

A Skills Approach To Career Development

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ABSTRACT

Students preparing **themselves** for careers in the future must be able to develop a wide range of skills that are applicable **across** those careers. Academic advisors must attempt to **sure** that these students **acquire** such **ski**. **This** article presents an approach for doing bot...

A SKILLS APPROACH TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The academic advisor's role in the career development of college students has lately **increased** in importance. Since stage, motivational, environmental and personality theories have **influenced** the modern approach to career development, this article is an attempt to complement those theories with a **practical** approach that is applicable to **them** and to **careers**. It is an approach that:

- 1) provides **flexibility** in the ever-changing job market;
- 2) require, **little** additional advisor training;
- 3) is **generally** applicable to **all** students who **intend** to enter the labor force, whether or not they **earn** their degree(s).

It is a **skills approach** to career development.

CURRENT CONDITIONS AND FUTURE NEEDS

Advisors (especially faculty advisors), still find themselves in the **aftermath** of the **1** effects upon educational philosophies and policies; for **example**, the freedoms and relaxations **enjoyed** by students in the **late sixties** and **seventies** often resulted in **underprepared** workers. Also, during recent **economic** and employment conditions, **many** high school (and college) graduates **find themselves** lacking in **certain** skills and, thus, at a competitive disadvantage in a tight labor market. Advisors, however, can provide a **brighter outlook** and strategy to **help their** students **compete** in this **difficult market** by utilizing the skills approach to career development.

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The **development** of job-applicable, **career-transferable** skills will help students **meet** the demands of **specialization**, automation, mobility, urban growth and industrial trends **described** by Wallace, et al.¹ **Advisors must** be aware of these demands, make them known to their students, and actively **assist** students in meeting them. Advisors may achieve this by **emphasizing** the skills **listed** below and suggesting (even designing) experiences for students to help them **develop** these skills to fulfill the demands.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

Several lists of job-related skills have been used to **assess** students' **self-perceived abilities**. **Figler**² described 113 functional skills; **Breen**³ categorized 76 **career-related liberal arts skills** into nine **interdisciplinary areas**; and **Brunell**⁴ outlined a series of **performance skills** by which students **could** measure themselves as they prepare to choose a college. **Students' self-perceived abilities**, like their **interests** are not always confirmed, but they can be developed.

The **skills** described **here** are applicable to a variety of jobs and careers in a rapidly changing work world; they are skills that **job applicants** may **need** to **document** in the competitive job market. The approach **presented** offers both rationale and possible **methods/strategies** for **developing these skills**.

Writing. This is perhaps the most **necessary skill** for students to master. **Educators** at all levels have **been** embarrassed **recently** by the lack of **writing skill** that (high school and college) graduates have exhibited. Employers have complained **loudly** about this condition; competency exams have **been** instituted in many **secondary school systems**; and **developmental/remedial courses** have flourished in **colleges and universities**.

The importance of this skill should be obvious to both the **student** and the advisor. **Written correspondence** **exists** in almost **every** occupation; others **require** reports, **position statements**, training **materials**, and general communication to be **prepared** in written form.

Advisors should encourage students to:

- **enroll** in **elective** courses having a **significant** writing component
- request "extra **credit**" for writing in courses that do not, and
- **participate** in certain **extra-curricular activities** that require **writing**, such as the **year-book**, newspaper, etc.

These activities should develop both the mechanical aspects of writing as well as the creative.

¹W. Wallace, C.E. Wigner, M. Pontecosi, and P. Houston. *For Your Action: A Practical Job Search Guide for the Liberal Arts Student*. (Bloomington, IN: Career Options Project, Indiana University Arts and Sciences Placement Office, 1982.)

²H.E. Figler. *PATH: A Career Workbook for Liberal Arts Students*. (Cranston, RI: The Carroll Press Publishers, 1971.)

³P. Breen. "76 Career-Related Liberal Arts Skills," (*LAHE Bulletin*, October, 111).

⁴L.C. Brunell. *Steps to A College Choice*. Mount Vernon, NY: School Guide (The Catholic News Publishing Co., 1982).

Speaking. Whatever is not communicated on the job in writing will certainly be communicated orally. The ability to speak to a group, **on a relevant topic**, is **very** desirable in most **employment** situations. Those who have such skill **usually** have better opportunities for **advancement** in their careers.

Advisors should encourage students to speak up in **their classes**, to enroll in specific **speech classes**, to try out for dramatic **roles**, debate **teams**, or **cheerleading**, and to engage in **extra-curricular activities** that require "public" presentations, such as student government and various clubs.

Research/Analytical. Employees who are **considered** most **desirable** have the ability to **search**, identify, select and wisely utilize a **variety** of **resources**. Resources such as manuals, tools, **textbooks**, **journals**, newspapers, and TV are available to assist workers in improving their job **performance**. The important task is to know how to analyze and utilize the **resources efficiently** and productively. Unfortunately, many high **school** graduates, **even** the **academically talented ones** who attend prestigious **institutions** of higher **education**, are "library **illiterates**" according to Men.⁵ Adequate **library research skills** is the minimal **research tool** students should acquire while in college.

Advisors should encourage students to seek various resources, inside and outside the institution, and they should encourage their colleagues (**faculty advisors**) to **design** research projects for their classes and general **curriculum**. These projects might include **written research papers**, scavenger hunts, **personal interviews**, and written inventories. The use of a contractual approach is an **excellent** way for advisors to develop research and analytical skills in their students.

