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The Career Institute: A Collaborative Career Development Program for Traditionally Underserved Secondary (6-12) School Students

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The Career Institute: A Collaborative

Career Development Program for Traditionally Underserved Students

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Abstract

Career development is integral to students' academic and social-personal development and addressing students' needs in this area is recognized as an important responsibility of the professional school counselor. However, efforts to address students' career development tend to be lacking or services are provided in a disconnected manner. Helping students adequately prepare for the demands of the 21st century requires that they be actively engaged in planning for the future. Facilitating their career development during the school years is an important part of this preparation. This article provides a brief overview of the literature on career development in schools and presents a school-wide career development program that is integrated into the school curriculum, collaboratively implemented with teachers, and begins in the sixth grade. The value of this type of programmatic effort is discussed and recommendations for program development are offered.

Keywords: school counseling; career counseling; secondary schools; at risk students; school-college collaboration

The Career Institute: A Collaborative

Career Development Program for Traditionally Underserved Students

Over the past decade, the school counseling profession has undergone a major transformation in response to the school reform movement (Bradley, Reese, & Martin, 2007; Stone & Dahir, 2006). As part of this transformation, National Standards for School Counseling Programs (NSSCP; Campbell & Dahir, 1997) have been developed and the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) has proposed a National Model (ASCA, 2005) to guide school counselors in providing comprehensive and developmentally appropriate counseling services. Both the National Standards and the National Model specify academic development, career development and personal-social development as areas of student competency that must be addressed by school counselors. However, despite the recognition of career development as an important part of a comprehensive school counseling program, this is an area that continues to receive the least attention in the day to day roles and responsibilities of school counselors (Foster, Young, Hermann, 2005; Osborne & Baggerly, 2004).

For example, Foster, et al. (2005) examined national data on school counselors' work activities collected by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC). The authors utilized a panel of experts to rate the importance of these work activities in promoting student development within each of the three content areas school counselors are responsible for (i.e., academic, career, personal/social). Using only those work activities rated as "highly promoting" the national standards within each of the three content areas, the authors examined the NBCC survey data to determine how important these were perceived to be by survey responders and how frequently they reported engaging in these activities. For the career development content area, 20 work activities were identified as highly important by the panel of experts. Results of

the data analysis indicated that only three were rated by survey responders as “very important” and “frequently performed” (i.e., “facilitating students’ decision-making skills,” “identifying student support system,” and “planning and conducting classroom guidance”). Sixteen work activities were rated as “moderately important” and of these, only 12 were rated as “occasionally performed” (e.g., “provide career education for students,” “provide career counseling for students,” “counsel students about post graduation plans”). Clearly, career development as a key component of the school counselor’s responsibilities needs greater attention if we are to ensure that students are receiving the services that they need in order to be adequately prepared for their future.

The lack of attention to career development is usually attributed to the need to focus on preparing students academically, pressing issues that arise within schools which take priority (e.g., attending to disciplinary issues) and numerous other demands that are placed on school counselors (Amatea, & Clark, 2005; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). We propose, however, that by attending to students’ career development, school counselors, in collaboration with other school personnel, can facilitate students’ ability to achieve academically while also attending to their social-personal development (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). Career development interventions can also contribute to students’ sense of engagement in school (Kenny, Bluestein, Hasse, Jackson, & Perry, 2006) which can contribute to higher levels of motivation (Scheel & Gonzalez, 2007) and less disciplinary issues (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007).

This article describes the Career Institute, a collaboratively designed and implemented career development intervention program developed at an early-college school. The school itself was created to recruit and address the needs of traditionally underserved students who may not be considering going to college. The school’s mission of providing rigorous academic

preparation, the creation of a college-going culture, and of having students begin taking college courses while in high school, was well suited to the development of this type of program. A unique aspect of this program is that the career development interventions are started in the sixth grade, are continued in each subsequent grade, and are provided to all students. Though the school currently has only three grades (i.e., sixth, seventh, and eighth), the program is part of the school's 6th to 12th grade curriculum plan. In addition, in keeping with expectations that school counselors team and collaborate with other stakeholders to achieve systemic change (ASCA, 2005) this program presents a model of how school counselors can have a profound impact on achieving positive changes within a school. We begin with a brief review of the literature relevant to career development in schools.

