The 3-I Process: A Career-Advising Framework

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Advisors are familiar with students who are in various places on their ways to thinking and deciding about their academic and career-related futures. All students are in some stage of academic and career planning; that is, they are in various phases of exploration and decision making. Some are just beginning to think about the career and life decisions they will need to make, while others are taking action to implement the ones to which they have made a commitment. How students go through these developmental phases during their college years is unique to the individual.

This chapter and the next two outline a career-advising framework that entails three aspects of the career-advising process. The *3-I Process* integrates the career component into academic advising. INQUIRE, INFORM, and INTEGRATE are natural phases in the academic and career decision-making process. (See Figure 1.)

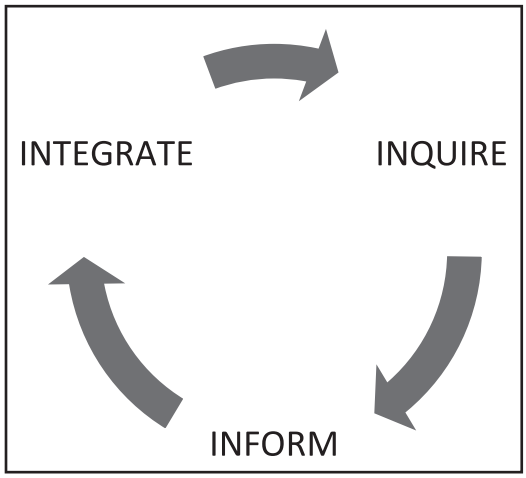
The 3-I Process is based on many decision-making frameworks but most closely resembles that of a theoretical construct developed by Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963). These theorists espoused a paradigm for decision making that includes a planning stage and an action stage. In the planning stage, students move through *exploration,* where they have vague ideas about the future, have no plan of action yet, and no negative choices. As they move into the *crystallization* stage, they are making progress toward a choice, begin to recognize alternatives, and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each. They eventually make a definite commitment in the *choice* stage and feel satisfied and relieved. They also consider the consequences of their decisions and begin further planning. In the planning stage, students engage in the process of closure about their commitments and plan the details and next steps that need to be implemented. Students' self-images and images of the future are elaborated and perfected. The 3-I Process encompasses the planning stages of Tiedeman and O'Hara's paradigm. Although not included, Tiedeman and O'Hara's action stage involves individuals living out their decisions by becoming part of the new environments they have chosen (for example, college or workplace). They begin to identify with their new environments by assimilation of the environment's values and goals; become highly involved and interact assertively, not passively, in the new environment; and eventually synthesize the group's purpose with their own. This whole process of planning and action, according to Tiedeman and O'Hara, is ordinarily progressive, but regression and recycling are possible. It is important to understand that the different phases in the 3-I Process are fluid and flexible.

In the 3-I Process, students might bring academic and career concerns in any of these three phases:

1. Student A is in the questioning phase (INQUIRE) as he begins to realize that certain academic and career decisions will need to be made. This transition often triggers questions and concerns about future academic and career planning.
2. Student B understands that she needs information (INFORM) about many aspects of the career choice progress. She wants to know what information she needs, where she can find it, and how she can use it.
3. Student C has all the information he needs and is in the process of solving a career problem or making a career-related decision. He needs help in pulling together all the disparate pieces (INTEGRATE). He also needs to implement the decision he has made.

Although all students in time pass through all these processes, they may contact advisors while engaged in any of them. For example, advisors may use only the INQUIRE process with students who are just beginning the exploration process. Advisors may need to help other students through two processes, INFORM and INTEGRATE, as they begin to gather information and then need assistance in making sense of what they have

Figure 1. The 3-I Process



learned. Advisors need to recognize the phase in which each student is engaged and adjust their approach accordingly.

The next three chapters suggest the type of career concerns that students might bring to these different stages of career exploration and planning. Advisor responses are suggested for each part of the process. The 3-I Process should not be viewed as rigid or linear. It designates three interactive phases that students might be passing through as they explore different academic and career possibilities, make decisions, and begin to implement them.

Inquire

The INQUIRE phase of the decision-making process involves identifying students' academic and career concerns, clarifying their needs, and making appropriate responses that help them move to the information-collecting phase. Academic advisors expect students to ask them questions. How advisors listen, interpret, and answer questions effectively is an art. For example, a student may want to drop a course because of financial stress, family problems, or failure in a course. Each of these reasons prompts a different set of questions that advisors might ask to clarify the student's situation. Each of these reasons has implications for the student's academic status, personal life, or career goals. Failing required courses in some competitive majors may mean a student needs to rethink his or her choice. Financial or family problems may lead to a delay in rescheduling a course sequence in some career preparation curricula, such as nursing or architecture. Although advisors are usually astute in discussing the academic implications of dropping a course, they also need to consider how it might affect the student's career plans and goals.

