

# Using a Career Course to Assist a Diverse Student Population in Exploring Careers and Imagining Future Possibilities

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## Brief Literature Summary

### Diverse Population on Campus

A central theme of the vocational psychology literature discusses the nation becoming more diverse and the need to understand the career development of individuals from various cultural backgrounds. Ethnicity and culture can play a large role in how one navigates the career development process and career practitioners need to be multiculturally competent in providing assistance. A significant number of career practitioners work in post-secondary settings and educational trends data have shown that these institutions have become increasingly diverse over the past 30 years. Though minority students attend institutions that are predominantly Caucasian the percentage of college students who are Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, African American, or American Indian/Alaska native has been increasing. From 1976 to 2012, the percentage of Hispanic students went from 4% to 15%, the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students rose from 2% to 6%, the percentage of African American students increased from 10% to 15%, and the percentage of American Indian/Alaska native grew from 0.7% to 0.9% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Luzzo and Ellen (2001) found that minority college students perceived significantly greater educational and career related barriers directly associated with their ethnicity than their European American counterparts. Therefore, it is important to evaluate ethnic differences and perceived educational and career related barriers in the career decision making process to increase an understanding of the career development needs of various ethnic minority groups. The purpose of this study was to examine how a career course intervention, that enrolls a diverse undergraduate student population, can be used to positively impact their career development and career problem-solving, particularly as it relates to self-knowledge and negative career thoughts.

The positive impact of undergraduate career courses on students' career development has been consistently demonstrated in the literature. A survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers reported that one-third of career service facilities (240 out of 734) also offered an option of a career related course (NACE, 2014). Folsom, Peterson, Reardon, and Mann (2005) indicated that a career development course may have a positive influence with gender and minority groups regarding efficiency of obtaining undergraduate degrees. The researchers reported that female students that took the career development course graduated in fewer months when compared to other female students that did not take the course. It was also found that minority students that were in the course took fewer credit hours to complete their degree requirements than minority students that did not complete the course (Folsom et al., 2005). Similar findings of the career course accelerating the graduation rate of students than other students not in the career course have been reported when the Folsom et al., (2005) study was replicated by Reardon, Melvin, McCain, Peterson, and Bowman (2015, in press).

## **Negative Career Thinking**

Negative career thinking has also been investigated in relation to career interventions. Negative career thoughts are dysfunctional cognitions that impede career decision-making and problem-solving abilities (Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1996; Osborn, Howard, & Leierer, 2007). Negative thoughts can cause individuals to avoid engaging in career decision making behaviors and result in further negative outcomes such as procrastination, anxiety, dependency, and premature foreclosure of the career exploration process (Sampson et al., 1996). Research done by Dahl, Austin, and Wagner (2010) also found that dysfunctional thoughts limited the effectiveness of career decision making and problem solving by preventing an individual to continue exploration behavior and increased career indecision.

## **Cognitive Information Processing Theory and the CTI**

One theory that explores the effect of negative thoughts on career development is cognitive information processing (CIP) theory (Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz, 2004). CIP uses a three-level pyramid model comprised of different knowledge domains. The base of the pyramid represents the knowledge domains which include self-knowledge and occupational knowledge. The middle level of the CIP pyramid represents the decision-making skills domain which includes generic-information processing skills necessary to gather and use information to solve and make career decisions. These skills include five CASVE phases for receiving external or internal signals of a gap between an individual's current and desired situation (Communication). The top of the pyramid is the executive processing domain which deals with metacognitions such as self-talk, self-awareness, and control and monitoring that direct the choice and arrangement of cognitive strategies used to make career decisions (Sampson et al., 2004). CIP emphasizes individuals' readiness to take part in career decision making and problem solving by exploring their capability to navigate career problems and the complexity of life circumstances in relation to career concerns (Sampson et al., 2004). The Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI; Sampson et al., 1996), which is based on CIP theory, can be used as a readiness assessment to identify factors that may impact career problem solving and decision making. Negative career thoughts can be looked at in three areas: Decision Making Confusion (DMC), Commitment Anxiety (CA), and External Conflict (EC). The CTI was used in the career course to assist students in identifying, challenging, and altering their negative thoughts that can be impeding their career problem solving and decision making (Reardon, Lenz, Peterson, & Sampson, 2012).