Career Development in Schools

Historically, career development has been a major focus within the educational mission of schools (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). The development of school counseling programs was spurred by the recognition that the mission of schools is to prepare young people for the world of work (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). From the perspective of "life career development" (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006; Gysbers, Henderson, Johnston, 2003; Gysbers & Moore, 1975), a framework that views student development as a comprehensive, interrelated process that includes all aspects of an individual's life (e.g., social-personal development) it is proposed that both educational and school counseling services work in unison to prepare students for the future, each contributing to the efforts of the other (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). In effect, students' academic, career, and personal-social development are tied together and should not be seen as separate and distinct processes.

Career development is an important, ongoing process that students need to be actively engaged in as early as possible (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005; Magnuson & Star, 2000). From a developmental perspective, career development begins in early childhood and continues throughout an individual's life (Super, Savickas, Super, 1997). Super's life-span, life-space model of career development identifies certain developmental stages and tasks that individuals need to "master" if they are to make satisfactory progress toward identifying and preparing for the type of work they see themselves performing in the future. The first two stages of this model (i.e., growth and exploration) coincide with the period during which individuals are in school (i.e., K-12), a period during which efforts to provide students structured, coordinated guidance to assist them with this developmental process can produce long lasting effects (Duane & Trusty, 2005). By providing career related interventions during this critical period, school counselors can ensure that young people acquire the necessary information and skills (ASCA, 2005; Campbell & Dahir, 1997) needed to actively engage in effective educational and career planning for the future.

Though career development should be addressed throughout the K-12 school years (Hartung, et al., 2005; Magnuson & Star, 2000; Niles & Trusty, 2004b), early adolescence is a particularly important period which warrants attention. This is a time during which students need to understand the connections among their school work, the real world, and their future goals as decisions made in middle school will impact what courses they will take in high school. This, in turn, will influence students' post high school educational and career plans and have implications for future success (Arrington, 2000; Niles & Trusty, 2004b; Trusty, et al., 2005; Trusty & Niles, 2003). Unfortunately, however, students often do not see the relationship between school work and their future (Johnson, 2000). Johnson examined sixth and ninth grade

students' awareness of the relation between school and future career goals and found that these students had a very limited understanding of this relationship. For example, the author reports that over 80% of student responses indicated that they had little or no understanding of how what they were learning in their favorite subjects (e.g., math, science) related to future employment.

Research that has examined the impact of career-related interventions on students' career development and preparation for post high school transitions (Lapan, Tucker, Kim, & Kosiulek, 2003; Lapan, Aoyagi, & Kayson, 2007) has provided support for the benefits of such interventions in enhancing students' career development and in preparing them for the future. For example, Lapan, et al. (2003) examined the impact of a career development intervention on 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students' belief that their education was preparing them to achieve their educational and career goals. The authors report that students indicated higher levels of satisfaction that their education was preparing them for the future and that students expected to pursue goals that required additional post-high school education after participating in the intervention.

Lapan and Aoyagi (2007) conducted a follow-up study with the high school seniors that participated in the first study (Lapan, et al. 2003) three years after they graduated (Lapan, et al., 2007). The purpose of this study was to examine the long-term effects of the career interventions on these students' lives. Specially, the authors wanted to examine whether the advantages that students had obtained from participating in the career intervention during their senior year in high school actually lead to more successful outcomes in students' adult lives. The authors report that three years after graduating high school, participants who had benefited most from the career intervention also tended to report higher levels of satisfaction with their work and personal lives, were more likely to have obtained higher levels of education, and were

taking more proactive actions to become successful. Though it is difficult to generalize to larger populations given the limitations of this study (e.g., the sample was small and from a rural setting), these results do suggest that providing career development interventions can help students successfully transition into adulthood.

