
Freshmen Career Development and Career Goals

In the 2014 National Freshman Attitudes Report, 21% of freshmen reported being “very confused about which career to choose and 47% of freshmen affirmed that they wanted career counseling (“National Freshman Attitudes Report”, 2014). Despite this, studies have shown that although first-year students may indicate a need for career services, few actually use those services (Fouad et al., 2006; Williams, 2011). Arizona State University (ASU) is no exception to this phenomenon as first-year students are the least likely academic level to engage with the on-campus career center, known as Career & Professional Development Services (CPDS). When comparing the engagement of undergraduate students by class with CPDS in the 2017-2018 academic year, freshmen only made up 12% of advising appointments, 6% of event participants, 5% of career fair attendees, and 4% of Handshake logins (see Appendix A).¹ Despite the first-time freshmen enrollment totaling 10,278 students in Fall 2017 (ASU Facts, 2019), freshmen accounted for only 436 career advising appointments and 145 event attendees throughout the academic year (see Appendix A). Comment by Lindsey Hartman: Questions for MondayCan I interchange first-year students and freshmen or should I be consistent and choose one?Handshake data in the introduction

Utilizing CPDS resources and participating in career development activities from an early stage can increase student career readiness and decrease anxiety surrounding career decision-making (Fouad et al., 2006). In my role as a Management Intern with CPDS, I have had the opportunity to work with undergraduate students of all academic levels. I have noticed that first-year students often display a great amount of apprehension around the idea of needing to choose a career path. Students who wait to seek help from CPDS until their junior or senior year when they are nearing graduation and unsure what career to choose, or in the middle of a

¹Handshake is the online career platform used at ASU. Students are able to create profiles, search and apply for job opportunities, schedule career advising appointments, and find career events and fairs. The system also stores data surrounding student engagement with the platform and has extensive analytical abilities.

job or internship search, often visit the career center unprepared, overwhelmed, and stressed, and tend to have more difficulty finding ideal employment opportunities.

Engaging in career planning activities is a key aspect of development for first-year students (Hammond, 2017). The purpose of this study is to understand career advisors’ perspectives on freshmen engagement with career development activities at ASU. Prior research on the subject of freshmen career development needs has mainly focused on student perspectives, rather than seeking out the viewpoints and experiences of professionally trained staff members. Because career advisors have the most opportunities to interact closely with students both one-on-one and in groups in career-related settings, I seek to understand how they are currently interacting with freshmen, prior methods they have used to connect with first-year students, patterns they have noticed in freshmen engagement levels, and barriers they believe may prevent freshmen from seeking out career resources. The findings of this study could be used to identify gaps in current programming and inform the future design of career development programs marketed towards first-year students.

To provide context for this study, I begin my review of the literature by highlighting the importance of freshmen participation in career-focused activities. I will then discuss prior research conducted to understand why first-year students may not seek assistance from career services. Finally, I will present strategies that have been suggested to encourage freshmen to engage in the career development process. Although there is research dating back to the 1980s on these topics, I focused my literature review on publications within the last twenty years.

Engagement in career planning activities is essential to the development and retention of freshmen students (Hammond, 2017). There are four critical periods in which career interventions may be the most effective: prior to entry, at orientation, during the first semester, and throughout the remaining college years. Three out of four of these periods take place before or during the freshman year, pointing to a strong need for student involvement with career services at an early stage in order to facilitate future growth (Walck & Hensby, 2003). As new students transition into university life, many express uncertainty surrounding their career focus, but feel pressured to choose a career path quickly even though they have insufficient knowledge and direction to make well-informed decisions (Stebbleton & Diamond, 2018; Walck & Hensby, 2003). Many students who are dissatisfied or uninterested with their degree and career choices lack motivation and confidence, and report higher levels of psychological distress which makes them more susceptible to dropping out (Creed & Hughes, 2013; Fouad et al, 2006; Walck & Hensby, 2003). In one study examining the impact of career workshops on freshmen on academic probation, over 60% of participants had never had any structured career guidance in their lifetime and over 75% had never utilized any career resources provided on campus prior to the intervention (Williams, 2011).

Students are more likely to succeed academically if they have a long-term reason to commit to their goals and are able to connect their interests and abilities to their plan of study (Antonio & Tuffley, 2015). The presence of defined career goals is linked to increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and academic performance, and students who understand the connections between college success, career goals, and the world of work are more likely to be retained (Hull-Blanks et al., 2005). Career exploration in the first year can help students develop career goals and build confidence in their career decision-making skills, while also promoting the development of a future time perspective and a vocational self-concept (Gore, Metz, Alexander, Hitch, & Landry, 2004). When students feel as though they are moving purposefully towards their future career, they are more apt to invest emotional energy into their studies, succeed academically, and persist through college (Antonio & Tuffley, 2015; Hull-Blanks et al., 2005).

Although freshmen report a need for help with career decision-making, few actually utilize services provided on campus (Fouad et al., 2006), but there is not an overwhelming amount of research done on the topic of barriers freshmen face in seeking career guidance. Preferring to speak with others, uncertainty about the process, and a focus on adjusting to university life were three common themes that stood out in the literature I reviewed. Students have indicated that they are more likely to seek help from family, friends, academic advisors, professors, and the media rather than utilizing career services. Part of this issue may be the lack of awareness surrounding the professional career support that is available on campus (Fouad et al., 2006). Parents and family members seem to have a large influence on the career choices of freshmen. In one study, over 32% of participants had sought career-related guidance from parents, family, and significant others (Fouad et al., 2006). In another study on first-year student career choices, over 55% of students surveyed indicated that their most frequently used source of career information was their family (Walck & Hensby, 2003), and yet another study revealed that over

30% of students made career choices based on their relatives' career paths (Williams, 2011).

