

Emphasis on Vocational Majors

“While companies may complain young workers aren’t getting the right degrees, students are actually increasingly pursuing vocational majors that they hope employers will like. Business majors, for instance, outnumber liberal arts majors by as much as seven to one, depending on the definitions used. And since 2001, science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) degrees have increased at a rate equal to or greater than the overall increase in bachelor degrees being awarded.” (Capelli, 2014)

Liberal Arts as Career Preparation

“A broad general education helps foster critical thinking and creativity. Exposure to a variety of fields produces synergy and cross fertilization. Yes, science and technology are crucial components of this education, but so are English and philosophy. No matter how strong your math and science skills are, you still need to know how to learn, think and even write.” (Zakaria, 2015)

“Most employers are looking for transferable skills — the ability to problem solve, work in teams, write and communicate, and think critically, says Ms. Collier of SUNY New Paltz. These can be developed in any liberal arts discipline. It makes no sense, she says, to “suffer through a major” because you think it will lead to employment. “We tell students, ‘Find a major that makes you intellectually engaged, that expands your brain and deepens your understanding of the world.’ ” (Capuzzi Simon, 2012)

The Explorer

An estimated 80% of college bound students have yet to choose a major (Ronan, 2005)

An estimated 20 -50% enter college “undecided” (Freedman, 2013)

50% of those students that declare a major, change their major, in many cases as often as 2 or 3 times (Ronan, 2005)

Do these numbers reflect the failure of career education at the secondary level or do they point to the futility of expecting adolescents make informed decisions about their future? Neither? Both?

A 2008 study concluded “that students are choosing major based on influence and assumption rather than through an understanding of their own personal goals and values.” (Freedman, 2013)

ACT reports that based on the 2013 administration of the exam, only 36% of students indicated a major choice that was a “good fit” based on the ACT Interest Inventory completed when registering for the test. (www.act.org/newsroom)

From the Princeton Review: How important is your major? Unlike tarot cards, the major you choose will neither predict nor guarantee your future. Many graduates find jobs that have nothing to do with what they studied in college.

In the current job climate, does any of this matter anyway?

The average American will have nearly 12 different jobs by the time they are 50! (Bureau of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov)

Estimates suggest that Americans will have between 3 -7 different careers, with 7 being the number most commonly cited (although not statistically verified) (Bialik, 2010)

“Shorter job tenure is associated with a new era of insecurity, volatility, and risk. It's part of the same employment picture as the increase in part-time, freelance, and contract work; mass layoffs and buyouts; and "creative destruction" within industries.” -Anya Kamenetz, *The Four Year Career*

Are high school students developmentally capable of making decisions regarding major and career?

The Prefrontal Cortex is “involved in things like planning and strategizing and organizing, initiating attention and stopping and starting and shifting attention. It's a part of the brain that most separates man from beast, if you will. That is the part of the brain that has changed most in our human evolution, and a part of the brain that allows us to conduct philosophy and to think about thinking and to think about our place in the universe. ...

I think that [in the teen years, this] part of the brain that is helping organization, planning and strategizing is not done being built yet ... [It's] not that the teens are stupid or incapable of [things]. It's sort of unfair to expect them to have adult levels of organizational skills or decision making before their brain is finished being built.” -Jay Giedd, *Frontline, Inside the Teen Brain*

James Marcia and Identity Status

Identity Status depicts a particular developmental position held by an individual regarding:

- willingness to explore and to commit to vocation (what work will I do)
- values (what do I believe – especially regarding religion and politics).

Baxter Magolda's Four Stages of Knowing

Stage 1: Absolute Knowing:

- Knowledge is certain and absolute; answers exist in all areas
- Passive learners who expect an authority to transfer truths to them

Stage 2: Transitional Knowing:

- Beginning to question the certainty of knowledge and the authorities who convey it
- Recognition of gray areas, multiple perspectives, and contradictions

Stage 3: Independent Knowing

- Knowledge is viewed as uncertain; few absolute truths
- Individuals begin to view their opinions as equally valid as someone in authority; however, opinions are often held without evidence, causing conflict

Stage 4: Contextual Knowing

- Knowledge is mostly uncertain; however, some claims are better than others, based on evidence
- Ability to compare different perspectives and integrate new and existing knowledge.

