include as many as 50 different, discrete career interventions. Moreover, career courses can be a unique intervention in that participants actually pay for the service before receiving it. Assuming a fee of \$100 per credit hour, a 3-hour course enrolling 30 students would generate \$9,000 in tuition fees. The amount of money generated by a course could be even higher if there were matching funds provided from other sources. Few other career interventions are likely to have the potential for generating such income.

However, this area of research is not without weaknesses. Spokane and Oliver (1983) examined research literature on career interventions and noted some of the problems that are also relevant to the evaluation of career courses: (1) the course content and duration are sometimes not clearly specified in the reports and vary widely across studies; (2) courses include multiple treatments, ranging from as few as 12 to more than 50; (3) course treatments are not all equally

potent or effective, e.g., some are unstructured and some are highly controlled, some are based on a single integrating theory and others are atheoretical; (4) output and outcome measures are not clearly linked to the treatment interventions; (5) student motivation to enroll in the course is not assessed; (6) possible differences among instructors are not investigated; and (7) investigators may have bias regarding preferred treatment outcomes. Moreover, some investigators in this area have recommended that long-term studies of the impact of career courses be studied. For example, Kern (1995, p. 80) suggested that “A longitudinal study of the participants in a career planning and decision-making course may indicate whether participants not only made career choices but went on to graduate.”

Some researchers and policy makers have urged that studies of the long term effects of these courses be undertaken, but it is difficult to imagine this being done under the present arrangements. For example, much of the research in this area is the result of dissertations completed by graduate students as part of their training. Some of the research we found emanated from the work of authors of career texts or instruments, or the developers of courses, who have a vested interest in learning more about their products and materials. One option might be for textbook publishers to support research on their instructional materials in the same way that test publishers support studies of psychological tests. Another option might involve the support of universities, government agencies, and foundations for long-term research on the impact of career courses related to student retention.

Of special interest to many postsecondary institutions, career courses may have an important impact on increasing student retention to graduation. Noel, Levitz, and Saluri (1984) estimated that large numbers of college students, approximately 75 percent, fall under a definition of “undecided” at some point in time. These “drop out” prone students may benefit from a career development course intervention that can reduce this dropout risk.



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Researcher(s)	Year	Variable(s) of Interest	Comparison Group	Measuring Instrument(s)	Design	Sample Size	Findings
Babcock & Hoffman	1976	Career planning, self & occupational knowledge, & career decidedness	Yes	Career Development Inventory	Pretest/posttest	77	Greater gains in career planning & self-knowledge for career class
Touchton et al.	1977	Cognitive development	Yes	Knefelkamp & Slepitza scale	Pretest/posttest	76	Increased cognitive complexity; positive course satisfaction
Evans & Rector	1978	Vocational development/ career decision-making	No	Vocational Decision Checklist	Pretest/posttest	79	Positive effect on vocational development
Bechtol	1978	Retention	Yes	Academic Records	Postcourse follow-up	192	Significant increases in students returning for next term
Ganster & Lovell	1978	Career planning & decision-making	Yes	Career Maturity Inventory	Pretest/posttest	46	Significant increases in career maturity
Bartsch & Hackett	1978	Locus-of-control	Yes	Rotter's I-E Scale; two author designed instruments	Pretest/posttest	64	Greater internality in locus-of-control
Gillingham & Lounsbury	1979	Career decidedness	No	Author designed instrument	Postcourse evaluation	115	Improved career decision-making
Williamson	1979	Career decision-making, locus-of-control	Yes	Rotter's I-E Scale; Assessment of Career Decision-Making	Pretest/posttest	42	Increased career decision levels for those students completing the course
Heppner & Krause	1979	Course evaluation	No	Self-evaluations & feedback	Postcourse evaluation	NS*	Course satisfaction & increased knowledge
Weist	1980	Career maturity, self-esteem, & sex role stereotypes	No	Career Maturity Inventory; Self-Esteem Scale	Pretest/posttest	36	Little evidence of increase in outcome variables
Baldwin	1981	Career maturity	Yes	Career Development Inventory	Pretest/posttest	120	Only limited increase in career maturity
Smith	1981	Career maturity	Yes	Career Maturity Inventory	Pretest/posttest	115	Significant increase in career maturity