Research also suggests that attending to students' career development can both directly and indirectly contribute to academic achievement (Evans & Burck, 1992; Kenny, Bluestein, Hasse, Jackson, & Perry, 2006). For example, based on the results of a meta-analysis, Evans and Burck reported a small but positive effect on school achievement as a result of career education interventions. Career development interventions have also been positively related to school engagement (Kenny, et. al, 2006), a construct that has been related to academic achievement (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). In a study that examined the relation between career development and level of student school engagement, Kenny et al. reported a significant relationship between indicators of career development (i.e., career planfulness and expectation) at the beginning of the school year and increased school engagement (i.e., belonging and valuing) throughout the school year for students in their study. The authors point out that a statistical examination of the impact of school engagement on career development was not significant, suggesting that the relationship was unidirectional.

By attending to students' career development, school counselors are also able to attend to students' personal-social development. Gysbers and Henderson (2006) propose that the 'life career development' perspective can serve as a means of conceptualizing and facilitating students' overall development, not just in relation to careers or occupations, but as multifaceted, complex human beings. As students engage in career development interventions geared at identifying their interests, skills, and aspirations, these activities also help students develop

decision-making skills, understand the consequences of their decisions, and identify and begin to implement short and long-term goals. Career development interventions can also serve to help students identify appropriate social, interpersonal, and work related skills. In effect, career development can be seen as self-development.

Finally, research with at-risk students has indicated that career intervention efforts can have a positive effect on students' overall career development. For example, research suggests that career interventions can contribute to increased levels of career planning and job search skills (Loughead, Liu, & Middleton, 1995), self-efficacy for career planning and career exploration (O'Brien, Dukstein, Tomlinson, Kamatuka, 1999), and career decision-making (O'Brien, Bikos, Epstein, Flores, & Dukstien, 2000). In addition, Schnorr and Ware (2001) reported that participating in an educational program which integrates academic and career considerations can have a positive impact on at-risk students' career maturity. Of particular interest was the finding that length of participation in the program significantly contributed to both the knowledge and attitude components of career maturity.

Given the possible benefits of career development interventions to overall student performance in school and the inherent value in preparing young people for post high school transitions, career development interventions within the school curriculum should be a priority for school counselors and other educators. Integrating career development into the curriculum and making it a shared responsibility that is integral to students' overall learning, can ensure students will be better prepared to successfully transition from grade to grade, out of high school, and into productive and satisfying lives as adults.

The Career Institute

The Career Institute (see Figure 1) is conceptualized as a programmatic effort to address the three domains of student development school counselors are responsible for (i.e., academic, career, and personal-social) through a collaborative and school-wide curriculum effort that is implemented by school counselors and teachers. Through this type of effort, school counselors can intervene at multiple levels, serving as collaborators, consultants, and student advocates, all roles identified within the purview of the professional school counselor (ASCA, 2005). The remainder of this article provides a description of the Career Institute and offers some recommendations for the professional school counselor interested in developing career development programs in his or her school.

Background: The School

The “Inquiry School” is an Early College School that will eventually serve grades six through twelve. The School was developed specifically to recruit academically at risk and struggling students, English Language Learners (ELLs) and other students who might not otherwise expect to attend college. The mission of the School is to provide underserved students with the support and resources to not only graduate from high school, but to expose them to rewarding college experiences (e.g., taking college courses, participating in activities on a college campus) that will enhance students’ confidence in and consideration of continuing their education beyond high school. In this effort, the school and its staff strives to develop a school-wide vision of college readiness and academic excellence for all students attending the school.

Collaboratively conceived and planned with the help of a local school district, a major university and the Early College Initiative (ECI), a national movement launched with grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support the development of college-school partnerships,

it first opened in September, 2005 with 83 sixth grade students. The school admits another 83 sixth grade students every year. Now in its third year, the school serves 240 students from the sixth through the eighth grade. The student population is currently XY African Am, XY Asian, XY latino, and XY other; the majority of the students is female (x%) (something on performance level of students??). ANY INFO ON SUBSIDIZED LUNCH AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL?

Development and Implementation

In keeping with the mission of the school, the need for college awareness was a topic of on-going discussion at monthly planning committee meetings. The planning committee consisted of key school stakeholders including the school principal, teachers, parents, and representatives from ECI and the affiliated college. After discussing and collaborating with the planning committee, a draft of a seven-year plan to address students' career development and early college awareness was proposed by the authors.