## **RIASEC Theory and the SDS**

Holland's RIASEC theory suggests that vocational interests are an expression of an individual's personality, and the goal is a good "fit" between individuals and their environments (Holland, 1997). The Self Directed Search Form R (SDS Form R) 5<sup>th</sup> edition is an interest inventory commonly used in career counseling and advising. The SDS Form R was completed

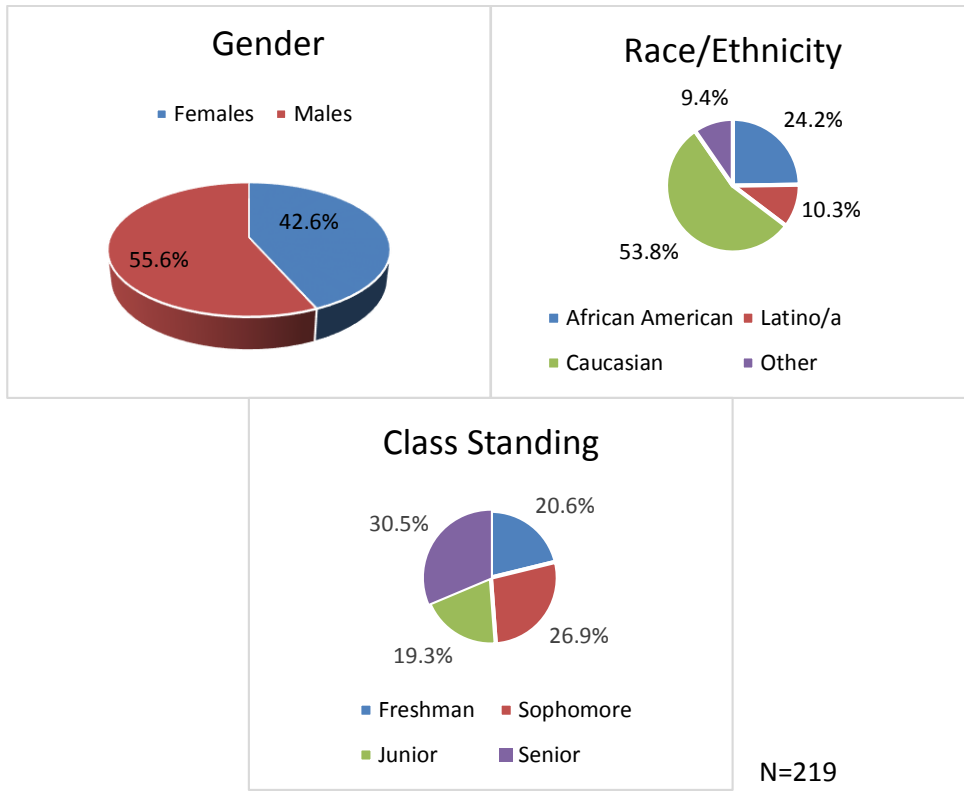
by students in the career course to identify their SDS summary code to foster career exploration and expand options for occupations, fields of study, and leisure activities that match their interests. It was also used to teach students that RIASEC types help describe the culture of an organization or academic field (Reardon, Lenz, Peterson, & Sampson, 2012). Reardon and Lenz (1998, 1999) stated that the primary and secondary constructs on the SDS assist in providing additional information about a client's decision making process.

Secondary constructs of particular interest to this study are differentiation and profile elevation. Differentiation is "the level of definition or distinctiveness of a personality or occupational profile" (SDS; Holland & Messer, 2013). An SDS summary score that is highly differentiated will have a large difference between the highest and lowest code scores, while an undifferentiated summary score will have similar scores across all six RIASEC scores (SDS; Holland & Messer, 2013). Past research has found that high differentiation is positively correlated with more stability in work history and career preferences (Reardon & Lenz, 1998). Profile elevation is the sum of the six RIASEC scores across all sections of the SDS (SDS; Holland & Messer, 2013). Hirschi and Lage (2007) found a significant relationship between profile elevation and career exploration and career planning, which suggests that high profile elevation was positively related to degree of career-choice readiness attitudes.

### **Career Course Intervention**

The career course examined in this study is based on CIP theory and taught by a lead instructor and three co-instructors. The class uses a text by Reardon, Lenz, Peterson, and Sampson (2012) *Career Development and Planning: A Comprehensive Approach*, and is offered for variable credit of one, two, or three credit hours. Students complete a performance contract indicating which three course units they plan to complete. Unit 1, "Career Concepts and Applications," focuses on self-knowledge, options knowledge, decision making, and metacognitions (Reardon et al., 2012). Assignments include writing an autobiography, completing the Self-Directed Search Form R (Holland & Messer, 2013), the CTI (Sampson et al., 1996) and a skills assessment activity, writing an Individual Action Plan, using computer-assisted career guidance systems (e.g., SIGI3 and Choices), and writing a research paper on one or three occupations. Unit 2, "Social Conditions Affecting Career Development," focuses on factors affecting the career planning process such as social, economic, family, and organizational changes and the importance of students developing a more complex cognitive schema to solve career problems (Reardon, et al., 2012). Unit 3, "Implementing a Strategic Career Plan," focuses on employability skills and strategies for implementing academic/career plans (Reardon, et al., 2012). Assignments include reports on two information interviews reports, completion of a resume and cover letter, and a strategic/academic career plan paper.