NS\* = Not Specified

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Researcher(s)	Year	Variable(s) of Interest	Comparison Group	Measuring Instrument(s)	Design	Sample Size	Findings
Reardon & Regan	1981	Course Evaluation	Yes	Student Instructional Rating System	Posttest	76	Course highly rated on organization and student-instructor interaction
Ware	1981	Career decidedness & maturity; self & occupational knowledge	Yes	Assessment of Career Decision-Making; Career Maturity Inventory	Pretest/posttest	148	Positive effect on career maturity, occupational, & self-knowledge
Johnson et al.	1981	Vocational identity, course evaluation	Yes	My Vocational Situation; author designed scale	Pretest/posttest	46	Increased vocational identity; no differences among course treatments for satisfaction
Barker	1981	Career planning & decision-making	Yes	Assessment of Career Decision-Making; author designed instrument	Pretest/posttest	589	Positive effect on career decision-making ability & selection of a major
Goodson	1982	Retention to graduation	Yes	Ten-year follow-up	Longitudinal	451	Positive effect on retention to graduation
Stonewater & Daniels	1983	Student development & cognitive development	Yes	Knefelkamp & Slepitzka scale	Pretest/posttest	143	Increased cognitive development
Rayman et al.	1983	Vocational identity, occupational information, & barriers	No	My Vocational Situation	Pretest/posttest	255	Positive effect on vocational identity; these results not dependent on other variables
Remer et al.	1984	Multiple, including decidedness & vocational identity	No	My Vocational Situation	Pretest/posttest	74	Positive effect on vocational identity, rational decision-making, & decidedness
Carver & Smart	1985	Career decidedness, maturity, & other related variables	Yes	Career Maturity Inventory; Career Decision Scale	Pretest/posttest	110	Positive effect on career maturity/decidedness & academic/major selection
Ware	1985	Self & occupational knowledge	Yes	My Vocational Situation; Career Maturity Inventory	Pretest/posttest	70	Positive effect on vocational identity & self-knowledge
Lent et al.	1985	Career decidedness	No	Career Decision Scale; author designed instrument	Pretest/posttest	20	Reduced indecision; Increased self-knowledge & career information

Researcher(s)	Year	Variable(s) of Interest	Comparison Group	Measuring Instrument(s)	Design	Sample Size	Findings
Wachs	1986	Vocational identity, differentiation, self-esteem	Yes	My Vocational Situation; Vocational Preference Inventory; Knowledge of Preferred Occupation Scale	Pretest/posttest	138	Positive effect on vocational identity, differentiation, & self-esteem
Broley	1986	Locus-of-control & cognitive complexity	Yes	Knefelkamp/Sleptiza scale	Pretest/posttest	44	Significant increases in internal locus-of-control
Davis & Horne	1986	Career decidedness & maturity	No	Career Decision Scale; Career Maturity Inventory	Pretest/posttest	102	Significant increases in career decidedness & maturity
Lent et al.	1986	Career indecision	Quasi	Career Decision Scale	Pretest/posttest	54	Positive effect on reduced career indecision
Bash	1987	Career satisfaction/certainty	Quasi	Winer et al. certainty item; Slaney satisfaction item	Pretest/posttest	120	Positive effect on career choice certainty/satisfaction
Montolio	1988	Vocational identity; adjustment to college; career planning	Yes	My Vocational Situation; Career Planning Scale; Adj. To College Scale	Pretest/posttest	239	Increased vocational identity & total adjustment
Wiseman	1988	Decidedness & self-efficacy	Yes	Career Decision Scale; Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale	Pretest/posttest	62	No significant differences
Quinn & Lewis	1989	Career decidedness	Yes	Career Decision Scale	Pretest/posttest	NS*	Increased career certainty
Garis & Niles	1990	Decidedness	Yes	Survey of Career Development; Self-Assessment of Confidence in Education/Career Planning; Career Decision Scale	Pretest/posttest	112	Positive effect on career decidedness
Kern	1990	Decidedness & self-concept	Yes	Career Decision Scale	Pretest/posttest	169	No significant change in outcome variables
Lisansky	1990	Retention	Yes	Academic records; Career Decision Scale	Pretest/posttest; Follow-up	79	No difference in retention; increased decidedness & rational decision making

NS\* = Not Specified

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Researcher(s)	Year	Variable(s) of Interest	Comparison Group	Measuring Instrument(s)	Design	Sample Size	Findings
Oresnick	1991	Decidedness	Yes	Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale	Pretest/posttest	159	Positive effect on career decidedness
Henry	1993	Vocational identity; need for occupational information; barriers	No	My Vocational Situation	Pretest/posttest	64	Increased identity
Johnson & Smouse	1993	Decidedness	Yes	Career Decision Profile	Pretest/posttest	240	Positive effect on career Decidedness
Robinson	1995	Career maturity	Yes	Career Decision Index	Pretest/posttest	107	Positive effect on career planning thoughts
Dodson et al.	1996	Course evaluation	No	Author designed instrument	Posttest	42	Positive effect on career choice & educational planning
Peng	1996	Career beliefs & career decision making	Yes	Career Decision Scale; Career Beliefs Inventory	Pretest/posttest	495	Decreased career Indecision
Kilk	1997	Career thoughts; decided major	Yes	Career Thoughts Inventory	Course Evaluation	346	Career thoughts related to deciding a major & career course enrollment
Schmidt	1999	Retention & career decidedness	Yes	Academic records; Career Decision Scale; Rotter's ten point scale	Pretest/posttest	378; 9,242	Increased rate of retention; positive effect on career decision making & internal locus-of-control
Folsom	2000	Retention; graduation efficiency	Yes	Academic records	Follow-up	1,088	Fewer course withdrawals
Halasz & Kempton	2000	Decidedness	Yes	Career Decision Scale	Pretest/posttest	150	Increased career choice certainty
Folsom et al.	2001	Academic performance & retention	Yes	Academic records	Follow-up	1,088	Female students graduated faster; minority students took fewer hours to graduate
Reed et al.	2001	Negative career thoughts	No	Career Thoughts Inventory	Pretest/posttest	181	Decreased negative career thoughts