Organization/Leadership. Effective managerial personnel are always sought in order to improve the functioning of an agency, **business**, or organization. Those who are hired or promoted to **serve** in these capacities are able to set priorities of tasks to be completed, to **coordinate** physical, human, and **fiscal resources necessary** to accomplish the tasks, and to **direct** the overall effort.

The **college** experience provides numerous **opportunities** for students to practice these skills. **Advisors** should encourage students to participate in clubs and **organizations**, fund-raising events, **committees**, field trips, and other **activities** that provide opportunities for leadership and organization. These activities also foster a **sense of responsibility**, pride in one's work, and time-management skills, which are also transferable to the work world.

Advisors have many **opportunities** to teach this **skill directly** to students. They will "naturally" help students **realize** their **interpersonal** dynamics through the advising process, but they can also encourage students to **examine** these skills in other **environments**, such as student or community groups and their classes.

Interpersonal. Advisors should also inform students that few **employment** situations exist in which the worker does not **interact** with **people** on a regular basis. The ability of the worker to facilitate such **interactions**, to **overcome** adverse interactions, and to maintain optimum working relationships is **essential** in the work world.

⁵D.Y. Allen. "Students Need Help in Learning How to Use the Library," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, (9 Jan 1982), p. 56.

Quantitative. Certainly **not all** jobs **require** higher level **mathematical ability**, but most require some **computational skill**. Students who are **able to demonstrate** such ability will likely have **more opportunities** for employment and **advancement** during their careers.

Alternatives to specific **courses** may be more difficult to **determine** in the quantitative skill **area** than in **others**. However, advisors should **encourage students** to refine **those skills** through student club and organizational **activities** or through **assisting teachers, counselors, or other** staff with various projects that **require** such tasks as **recording and classifying information, estimating** (costs, **measurements, times**, amounts), or using **precision instruments**.

Students should not **necessarily** be limited to quantitative **skills**; they **need** to develop **familiarity** with computers, their **applications**, and their **limitations**. In the **future**, **workers** in most occupations will eventually **need a certain computer literacy in order to function capably** in their jobs and careers. Whatever materials, **resources, courses, or activities** are **available** to the **advisor** should be **utilized to their fullest** in this critical **skill** development effort.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Obviously, different careers require different degrees of the skills described above at different times, and often more than one skill is required at the **same** time. The important point is that students **need to develop each** of the skills to a degree that will enable them to **function** effectively in a **variety** of careers. The **skills are** career-transferable, **irrespective of** vocational development stages, vocational environment or personality **characteristics**, and vocational aspirations.

Breen* and Wallace, et al. identified other skills that **also have relevance** to this discussion; they include valuing, creating (artistically), enduring (physically and psychologically), entertaining, and obviously **reading**. All of **these** skills are relevant for a variety of workers. Whether students aspire to be **managers, lawyers, social workers, performing artists, teachers, accountants, zookeepers, or computer programmers**, they will need such skills to succeed in **their careers**.

The skilled student in the future will:

- enjoy more the **opportunities** for employment and advancement
- be adaptable to the changing nature of the labor **market**, and
- be able to develop new **areas** of expertise having mastered the common skills.

The skilled advisor in the future must be one **who recognizes the need** for such broadly **applicable career skills**, and **designs learning experiences** for **students to help them develop** those skills. The skilled advisor in the future must be one who maintains **his/her** awareness of the significant social, economic, and **technological changes** that are **being** experienced more rapidly and more **radically** than before. The **skilled advisor** in the **future** must be one who **assumes some** educational responsibility for insuring that students are able to **compete** in the **everchanging**, and demanding labor market. The skilled **advisor** in the future must use a skills approach to career development.

*Breen, 1981.

†Wallace, et al., 1982.

Maximizing Career-Oriented Academic Advising at the Departmental Level

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INTRODUCTION

A growing number of undergraduates are asking their academic advisors this question: "Which of these **courses** will help me **get a job?**" Many departmental instructors advising undergraduates have **difficulty** responding to such an inquiry. Based upon his experiences at Virginia Commonwealth University, John Borgard notes that faculty advisors would be better **able to serve** departmental majors if **those advisors were** more pragmatic and worked more closely with practitioners and employers to **assist** undergraduates with career planning.¹

It is difficult to implement Borgard's strategy. Only so much of a faculty advisor's time can be spent in career-related counseling, and that **time must be** used to the fullest, because more assistance is demanded by undergraduates, leaving less time to **spend** with individual departmental majors.

One strategy to **maximize** career-oriented **academic** advising is to have a **departmental course** in career planning. A **course** has **been** developed at the University of North Dakota's Department of Geography, titled "Applied Geography—Careers in Geography," and it has **been** instrumental in improving the quality of information given to undergraduates **concerning** job prospects. The course **has laid** the **groundwork** for stronger career-oriented connections **between** faculty and practitioners for advising students, and is a means to **serve** them in a more pragmatic fashion. This **article** suggests that faculty advisors in **other** disciplines can use a career-planning course as a strategy at their institutions for the **benefit** of their departments and their **advisees**.

BACKGROUND TO THE COURSE

Courses in career-planning at the departmental **level** are not unique, particularly within geography departments. Geographers at Southwest Missouri State University have offered a successful course since the **mid-1970s**.² Variations of this **course** are to be found in many geography **departments** in the **United States**. e.g., University of Montana and

¹John H. Borgard, "Toward A Pragmatic Philosophy of Academic Advising," *NACADA Journal* 1 (1981), ■

²Milton D. Rufferty, "The Geographer Placement Seminar: A Course Syllabus," *The Professional Geographer* 29:2 (May 1977), 215-217.