The plan was called the "Career Institute," (CI) and it mapped out program interventions for each grade level over seven years. Attempts were made to align the interventions with the expected student career development competencies identified in the National Standards (ASCA, 2005; Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Particular attention was focused on facilitating students' self awareness (e.g., identify abilities and interests; Standard A1.3) and understanding of the relation between school and work (e.g., awareness of education and training to career goals; Standard B2.1 and C1.1), during the early years (i.e., grades 6th and 7th). As students progress into 8th grade and beyond, more emphasize is placed on acquiring information about careers (e.g., developing research skills; Standard A1.1 and B1.5) and making decisions about college majors and careers (Standard B1.1 and C1.3). The program was designed to be both developmental and

sequential so that the interventions for each year build on the activities from the previous year. Once the draft was developed, it was shared with the planning committee. All stakeholders provided feedback and recommendations for the development and implementation of the seven-year plan. With the input and approval of the school planning committee and staff, the CI became part of the school's curriculum in its effort to address students' college awareness and career development in a systematic manner.

Challenges to Program Implementation

Though this is an early college school with the mission of early college awareness, preparation, and attendance, one of the challenges that needed to be addressed was how to engage the entire school community in the efforts of the CI. The first step was to establish a positive working alliance with the school principal. This working alliance was begun through discussions on how school counseling could contribute to achieving the goals and mission of the school. The Principal was provided information about the ASCA Model (2005) and the roles the school counselor can assume in helping the school achieve its mission. This provided a framework for development of the CI within the larger mission of the school with school counselors taking the lead in its development and implementation. Thus, though the CI is a school-wide effort that requires the participation of all stakeholders, the school counselor is responsible for taking a leadership role in collaborating with teachers and other stakeholders in carrying out the program.

The second challenge was getting the understanding and active participation of the teachers. Opportunities were provided for discussions between the CI coordinators (i.e., school counselors, college staff) and teachers on the significance of career development and how this focus could contribute to achieving the goals of the teachers and the school. In addition, teachers

were and continue to be provided professional development specifically around students' career development. The professional development efforts help to familiarize teachers with career-awareness concepts and the activities students will be engaged in. For example, teachers are provided the opportunity to take the same interest inventory that the students take and they undergo a similar learning process through small group discussions of their results. Teachers are also given the opportunity to explore ways that they can connect concepts of career development to the curriculum. The importance of teachers generating ideas for career development in their own classroom dovetails importantly with the goals of the CI (e.g., to become a school-wide, curriculum-based, collaborative effort). As teachers become more informed and familiar with the goals of the CI and the value of career development they are able to relate career development to their specific discipline areas and integrate it into their lesson plans and teaching units.

The Program

Scope and Sequence

The curriculum for each grade of the CI (see Table 1) was and continues to be developed in collaboration with the school counselor, teachers, and college faculty. The activities and experiences provided through the CI occur over a six to eight week period and are implemented during advisory class. The Advisor/Advisee program, a significant part of an effective, child-centered curriculum (George & Alexander, 1993), gives one teacher an opportunity to know a small group of students (15-18) over a long period of time. The advisory class meets daily and remains with the same advisory teacher for the entire seven years of schooling. By keeping the same group of students with the same teacher throughout the students' years at the school, an

opportunity is provided for students to develop a close and meaningful relationship with at least one adult in the school.

During the CI/Advisory sessions, students participate in a series of interventions designed specifically for each grade. The theme for the sixth and seventh grade CI interventions is characterized by "Exploration." The primary focus of the Exploration stage of the CI is to help students develop greater self awareness and relate their growing knowledge of self to ideas about educational and occupational possibilities. The activities students are engaged in are designed to help them identify and examine their interests, values, abilities and skills and use these personal attributes as a lens for exploring the relationship between education and work.

