

## College Courses in Vocational Planning\*

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I want to speak about college-level group vocational guidance which is conducted within the formal curriculum - that is, as accredited classes in vocational planning. Such courses were virtually non-existent before the 1930's. Their appearance was originally linked with the rising pragmatism which marked the philosophy of American collegiate education in the first half of the twentieth century. One has to understand the emergence of vocational planning courses as part of the movement which also produced the courses commonly bearing such titles as "Social and Personal Adjustment," "Educational Orientation," "How to Study," and "Preparation for Marriage and Family Living." As a matter of fact, in many colleges, topical units in vocational planning have quite frequently been incorporated within omnibus courses in personal adjustment. A clear example of this is the freshman psychology course at Boston University Junior College on which reports have been presented at previous APGA conventions and for which Glanz and Walston's 1958 book, "An Introduction to Personal Adjustment," was developed as the text.

It is difficult to know the current status of college courses in vocational planning. No systematic national surveys of this field of instruction are available, to the best of my knowledge. A few years ago, Robert Hoppock

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at New York University and his associate, Nancy Stevens, published brief reports in the Personnel and Guidance Journal and the Vocational Guidance Quarterly describing what some two-year and four-year colleges have been doing in this curricular area. Additional data on the subject are to be published this month by William C. Brown Company in the initial volume in its newly revised series on general education. This book, which is co-edited by H. T. Morse and Paul Dressel, is titled "General Education for Personal Maturity." It embodies three principal topical sections, devoted respectively to descriptions of course programs in operation in the areas of social and personal development, marriage and family life, and vocational planning. The last-named section includes chapter accounts of vocational planning courses in four widely differing types of American colleges as well as a chapter which attempts an integrating view of the field.

While dependable national statistics are lacking on college level courses in vocational planning, we can be confident of certain general trends. For one thing, the post-Sputnik reaction against so-called life adjustment education has made most of our four-year colleges less receptive to the introduction of personal development courses, vocational planning courses among them. The hard-core intellectualism which so many colleges are now vigorously espousing permits little room for classes which have, as their chief aim, that of helping the student attain an increased measure of psychological well-being. Such personal development courses have been commonly labeled by their critics as superficial, lacking in substantive content, and of substandard intellectual quality. The fact that these criticisms are frequently uninformed does not lessen their persuasiveness among non-student-personnel-minded faculty who are disposed to think this way anyhow.

Paradoxically, an opposed trend is to be found in the junior college movement, particularly among terminal and community junior colleges which do not serve primarily as traditional feeder schools for the four-year colleges and universities. The rapid increase in the number of junior colleges has been attended by a rise in the number of personal adjustment course offerings, not the least of which are classes in vocational planning. Among the numerous junior colleges of California, for example, vocational planning courses are very common. Often, such a course is required of entering freshmen and of other groups of students believed to be in need of systematic assistance with problems of educational and occupational guidance.

A third trend concerns the changing presuppositions and techniques of vocational planning courses. Certain limiting instructional strategies which were for too many years invoked as the dominant modus operandi of group vocational guidance are today being accorded a more modest and defensible role. One illustration of a now obsolescent practice is that of virtually equating group vocational guidance with class testing and test interpretation within the static guidance model of matching student traits to job requirements. Another is the overreliance upon dissemination of career information on the debatable assumption that the vocational problems of college youth originate largely or entirely out of an occupational information deficit. Still another refers to the inflated emphasis upon the perfunctory techniques for marketing one's occupational skills -- how to fill out an employment application blank, how to conduct an employment interview, and the like.

I certainly do not wish to assert that such topics are alien to the make-up of a college course in vocational planning. In limited form, I employ these practices in my own teaching. My contention is rather that these

devices, while clearly useful, must be fitted into a fabric of instructional experiences which help the student to examine the meaning of human labor, to discern reality-based connections between the collegiate experience and the subsequent, socially valued role of worker, and to learn to make his system of personal values explicit as a necessary condition of his search for satisfying work. Increasingly, courses in vocational planning are accomodating these aims as new psychological light is shed upon man as worker.