Academic advisors are in an ideal position to help students understand the relationships between their academic and career decisions and the impact these decisions have on their futures. Career advising is not just helping English majors identify possible jobs that might appeal to their interests and abilities. Career advising encompasses the whole realm of factors that students confront as they make academic choices that will influence career-related opportunities. Some academic decisions have an impact on not only students' immediate college experiences but their future lifestyle as well.

Many academic advisors are aware of students who have chosen a particular major because they think it will lead directly to a job after college. Some parents encourage their students to select these areas because the parents are concerned about security or good salaries. Such jobs, of course, don't always work out. Some students change majors and must rethink their academic and career goals. Students who are undecided about a major when they enter college may hesitate to select the ones they are interested in because the job connections aren't obvious. When academic advisors don't acknowledge the major-occupation connection in students' thinking, they miss an opportunity to become full partners in the academic decision-making process. The bridges need to be built, and advisors can be the initial support for doing so. There are as many career questions as there are students asking them. Some possible career-related questions and advisor responses are offered in this chapter.

Career Concerns

In the real world of advising, there are different types of advisor-student contacts and settings. Some advisors experience the one-stop or "McAdvising" situation. When students ask career-related questions, it is often tempting to refer them immediately to the career services on campuses. It is important at this juncture to ask students to return when more time is available or refer them to a campus resource when the problem demands immediate attention. Career concerns, whether simple or complex, should never be ignored.

Advisors who are fortunate to work with a student on a long-term basis or have more time to work with others during appointments have an opportunity to engage in career advising in more depth. Career concerns are not always obvious but may emerge as students share their reasons for requesting academic help. *Given the time constraints on most advisors' time, it is imperative that they become proficient in identifying core career-related concerns from the questions students ask*.

Career-related problems fall into at least three general areas: information deficits, general indecision, and personal concerns. Some examples follow.

Information Deficits

Students may:

- Be unable to relate occupational information to their current academic major
- Lack information about occupational fields in general
- Ask what kind of job they can get with their major
- Don't know how or where to access career information
- Be unable to choose between two strong alternative majors or career fields because of lack of information

General Indecision

Students may:

- Be developmentally not "ready" (that is, lack of career maturity) to engage in the tasks involved in academic and career exploration and decision making
- Need to assess their strengths and limitations as they relate to career fields
- Be unable to relate what they know about themselves to career fields
- Change major because they no longer want the career field to which it leads
- Lack general decision-making experiences and skills
- Be unable to set career goals

Personal Concerns

Students may:

- Have difficulty picturing themselves in a work environment (vocational self-concept)
- Lack confidence in performing decision-making tasks (self-efficacy)
- Lack motivation to explore career alternatives
- Be encumbered with occupational stereotypes, thus eliminating viable career fields
- Experience parental pressures to choose an unwanted career direction
- Be indecisive decision makers

It is obvious that some of these concerns, such as those related to indecisiveness or obvious levels of high stress or depression, are not within the purview of academic advising. A problem for some advisors is knowing *when* to refer, especially when it pertains to career-related problems that are more personal in nature. Some stated career concerns may disguise a personal concern that the student is consciously (or unconsciously) covering up. Other students may need help with family or more personal problems that are impinging on their career decision-making processes. Advisors should sense when they are ill equipped to help students solve more personally related career problems. At times they must rely on their instincts (as they do with more personal academic concerns) to determine if the problems are severe enough to warrant referral to a personal counselor. The best adage may be when in doubt, refer.

Advising Nontraditional or Special Needs Students

It hardly needs to be said that today's campuses reflect the diverse populations that make up our current society. The career concerns of different types of students are as diverse as the students themselves. Although for many years campus career services were designed for traditional-age undergraduate students, these services have changed dramatically over the past few decades.

It is always dangerous to generalize about specific groups of students since individuals often differ within a group even though environmental and cultural differences are similar. Each student brings a distinctive set of characteristics and backgrounds that place his or her career concerns into their particular context. Although this applies to all students, some examples of students who may bring more specific concerns to the career-advising process follow.