## Demographic Information

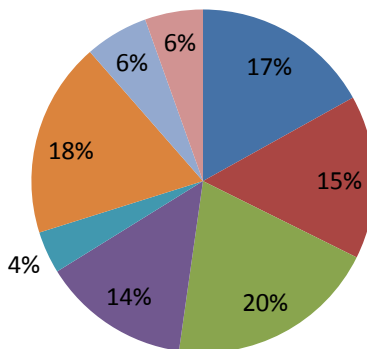


## Class Data

### Why FSU Students Enroll in a Career Course

Based on responses from student data sheets

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| ■ Self-Knowledge              | ■ Educational and Occupational Information |
| ■ Career Planning Information | ■ Job Hunting Skills                       |
| ■ Relationships and Careers   | ■ Decision Making                          |
| ■ Global Economy              | ■ Work and Family Balance                  |



N=288

## Race/Ethnicity

	African American			Caucasian		
	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
DMC Total	54	9.89	7.9	120	11.17	8.4
CA Total	54	13.63	6.9	120	14.22	6.2
EC Total	54	4.61	3.5	120	4.42	2.9
OAQ Score	54	2.35	.7	120	2.43	.73
GIS Score	54	43.87	8.9	120	42.95	9.8
Satisfaction	54	2.63	2.0	119	2.92	1.9
Profile Elevation	22	138.6	28.5	65	143.8	31.5
Differentiation	22	6.86	3.1	65	6.92	3.2
	Latino/a			Other		
DMC Total	23	11.83	6.1	21	13.14	8.6
CA Total	23	14.17	3.9	21	13.48	6.9
EC Total	23	4.65	2.5	21	4.52	2.5
OAQ Score	23	2.48	.5	21	2.67	.8
GIS Score	23	43.43	9.6	21	44.29	10.0
Satisfaction	23	3.26	1.9	21	3.19	2.1
Profile Elevation	13	161.9	34.4	10	140.5	25.5
Differentiation	13	6.0	2.6	10	6.37	4.4

Note. N=219; DMC= Decision Making Confusion, CA= Commitment Anxiety, EC= External Conflict, OAQ= Occupational Alternatives Questionnaire, GIS= Goal Instability Scale.

## Gender

	Male			Female		
	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
DMC Total	124	10.24	7.4	95	12.35*	8.9
CA Total	124	13.02	6.4	95	15.40*	5.9
EC Total	124	4.50	2.9	95	4.57	3.0
OAQ Score	124	2.36	.7	95	2.54	.7
GIS Score	124	44.35	8.9	95	41.93	10.1
Satisfaction	123	2.6	1.9	95	3.29*	2.1
Profile Elevation	58	145.5	31.3	53	144.5	31.7
Differentiation	58	6.6	2.9	53	6.9	3.6

Note. N=219; DMC= Decision Making Confusion, CA= Commitment Anxiety, EC= External Conflict, OAQ= Occupational Alternatives Questionnaire, GIS= Goal Instability Scale.