I would like to relate some of the things college-level courses in vocational planning are currently doing by discussing briefly the one I know best, namely, the course I teach in the General College at the University of Minnesota. Five years ago, in an NVGA paper devoted to a somewhat different theme from ours today, I had occasion to state some of the suppositions about students and their learning upon which we have gradually shaped our course. I find that many of these presumptions are just as serviceable to me now as they were then, and I would like to repeat some of them here, with adaptations and elaborations as necessary, as a way of making our course rationale clear.

Other things equal, it is our belief that the student's vocational development is facilitated under each of the following conditions:

1. When the student, at the time of entrance into the course, is highly motivated to develop a workable plan for vocational life.

We recognize that in the classroom setting we can have a more salutary impact upon students who already evince an active concern about matters of vocational choice and training. Contrary to requiring the Vocational Planning course of all students, we systematically screen students for admission to the course on the basis of judged need and related qualifications. We make no apologies whatever for thus "stacking the cards" in our favor since we

know we cannot serve all students and we prefer to work with those with whom our probable success rate is good. These are by no means always the academically more able students.

2. When the student is free from persistent emotional involvements.

Students who are anxiety ridden sometimes slip into the Vocational Planning course in the false conviction that their problems are rooted in vocational indecision. It is sometimes this way, of course, but the converse is more likely to be true.

We do not ignore the relationship of appropriate vocational planning to personality considerations. On the contrary, our counseling with our students often leads to increased focus upon intrapsychic problems. However, our course aims and structure do not permit us to be maximally helpful to students whose emotional lives are in disrepair and who need to develop new techniques for coming to terms with themselves and with society. When we detect such students in the course screening process, we attempt to refer them for therapeutic counseling.

3. When the student is furnished opportunities for counseling at crucial stages in the sequential development of his course experience.

We have never regarded opportunity for individual counseling as ancillary in its relation to group work in our Vocational Planning classes. Rather we view it as a sine qua non of the student's experience. As the course is currently constituted, each student arranges a minimum of three interviews with a counselor at strategic points. Students sometimes ask that that additional counseling sessions be scheduled both during and beyond the course. The studies of Stone, Speer and Jasker, and Hoyt have all pointed up the central role which counseling occupies in group vocational guidance.

4. When the student is oriented to the purpose and nature of counseling in advance of his series of interviews.

Our Vocational Planning course includes a classroom unit called "Preparation for Counseling." Our counselors have reported out of their experience, again and again, that students who have the benefit of this kind of orientation to the nature of counseling are more capable of defining their central personal concerns in the interview and they have a more sophisticated conception of how they may employ the counseling function to mediate a clarification of their problem-solving tasks.

5. When a self-history or autobiographical approach is used to lead the student through the initial stages of vocational exploration.

Furnishing the opportunity for this experience of critical self-examination is basic to our course strategy. Through a progressive series of supervised written assignments, which we have termed the "sequential project method," the student is encouraged to use a variety of self-analytic and diagnostic methods as a means of arriving at exploratory educational and vocational decisions. Emphasis here is not alone, or even chiefly, upon knowing one's abilities and interests, but upon the student's interpretation of his past life and the articulation of his aspirations and his personal values. We see this self-reference project work as a logical extension of the counseling process and we attempt to deal with it as such.

6. When the student is freely permitted to explore his subjectively expressed job interests and to reject, if he wishes, those occupations inferred from test results or other data.

Heretical though it sounds, we propose that it is more effective to permit the student to decide, on motivational grounds, where he ought to make tentative

symbolic probes at the world of work rather than to use test results to scale down the options for him. Certainly this is true in the earlier stages of occupational exploration. Our experience leads us to believe that, after the student has been given a good deal of freedom in deciding what fields of work to examine, he is more likely to be receptive to information about his own qualifications which derives from test scores, grade records, and other personal data sources.

7. When the student is given abundant opportunity to penetrate the occupational universe symbolically and to correct and enlarge his image of how the world of work is ordered.