Cultural and Ethnic Considerations

DeVaney and Hughey (2000) indicate that racial identity influences the vocational process in

terms of "career maturity, perceptions of racial climate, work, adjustment, and work satisfaction" (p. 234). It has little impact, however, on content variables such as needs, interests, or college major. Cultural differences exert strong influences on some ethnic minority students' career choices as well as their decision-making styles.

African American students. According to Sharf (1997), African Americans are "less likely to envision themselves in particular occupations, perceive a more limited range of appropriate jobs, and are less likely to take ownership of their career decisions" (p. 239). Faculty mentoring programs have had a positive effect on minority academic achievement and retention (Campbell & Campbell, 1997), and faculty advisors are important sources of both academic and career information. DeVaney and Hughey (2000) recommend that advising in a broader life-planning process rather than a narrow occupational focus can help African American students acquire planning skills that will transfer into other family and worker roles.

Asian American students. Although Asian American students are from many cultures, they share a common worldview. Generally, they place a high value on occupational prestige, financial success, and job security. This causes some Asian American students to not consider certain occupations, such as teaching, law, and politics (DeVaney & Hughey, 2000). Mau (2004) found that Asian American students perceived more difficulty with career decision making than other groups, while White Americans perceive the fewest difficulties. She concluded that individual-oriented cultures are more conductive to fostering independent, rational approaches to career decision making than are collective-oriented cultures.

Career indecision in Asian American women, according to Sharf (1997), may stem from a lack of vocational information and role models. They may experience internal conflict when they consider career fields that are personally appealing but culturally inappropriate. Sharf suggests advisors help them develop study and decision-making skills, build confidence, and consider a broad range of occupational fields. According to Leong (1986), Asian American students may present academic and career issues to their faculty advisors when the real concerns are interpersonal in nature.

Hispanic students. Hispanic students' attitudes toward work are similar to those of White students when they enter college, but expectations for success and occupational aspirations tend to decline later (DeVaney & Hughey, 2000). Advisors must recognize the strong influence of traditional cultural values, especially family expectations, when helping Hispanic students make academic and career choices.

Since familial and societal expectations often influence career decisions, making a choice is not always done by the individual but by many people (for example, family, friends, significant others). Some minority students may consider a narrower range of occupations because they are considered inappropriate in their culture. Some are less likely to take ownership of their career decisions, as well. Advisors also need to be aware that a future orientation is not a cultural value shared by all students (Carter, 1991). A focus needs to be on career information; when advisors help students use the Internet to search for information, they may be teaching valuable technology skills as well.

Brown (2000) points out that one very important factor in advising minorities is language. Linguists have documented important differences among cultures in both verbal and nonverbal communication: "Rapidity of speech, verbal expressiveness, use of interpersonal space, tolerances for silence and many other variables differ across cultures" (p. 373). Minority students who persist in college tend to interact more extensively with faculty than White students interact with faculty (Sharf, 1997). Faculty advisors have an excellent opportunity to address career concerns and issues in these contacts.

Other Special Needs Students

There are many other special needs students who by virtue of their unique situations require different types of career information and advice. People with learning and other disabilities have been part of higher education for many years, but there has been a surge in enrollments in the past fifteen years (Hitchings & Retish, 2000). Zunker (2001) lists some of the special problems of disabled students, such as social/interpersonal skills, attitudinal barriers, lack of role models, and self-concept. Although many advisors refer their disabled advisees to the appropriate campus resources, they might also refer them to the excellent information that the U.S. government provides about how specific occupations will accommodate their specific disability (http://www.disabilityinfo.gov).

Adult students return to college for many reasons, many of them career related. Since adults

have supposedly gained knowledge from previous experience, it might be assumed they need little help. Some research has shown, however, that they are similar to traditional-age students in their knowledge of career decision principles, knowledge of preferred occupations, and level of career indecision (Luzzo, 2000). Advisors need to be aware of the multiple roles older students play and the work, family, and community responsibilities they are juggling in addition to their college work. Adult students need academic advice throughout the term, advice about prior learning assessment, and help in negotiating the academic process when family or career interferes with academic progress (Banta, Hansen, Black, & Jackson, 2002). Responding to career concerns may require e-mail or telephone contact, but many adult students might appreciate referrals to specific academic- and career-related Web sites or other online resources.

Federal laws and executive orders bar discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, and handicap. Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2002) warn that "many women, people of color, persons with disabilities, gay/lesbian/bisexual individuals regularly experience discrimination practices in hiring and promoting, insufficient financial resources, and a lack of role models and mentors" (p. 99). Advisors who work with students with discrimination concerns should be aware of the information and other campus resources that can help them.