To facilitate the integration of the CI into the advisory and minimize lesson preparation for busy teachers, the activities for each grade are carefully scripted by the CI coordinators. Teachers meet with the CI coordinators, review the lesson plans and provide feedback and recommendations. Once the lesson plans are finalized the CI coordinators and the teachers work together to implement the activities. Due to school counseling staff limitations, the teachers carry out many of the lesson plans in advisory with support and assistance from the CI coordinators. The CI coordinators are available to assist during the advisory, consult with teachers, and meet with students who require additional assistance. Advisory lessons that require more in depth career development theory or instruction (e.g., teaching students about the Holland types, career counseling) are conducted by the CI coordinators with assistance from the teachers. As students progress to high school, the CI coordinators will provide additional interventions (e.g., college research, preparing college applications, choosing college majors). Described below are the interventions for grades six and seven. The interventions for the eighth grade are currently in the planning stages.

In the sixth grade, students complete a series of activity sheets on which they identify their interest and things they are good at (e.g., drawing, writing). In small groups students then share and discuss what they have identified on the activity sheets. The advisory teacher/counselor encourages students to connect what they've learned about themselves and others to their education and future. Students learn not only about themselves, but about the varied interests and abilities of their classmates. This expanded and important knowledge of self and others, generated in a small and intimate learning environment (Vygotsky, 1986) also helps students broaden the range of careers they can consider. A debriefing activity focuses on getting students to discuss what they've learned about themselves, what they've learned about their classmates and relate this information to the world of work and what they are learning in school. After discussing their discoveries and eliciting their remaining questions, students are asked to write a reflection of their progress and a summary of their learning.

The second year of the Career Institute strives to build on the activities of the first year by extending and deepening the discussion on interests, likes, and abilities by using an interest inventory, the Self-Directed Search-Career Explorer (SDS-CE). As part of this intervention, students are educated about the Holland type codes (Holland, 1997); the classroom guidance lessons are conducted by a school counselor with assistance from the teachers. The information on type codes helps students organize information about themselves and the world of work. This kind of information is crucial because it gives students a framework to work with and against as they explore career options. For example, once the students have completed the SDS-CE and received instruction on Holland's type theory, they are encouraged to identify careers related to their type codes. In another activity students are encouraged to identify career options related to their interest, but *not* necessarily their type codes. Developing these lists and engaging in class

discussions provides students the opportunity to examine the kinds of academic skills they need to develop in order to realize career paths, but also helps them realize the relevance of school-related activities and academic preparation. Class discussions also focus on what students know about these careers and how they see themselves in relation to these careers (e.g., do I possess the skills needed, what would I need to learn to pursue this career).

As with the sixth grade, the seventh grade curriculum culminates with a debriefing activity. The difference is that in the seventh grade the activity is integrated into a regular class essay assignment for English. The essay assignment asks students to answer questions related to their work in the CI (What have you learned about possible careers? What careers do you want to learn more about?), and also questions that help them think about how school life is an integral part of college and careers (How will what I've learned about myself help me in the future?). Students' essays are included in their portfolios and can be used to assess their progress and development. Eventually, students will use the writings and other materials in their portfolios as resources to reflect on their development and assist them in preparing their personal statements for college applications.

The Career Day

The Career Day is a key component of the CI (see Table 1). This is a time set aside for students to meet professionals in varied fields, ask questions, and learn from the speakers' personal experiences in these fields. As a way of integrating the Career Day activity into the academic curriculum, students read a brief career-oriented biography for each visitor and discuss the biography in advisory class prior to the visit. Using the autobiography and the experiences students are having in the CI, advisory teachers help students develop interview questions. On Career Day, after the speakers give a short overview of themselves and what they do, students

are invited to ask their questions. In follow-up advisory sessions, students talk about their experience with Career Day, process their thoughts, and reflect on their developing sense of self as it relates to career awareness, integrating information acquired through the SDS-CE and the Career Day.

Addressing Issues of Diversity

As part of all interventions and class discussions, the school counselors and teachers are attentive to addressing issues of diversity that emerge as students discuss their thoughts and ideas about future opportunities, options available to them, and what may be considered appropriate as relates to cultural values and expectations. Discussions about different perceptions (e.g., gender, cultural) are encouraged, and students are provided with information about current national employment trends. In addition, when identifying speakers efforts are made to include women and men in nontraditional careers, culturally diverse individuals, as well as individuals who are willing to share information about their academic struggles and successes. By providing as broad a spectrum of individual differences in our invited speakers and engaging in these types of discussions with students early on, we hope to encourage students to consider options that may not have seemed possible or had never been thought prior to their participation in the CI.