\* $p < .05$

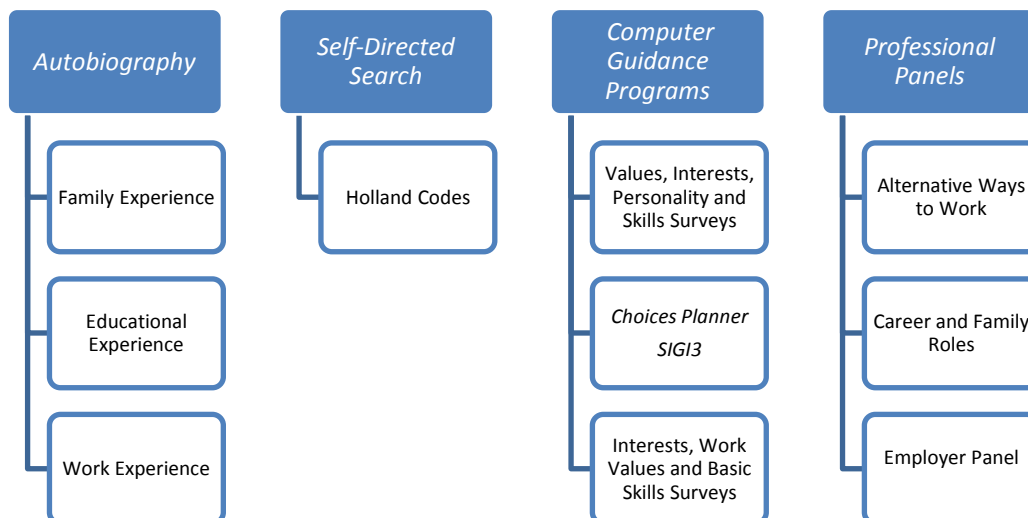
## Class Standing

	Freshman			Sophomore		
	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
DMC Total	46	12.63	7.8	60	11.38	8.4
CA Total	46	16.09	6.0	60	13.65	6.5
EC Total	46	4.28	2.2	60	4.28	2.9
OAQ Score	46	2.70	.7	60	2.47	.8
GIS Score	46	40.74	8.4	60	43.55	10.1
Satisfaction	45	3.33	2.0	60	3.08	2.1
Profile Elevation	21	156.52	26.3	28	145.42	32.1
Differentiation	21	6.73	2.8	28	6.76	3.5
	Junior			Senior		
DMC Total	43	11.30	7.9	68	9.74	8.0
CA Total	43	12.74	6.7	68	13.68	5.6
EC Total	43	4.84	3.1	68	4.65	3.4
OAQ Score	43	2.40	.8	68	2.25	.6
GIS Score	43	44.93	9.0	68	43.79	10.0
Satisfaction	43	2.91	2.1	68	2.41	1.8
Profile Elevation	25	131.2	6.7	35	146.45	32.9
Differentiation	25	6.67	3.5	35	6.90	3.1

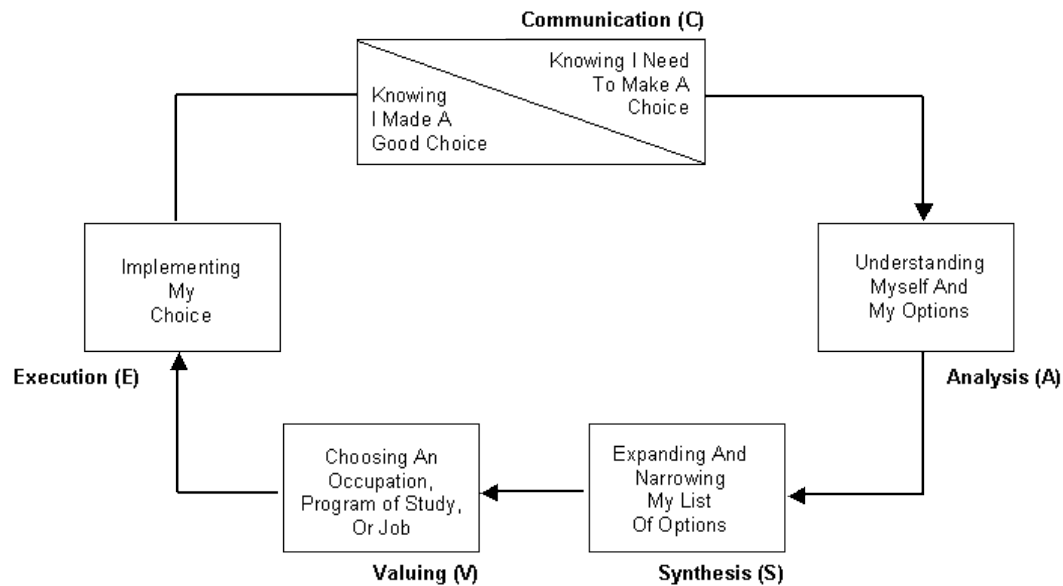
Note. N=219; DMC= Decision Making Confusion, CA= Commitment Anxiety, EC= External Conflict, OAQ= Occupational Alternatives Questionnaire, GIS= Goal Instability Scale.

## Interventions

### Self and Occupational Knowledge



## Decision-Making Skills



Adapted from: Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G. W., Lenz, J. G., & Reardon, R. C. (1992). A cognitive approach to career services: Translating concepts into practice. *Career Development Quarterly*, 41, 67-74. Copyright © National Career Development Association. Used with permission.

## Negative Career Thinking and Motivation

### Career Thoughts Inventory Profile

- Identify negative career thoughts
- Reframe negative career thoughts

### Develop Individual Action Plan

- Specific goals
- Identify necessary resources
- Implement deadline



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