Communicating

Regardless of the type of student or the type of career concern that needs to be addressed, communicating with students is at the heart of advising. It has been said that 90 percent of a working day is spent in some form of communication, such as listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Advisors may be the most informed people on campus in certain areas, but if they cannot communicate effectively, their knowledge will not be useful. Good communicators are able to:

- Concentrate on what the student is saying.
- Screen out distractions.
- Focus on nonverbal messages.
- Listen for the key points the student is trying to make.
- Reflect back to the main ideas that are presented.
- Respond to the student with interest and empathy.
- Listen and respond to any emotions being expressed.
- Listen in a patient, nonthreatening manner.
- Go beyond the surface meaning of words.
- Suggest possible actions the student might take.

As advisors work with students who have career-related concerns, there are certain communication skills that are especially important.

Listening

Effective listening is a critical skill, especially in today's technological world. *How* students present their concerns is as important as the words they use. Tone and inflection of voice as well as nonverbal movements reveal a great deal about a student's feelings and attitudes. Listening requires being sensitive to the meaning behind the words, since there can be layers of meaning behind a simple question or sentence. As advisors listen to students' concerns, they are automatically assigning meaning to the words and formulating questions to clarify what they are hearing. They also need to listen for the career content implicit in what students are expressing. At times even students are not aware of the career implications of their questions until advisors call them to their attention.

Questioning

For some expressed concerns, only a simple solution is required. But as most advisors are aware, one question may raise many more questions. Questioning, like listening, requires skill. Advisors can ask questions for information or to clarify what the student has said. In many situations, questioning beyond the surface problem may uncover facts and emotions that students might hesitate to reveal at first. Advisors must also be sensitive to and refrain from asking questions the student is not ready to answer. This is especially important with minority students, since some may have cultural issues with self-disclosure (Sue & Sue, 1990).

To summarize, much of the communication between an advisor and student involves identifying a problem, exchanging information, and arriving at a resolution. This process may take five minutes, an hour, a week, or even more. In the time-restrictive environment in which many advisors work, there is a tendency to provide

answers too quickly without involving the student in the process. *How* information is relayed is as important as the information itself. Although advisors may not always want to delve too deeply into some issues, they should never ignore those that might have a real impact on the student's academic and career situation.

Technology

A great deal of communication between advisor and student today is done through technology. Ninety-five percent of all college students access the Internet on a weekly basis and spend at least twenty hours a week online (http://wordofmouse.com).

Steele and Gordon (2001) found that, overall, most advisors profess a positive attitude about performing advising duties by e-mail but that 69 percent of the academic units within which the advisor respondents worked had no policies regarding the use of technology in advising.

Some advisors establish a listserv or an e-mail program so their advisees can ask questions or share concerns. They can provide career information links on their Web sites and offer career-related information through e-mail newsletters and electronic bulletin boards. Advisors can also assist students who are requesting career information by helping them search over the Internet (Sotto, 2000). Providing a list of career Web sites relevant to their academic major can not only offer sources of helpful information but will encourage students to take responsibility for their own exploration.

Advisor Questions

Advisors are often the first professionals on campus to hear a student express a career concern. Who else on campus is in a more advantageous place in intercepting students who have no one to talk to about their career thoughts and plans and don't know where to go for help? Advisors can act as a sounding board to help students think through all the ramifications of their problem and possible ways to resolve it. Just as important is how they refer students to a career resource so that it is targeted to the student's specific, timely need.

When advisors sense that their students are struggling with career decisions, they may want to ask a series of questions. Examples of questions advisors might ask in the areas of self-knowledge, occupational information, and decision making follow.

Self-knowledge questions:

- What are some career fields that interest you?
- Are you having difficulty in identifying your interests? What would help you do this?
- Do you have so many interests that none stand out? Which ones have you identified?
- Have you used any career resources to explore your interests (for example, interest inventories, computer-based systems, extracurricular activities, work experiences)? Which ones?
- What are your strongest abilities (identified, for example, from hobbies, leisure activities)? Why do you consider these strong?
- What do you value? What is important to you in a job? (See Table 1 for a list of work values.) Why?
- How do these values match the occupations you are considering?
- What kind of work experiences have you had (for example, summer jobs, part-time employment, volunteer work)? What did you learn from it?
- Are you feeling pressure to make a certain decision to please other people whose opinions you respect? If so, how is it affecting your decision making?
- What if anything is standing in your way of making a commitment to a major?