Freshmen are uncertain about the process of structured career counseling and report a belief that it would not be helpful. Despite showing psychological distress due to difficulties in career decision-making, over 35% of survey respondents said that they did not seek guidance from a campus career office because they felt it would not be beneficial (Fouad et al., 2006). As first-year students transition to university life, they are focused on adjusting to their new surroundings and career issues are not a high priority (Walck & Hensby, 2003). Their immediate needs include making a successful transition, meeting new people, and performing well academically. Career decision-making is seen as less relevant and freshmen students may not address career issues until their other, more immediate needs are met (Walck & Hensby, 2003).

In order to develop career goals, it is crucial that first-year students are exposed to the career exploration process, encouraged to engage in self-discovery, and have help in identifying their values and skills and then linking those with specific career options (Gore et al., 2004; Hull-Blanks et al., 2005). It is suggested that career development initiatives for freshmen students should be treated as a high-impact practice and involve multiple stakeholders, including families, faculty, and student affairs professionals (Stebbleton & Diamond, 2018). Because so many students rely on their families for career guidance, it may be valuable to provide information and assistance to parents and family members on how they can support their students through the career decision-making process (Walck & Hensby, 2003). It is also important to consider embedding career development materials into orientation activities so students are exposed to these resources early on (Walck & Hensby, 2003). Career planning courses have also been shown to be effective and faculty can play a critical role in their students' exploration process by embedding career materials into existing coursework (Stebbleton & Diamond, 2018).

I will conduct a generic qualitative research study utilizing individual interviews of professional ASU career advisors. A qualitative study will allow me to gain insight on how career advisors are interacting with freshmen, strategies that have been used in the past to engage first-year students, and barriers freshmen may face in seeking out career resources. A semi-structured interview format will provide me with the flexibility to explore each participant's thoughts, experiences, and perspectives. This is a pragmatic, real-world practice-oriented study and findings can be utilized to inform the design of future career initiatives for freshmen at ASU.

This study will be conducted at ASU, a large, public research university with approximately 72,000 on-ground students spread between four campuses located across the Phoenix area. Career & Professional Development Services has a physical office space on each campus, with two locations at the Tempe campus, and serves students of all majors and all academic levels, including graduate students and alumni. Across all five office locations, there are a total of nine full-time professional career advisors. Each advisor is assigned to work out of a specific campus location, but they will occasionally travel and work with students and professional staff at other campuses. There are currently five career advisors located at the Tempe campus, two at Downtown Phoenix, one at West, and one at Polytechnic. Advisors are responsible for an array of career-related tasks including one-on-one advising, conducting presentations, event-planning, staying up-to-date on current industry trends, and managing online resources.

Before beginning this study, I gained approval from the Assistant Directors on each campus to interview the career advisors whom they oversee (see Appendix B). My sampling method will be

homogenous as I will only interview CPDS staff members who work in the career advisor role. To secure participants for this study, I will email (see Appendix C) all nine professional career advisors working with CPDS and ask for volunteers to participate in one-on-one interviews to discuss the topic of freshmen career development. The interview will be approximately 30 minutes in a semi-structured format and consist of five pre-planned questions with follow-up prompts as needed (see Appendix D). I aim to interview at least four career advisors and the names of all participants will be kept confidential and responses will remain anonymous. In the case that I am not able to get enough advisors to participate, I will then reach out to the Assistant Directors who manage the career advising operations on each campus and ask if they are willing to complete an interview instead.

The data for this study will be comprised of participant responses to the interview questions. I will record each interview, transcribe the data, and then carefully review the transcripts to code the data and discover recurrent themes in the advisors' responses. I will use an inductive coding method which will allow myself, as the researcher, to develop a set of codes by directly examining the data. Data analysis will occur throughout the data collection process, which will allow for modification of the semi-structured interview questions if needed based upon the findings.

This descriptive, qualitative study will provide awareness on how career advisors think about career development in the first-year and how they engage with freshmen students. The data from this study will assist in building an understanding of how career advisors are connecting with first-year students, what they believe to be the most important career-related activities for freshmen, and barriers they have seen freshmen students face in the career development process. Because prior research has mainly focused on understanding student perspectives, it is important to also recognize the perspectives of trained professionals and how these viewpoints might differ. The results of this study may interest the CPDS leadership team and could be used to identify current gaps in career development programs directed towards first-year students and assist in the design of future initiatives for freshmen at ASU.

One limitation of this study is my use of a homogenous sampling method as I will only interview a small group of CPDS career advisors. Some academic colleges within ASU offer separate career services to students whose major falls within the particular school, but for the purposes of this study I will only focus on CPDS, which is the centralized career center that provides services to all ASU students. Future research may wish to compare the perspectives of higher education professionals who work across various colleges at ASU and provide career guidance to students of specific majors. Another limitation is the short timeframe in which I will collect and analyze data. The process will be done quickly and may result in a less thorough analysis.

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