Is college the best way to address career preparation, particularly for first generation and/or low income students? If your school does not have a college-going culture is it incumbent on counselors to promote college, or is it more responsible to focus on career tracks that do not require a college degree?

“Low SES seems to be related to lowered aspirations. It may also be related to the tendency to underestimate their ability to act on their values and an overall malaise because poor people may have the perception that they have little control over their lives.” (Brown, 2002)

“A belief of low competency or in negative outcomes will lead people to avoid certain activities. Goals are formed based on experiences and their perceived outcomes in different activities . . . a process in constant flux through adolescence. After this time, vocational interests typically stabilize and do not change unless new exposures occur.” (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004)

Career Technical Education (CTE) coursework:

“Offering students the option of starting preparation for their chosen occupation during upper-secondary school tends to increase school attendance of 15–19 year olds and improve labor market outcomes of high school graduates whether or not they enter and complete a post-secondary education.” (Bishop & Mane, 2004)

Why is career exploration important at the secondary level?

The focus of academic and career planning is threefold: to help students acquire the skills to achieve academic success, to make connections between school and life experiences and to acquire knowledge and skills to be college and career ready upon high school graduation. ASCA recognizes that college and career readiness is exemplified by students who are prepared for any post-secondary experience without the need for remediation and that all students possess the skills and knowledge needed to qualify for and succeed in their chosen field. (ASCA, 2013)

. . . But how?

“Students do seem to benefit, both vocationally and academically, from participation in career courses. In particular, they seem to increase their knowledge of careers and their ability to make career-related decisions. Yet, the research overall does not help us in determining the optimum content of or method of delivery of career guidance. “ (Hughes & Karp, 2004)

Text from slides for **High School Career Preparation**, IACAC Annual Conference, April 29, 2015

References:

ACT Newsroom, (2013), Many students select a college major that doesn't fit their interests well, *act.org*, November 11, 2013.

American School Counselor Association, (2013), The professional school counselor and academic and college/career planning, *www.schoolcounselor.org*

Bialik, C., (2010), A lifetime of career changes, *The Wall Street Journal*, September 3, 2010, *blogs.wsj.com*

Brown, D., (2002) The role of work and cultural values in occupational choice, satisfaction, and success: A theoretical statement, *Journal of Counseling Development*, Volume 80, Issue 1, p. 48–56.

Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Longitudinal Study FAQ, Department of Labor, www.bls.gov/nls/nlsfaqs.htm#anch41

Cappelli, P (2014) What employers really want? Workers they don't have to train, *The Washington Post*, September 5, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-leadership/wp/2014/09/05/what-employers-really-want-workers-they-dont-have-to-train>

Capuzzi Simon, C., (2012), Major decisions, *The New York Times*, November 2, 2012, Bishop, J., & Maine, F., (2004) The impacts of career-technical education on high school labor market success, *Economics of Education Review*, vol. 23, p. 381-402

Fisch, K., & McLeod, S., (2008) Shift happens, Vol. 3, *online video*: www.youtube.com/watch?v=cL9Wu2kWwSY

Fleming, K., (2013), Success in the new economy, *online video*: vimeo.com/67277269

Freedman, L., (2013), The developmental disconnect in choosing a major: Why institutions should prohibit choice until second year, *The Mentor*, June 2013.

Gibbons, M., & Shoffner, M., (2004), Prospective first-generation college students: Meeting their needs through Social Cognitive Career Theory, *Professional School Counseling*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (OCTOBER 2004), pp. 91-97.

Giedd, J., (2002), Inside the teenage brain, *Frontline*, Aired January 31, 2002, Transcripts: www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/interviews/giedd.html

Hettich, P., & Helkowski, C., (2005), Connect College to Career, Thomson Wadsworth, Belmont CA

Hughes, K., & Karp, M., (2004), School-based career development: A synthesis of the literature, *Institute on Education and the Economy*, Teacher's College, Columbia University

Kamenetz, A, (2012), The four year career, *Fast Company*, February 2012.

Ronan, G., (2005), College freshmen face major dilemma, *NBC News*, msnbc.com, November 29, 2005.
The Princeton Review, College majors, www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/college-majors

Zakaria, F., (2015) Why America's obsession with STEM education is dangerous, *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-stem-wont-make-us-successful/2015/03/26/5f4604f2-d2a5-11e4-ab77-9646eea6a4c7_story.html