Occupational information questions:

- What information have you collected so far about (*occupation*)?
- Where did you find the information?
- How do you know the information is accurate, up to date?
- With whom have you discussed it?
- What conclusions have you drawn from the information?
- What information do you still need in order to resolve the problem?
- What resources will help you find it?
- What are you going to do with this information once you collect it?

Decision-making questions:

- How do you usually make decisions (for example, systematically, spontaneously, rationally, intuitively)?

Table 1. *GOE* work values

Check the five work values that are most important to you in a job:

1. *Ability Utilization:* Making use of your individual abilities.
2. *Achievement:* Getting a feeling of accomplishment.
3. *Activity:* Being busy all the time.
4. *Authority:* Giving directions and instructions to others.
5. *Autonomy:* Planning your work with little supervision.
6. *Coworkers:* Having coworkers who are easy to get along with.
7. *Company Policies and Procedures:* Being treated fairly by the company.
8. *Compensation:* Being paid well in comparison with other workers.
9. *Creativity:* Trying out your own ideas.
10. *Independence:* Doing your work alone.
11. *Moral Values:* Never being pressured to do things that go against your sense of right and wrong.
12. *Recognition:* Receiving recognition for the work you do.
13. *Responsibility:* Making decisions on your own.
14. *Security:* Having a steady employment.
15. *Social Service:* Doing things for other people.
16. *Social Status:* Being looked up to by others in your company or in your community.
17. *Supervision, Human Relations:* Having supervisors who back you with management.
18. *Supervision, Technical:* Having supervisors who train you well.
19. *Working Conditions:* Having good working conditions.

Note. These values are taken from Farr, Ludden, and Shatkin (2001), pp. 448–452. The *Guide for Occupational Exploration* can be obtained from JIST Works (http://www.jist.com). Work values are listed with the fourteen corresponding work groups.

- Can you describe a decision you have made in the past two weeks and how you made it?
- Do you need to talk to others before you can make a decision? To whom do you share your ideas and how do they help you?
- What values are important to you in this decision?
- How well do you integrate your values into your decision making?
- How do you differentiate between a good decision and a bad one?
- What outcomes would you like as a result of the decision you are currently trying to make?
- What action steps will you take to implement your decision once it is made?
- How do you set goals for yourself? Do you usually meet them? Give an example.
- What academic and career goals have you set for yourself? How will you fulfill them?

By asking these types of questions, a clearer picture of the student's career concern can be determined. How the student answers will reveal what the student has done to resolve the problem so far and what parts of the problems still need to be addressed. Advisors can help students determine what actions need to be taken to move the process along or resolve it.

Inquiring not only involves questions that students ask but also the questions that advisors ask in response. The questioning phase is sometimes taken for granted since it is such a natural part of communicating. This is a critical part of the career-advising process because:

- It establishes the nature of the relationship between advisor and student.
- It portrays the advisor as a caring person who is interested in the student's career as well as academic concerns.
- It establishes the advisor as a reliable resource for career information.
- It sets up the communication patterns necessary for problem solving.
- It determines whether a specific career concern requires a simple or more detailed approach to resolving it.
- It ferrets out the problems that might be below the surface but need to be addressed.

Much of advising is problem solving, and questioning is its first step. John Dewey (1910) offered some steps in problem solving:

1. A difficulty is felt.
2. Difficulty is located and defined.

3. Possible solutions are suggested.
4. Consequences are considered.
5. A solution is accepted.

Dewey's first step involves *feelings* and his last step involves *acceptance*. Although a linear model, his steps in problem solving include the other important elements of questioning, information gathering, and identifying solutions and their consequences.

Summary

The proposed framework for career advising used in this book consists of three phases that, while flowing into one another, offer a sequence of tasks in which students are involved as they solve career problems and make decisions. A student's first contact with an advisor about a career concern will usually begin with questions. Advisors' responsibility at this point is to help students clarify their concerns by asking probing questions so that both advisor and student can begin to address the problem precisely. After the INQUIRE phase, advisors and students move into the INFORM aspect of the career-advising process, where the focus is on gathering and processing information. Advisors may find some students are just beginning to need help in identifying and gathering the kind of information they need, while others have all the information required but need assistance in INTEGRATING it into a coherent whole. Chapter 4 concentrates on helping students identify the information they need, where to find it, and how to process it within their personal context.

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