In our Vocational Planning course at Minnesota, we do this in three ways. We teach the students to use the Dictionary of Occupational Titles and, particularly, to explore his felt interests by working with the tables of three-digit occupational groups. We do it, also, by having the student study the organization of American occupations by interest families according to the classification which has been developed for the Kuder Preference Record. I should say here that our choice of Kuder's system over Strong's has little if anything to do with the relative merits of the two blanks as interest measures. Our preference rests rather on the conviction that the Kuder tables of interest-classified occupations furnish a more nearly complete and better balanced representation of the American occupational scene. Finally, we induce the student to make a symbolic exploration of the world of work by means of the new Functional Occupational Classification Structure which is emerging from the work of the United States Employment Service. I know that there are those who hold several types of reservations against this new job classification system and I share some of these. Nevertheless, I feel that this device gives my students and me the most meaningful and thoroughgoing sorting of jobs according to worker trait criteria that has yet been offered to vocational counselors.

8. When the student is encouraged to relate his findings about occupations to those facts and impressions he has gathered about himself.

The specially devised occupational survey form which the student uses incorporates a section in which he records his candid reactions to the occupation he has just investigated. He is obligated to dwell upon many aspects of the suitability of this occupation as a possible life work for him and to develop a reasoned defense of his acceptance or rejection of the field.

9. When the student is encouraged to investigate more than one occupation.

There is reason to believe that the study of a single field of work may promote a tenacious and unreasoning attachment to a manifestly inappropriate vocational choice. In our course, each student ultimately makes an intensive study of two jobs through recourse to the occupational literature and to job information interviews and, further, by means of organizing and interpreting his findings within the framework of the occupational survey form. We try to induce the student to suspend firm judgment about his preferred occupation until he has completed his study of both jobs and has systematically compared them in a terminal project. This experience prepares the student for his final counseling interview in which he is encouraged to articulate his educational-vocational plan, if he has been able to evolve one, and to discuss with the counselor the specific steps by which he proposes to implement the plan.

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These, then, are some of the assumptions and convictions out of which our Vocational Planning course at Minnesota has taken form. The course has undergone a number of changes over the twenty-eight years of its existence and, as our suppositions change, further modification is likely. I have now in preparation a manual, designed to accompany our recently published combina-

tion text-and-workbook, which will set forth in much greater detail than I have been able to present here the rationale and application of the sequential project method as it operates in the Minnesota course and in the courses of certain of the California junior colleges.

Now for a final observation about an issue which is currently receiving a moderate amount of attention, - the question of whether group procedures in vocational guidance can be substituted for individualized counseling. Those who champion the use of group methods with college students often emphasize the expedient nature of this approach. They contend that burgeoning college enrollments will increasingly tax our counseling facilities which, gloomy prediction has it, are not likely to expand in proportion to enrollment. Organizing vocational guidance services on a group basis, it is said, is an economical compromise solution to this dilemma.

I find this reasoning specious. For one thing, I do now know of evidence from research which supports the widely held view that individual counseling is per se profound and, therefore, superior to group techniques, which are necessarily superficial, hence inferior. I would not want to push the analogy too far, but from the fields of clinical psychology and clinical psychiatry we have had some rather astonishing claims about what can be done for patients in a setting of group psychotherapy. Certainly, the published reports of Bach, Powdermaker, Hinckley and Hermann, and others cannot be lightly dismissed. Where educational and vocational guidance are concerned, I think one can correctly assert that there are potential interaction advantages of the group setting as a learning environment which cannot easily be duplicated in the private relationship between student counselee and adult counselor. I have tried to identify some of these strong suits elsewhere in a recent paper.

But these are rational arguments, and it is necessary to repeat that not much evidence is at hand on the comparative outcomes of group vocational guidance and individualized vocational counseling.

What is more to the point is that it is misleading to speak of these two approaches to guidance as if they were mutually exclusive classes of helping practices. When group guidance is well done, it frequently increases rather than diminishes the demand for counseling. Moreover, effective group work points the way to counseling and helps establish the conditions for satisfactory progress in counseling. For this claim we do have some evidence. As others have pointed out, we need to assign to the group guidance function those tasks and experiences which can most expeditiously be presented within the group. But with the exception of multiple counseling under certain prescribed conditions, we should not advance group work as a substitute for the counseling interview. So I am led back to a claim which I asserted earlier in my remarks. It is that group vocational guidance has greatest potency when it is closely integrated with counseling.