Program Assessment

Preliminary feedback from teachers and other school personnel indicate that students are benefiting from the CI and that they are incorporating what they are learning about themselves and college/careers into their everyday activities at the school. For example, students' have been reported to be using the Holland information in class discussions and relating to information about themselves and their likes/dislikes using this classification system. A number of formal program assessment measures are currently being implemented (e.g., student surveys, students'

reflective writings, and teacher interviews) which we anticipate will provide us with a better picture of how the CI is impacting students' career development and early college awareness. Additionally, the use of student portfolios in which they will collect reflections about their self and career awareness will be used long-term to track students' development and progress. More traditional indicators of student performance will also be integrated into the evaluation process (e.g., student grades, disciplinary referrals) as the program continues to grow.

Recommendations for Program Development and Implementation

School counselors interested in developing and implementing this type of program in their school are strongly encouraged to become familiar with their school's mission statement and the ASCA national model (2005). This information will assist you in formulating some goals that you would want to address and provide you a framework from which to begin a dialogue with your school principal about how you, as the school counselor, can contribute to achieving the school's mission. Greater communication and understanding between you and the school administrators can ensure that your efforts receive the support and resources that will be essential in creating and implementing an effective program.

Second, although the support of the principal is critical, the participation and commitment of teachers is indispensable. The success of the CI to date would not have been possible without the ongoing collaboration, support, and participation of the teachers. Engage teachers as early as possible in the brainstorming and planning of program initiatives. Because teachers participate in all aspects of the CI, they provide ideas for how to best integrate the CI interventions into the overall curriculum and how these efforts may be reinforced throughout the school year. For example, teachers can support students' career development in discipline-related classes by discussing career related issues in science classes, English classes, etc. By working together you

can ensure that you are developing a program that meets the needs of all stakeholders and is supported by teachers.

A third recommendation is that you identify resources in the community that will enable you to carry out the programs you are developing. At the Inquiry School, the affiliated college provides access to many resources on the campus (e.g., meeting spaces, faculty expertise) and in turn the school provides a setting for college students to fulfill their internship and student teaching requirements. Parents, students, and community leaders are also allies in developing and implementing effective programs. Getting students' and parents' input related to what they believe is needed and having them identify careers they want to know more about and possible speakers to invite helps to engage them in the process. Members of the community can also provide assistance by coming to speak with students or serving as field trip sites students can visit and see first-hand what is involved in different types of work.

Summary and Conclusion

Though in its early stages, the CI program promises to fulfill many of the components identified in the literature as essential to providing comprehensive, curriculum-based, collaborative, and developmentally appropriate career development interventions (ASCA, 2005; Brown & Trusty, 2005; Gysbers & Henderson, 2006; Lapan, 2004; Stone & Dahir, 2006). By integrating career development into the curriculum and collaborating with teachers in developing and implementing these interventions, school counselors are able to contribute meaningfully to the school's academic program while advocating for students and developing important relationships with all stakeholders. Additionally, by working together, teachers and school counselors can identify the most appropriate ways to infuse the career development interventions into the curriculum and identify ways in which students can continue to be supported in their

career development throughout the school year. In this way, students are continuously provided with opportunities to realistically consider their future goals in relation to how they are progressing in school. Through continued collaboration and monitoring, teachers and counselors can work together to assess areas (e.g., academic or psychosocial development) in which students need additional assistance and enable school personnel to provide early intervention as needed.

Attending to the career development needs of students and providing appropriate interventions to facilitate students' career development has always been an essential role of the professional school counselor. However, recent trends in school reform, the changing world economy, and the focus on preparing students for postsecondary transitions has placed a renewed emphasis on facilitating students' career development throughout their school experience (Feller, 2003; Hughey & Hughey, 1999; Lapan, 2004). The implementation of a comprehensive and systemic career development program provides the mechanism through which school counselors can address students' career development needs while also attending to their academic and personal-social development. Within the context of career development, students have an opportunity to make connections between the learning that is taking place in their classes and their future educational and career goals.

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Figure 1

The Career Institute: A Programmatic Effort to Address Students' Academic, Career and Personal/Social Development

