

# Career Counseling: Which Approach?

by MICHAEL L. SEITENRIGHT

Career development for American students in the nation's community colleges and universities is a major concern of Student Personnel Workers. Professional staff workers are increasingly aware of and interested in an effective approach to career counseling. To be effective in their career counseling work, Student Personnel Workers need to know which career counseling technique is the most effective and reliable. Until recently research studies neglected the issue of the actual effectiveness of various approaches to career counseling.

One of the initial studies to be concerned with counseling techniques and related effectiveness was the Magoon and Gilbert study. "Magoon (1968) and Gilbert and Ewing (1971) have developed vocational-educational problem solving models which are based partially on counselor-client interaction." (Graff, Danish, and Austin p. 224) At Southern Illinois University, Graff, Danish, and Austin conducted a study entitled "Reactions to Three Kinds of Vocational-Educational Counseling." The Graff, Danish, and Austin study was partially based on the Magoon and Gilbert and Ewing research but was concerned more specifically with the issue of career counseling techniques and actual effectiveness. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relative effectiveness of three approaches to vocational-educational counseling: individual, programmed self-instruction, and group counseling.

The study contained a 14 item vocational-educational survey. In Part I the client checked the areas in which he sought career assistance. In Part II the client related on a five point scale the amount of assistance actually received. Part I was administered prior to treatment, and Part II was administered after treatment with the client responding only to those items initially checked.

Clients were randomly assigned to one of four groups. There were three experimental groups consisting of the individual approach, self-instruction, and group counseling and one control group. All experimental groups received the Kuder Preference Inventory and counselor interpretation of aptitude and interest test scores as part of the treatment. Procedure, thereafter, differed from experimental group to experimental group. The control group did not receive treatment.

Clients in the individual approach met with a counselor for two or three sessions lasting for 50 to 60 minutes. The counselors indicated that they focused on client vocational-educational concerns.

Clients assigned the self-instruction approach were given the "Self-Help Vocational Decision-Making Booklet" which used the following six steps.

- (1) defining the problem
- (2) gathering information
- (3) evaluating information
- (4) choosing a plan of action
- (5) taking on the plan
- (6) clarifying and reviewing plans

These six steps are commonly employed in the decision-making and career planning process.

The group counseling approach contained 9 groups of 5 to 7 members each. Counseling sessions centered on areas of the general problems involved in vocational choice and the importance of self knowledge of interests, abilities, values, career plans, etc. The focus was on the feeling underlying choice-making and problem-solving.

The control group did not receive treatment as did the experimental groups. They were administered Part I of the survey and informed that they would be contacted by mail in approximately three weeks. An appointment letter was sent about 20 days later with instructions to complete Part II of the survey. After Part II of the survey was completed, control clients received individual counseling which was not included as part of the research data.

The results of the study indicated that on all criteria the three experimental groups' scores were significantly higher than the control group in the amount of assistance received. Clients in the self-instruction group received significantly more assistance in the three areas of (1) informed of vocational opportunities, (2) educational and vocational decision-making, and (3) setting up vocational and educational goals consistent with abilities, interests, and personality. In the other four areas of the survey (1) interpreting aptitude and interest tests, (2) discussing personal and social effects on vocational choice, (3) discussing life philosophy and values effect on vocational choice, and (4) awareness of various academic majors, there was no significant difference in the amount of assistance received among the three experimental groups. The results suggest that vocational-educational counseling by all treatments was reasonable effective in most of the survey areas of assistance. Self-instruction proved superior to either individual or group counseling in three of the seven areas and equal to them in the remaining four areas.

From the results of the Graff, Danish, and Austin study, there is evidence that programmed self-instruction is a viable technique for use with students involved in the career decision-making process. For Student Personnel



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Workers, the importance of the findings is that basic career information and exploration is now assessable to all students through the concept of self-instruction. Initial research indicates that self-instruction is an effective and reliable technique of career counseling.

## Reference List

Graff, W., Danish, S., and Austin, B., "Reactions to Three Kinds of Vocational-Educational Counseling," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 224-228, American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., 1972

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