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College to Career: Making a Successful Transition

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Introduction

Students with disabilities are continuing to access institutions of higher education in increasing numbers. This can be attributed to the laws protecting individuals with disabilities, and providing equal access. An awareness of college and career readiness is important with transition preparation needs starting early and centering on student interests (Marshak, Van Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan, 2010). The successful completion of college is certainly an important goal, but it is only a milestone in moving closer to the ultimate goal – obtaining a position in an area of interest that makes use of a student’s education.

The employment rate continues to be strong particularly for those individuals that have some kind of training or skill. A report in The Economics Daily (2017) reveals that the higher one’s educational attainment, the more likely that one will be employed. As of April 2017, the percentage of individuals with disabilities who are employed is 20.1% versus those without disabilities at 68.6%. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is 10.7% as compared to 3.8% for those without disabilities (United States Department of Labor, 2017). These statistics emphasize the importance of collaboration between Disability Services and Career Services at higher education institutions in order to assist students with disabilities in becoming stronger candidates for employment.

Method

Participants: Students from two mid-sized colleges, who were registered with the Disability Services office on campus, were invited to participate in an online survey (single-answer and multiple-answer questions) assessing various factors, such as:

• Year in College
• School or College
• Nature of Disability
• Current status on internship, volunteering, or employment
• Transition preparation needs
• Utilization of the campus’ Career Center

While all respondents were asked to respond to certain questions (e.g. year in college, nature of disability), other questions were not shown or skipped based on the answer choice(s) selected in a previous question.

Results – 2013 Survey

Results from Public University 1 (+7,000 student body)

Essential Takeaways:

• Majority of students were juniors and seniors.
• Lack of major/career exploration occurring for students.
• More than 70% of students did not use the Career Center. This same percentage did not intern or volunteer in a field they are interested in pursuing upon graduation.
• Possible explanations: campus in a somewhat rural area; limited public transportation; insufficient usage of the Career Center.

Results – 2016 Survey

Results from Public University 2 (+11,000 student body)

Essential Takeaways:

• Majority of students were first-year students and seniors.
• Close to 50% of students identified their utilization of the Career Center. This involvement likely contributed to the approximate 60% of students who have interned or volunteered in a field they are interested in pursuing upon graduation.
• Possible explanations: campus located in a small city; good public transportation; significant number of different industries in the area (healthcare; hospitality; engineering; business).

Common Themes

• Both surveys were administered at traditional liberal arts colleges.
• Therefore, it was not surprising that the majority of students who took part in the survey are majoring in the Arts and Sciences / Humanities and Social Sciences.

• Most students indicated having a hidden disability.
• Graphs representing limited usage of Career Center resources (e.g. resume-building, interviewing strategies) for both groups looked very similar (see red graphs).

• Graphs representing services used at the Career Centers differ significantly for the participants in the survey at the two universities (blue vs. yellow graphs).

Next Steps

Public University 1

1. Hosting workshops on interviewing skills, resume-building, and job search strategies
2. Collaboration with Career Center (Both spots, are considering a co-teaching opportunity which will initially be for individuals with ASD).
3. Involve with Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP).
4. Awareness regarding state agencies (e.g. Vocational Rehabilitation).
5. Continued collaboration with campus’ Career Center.
6. Feedback from students connecting with a mentor and/or participating in WRP.

Public University 2

1. Establish Alumni-to-Current Student Mentoring (in-person and e-mentoring) strategies.
2. Host a Career Fair (with Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) and/or participating in WRP).
3. Awareness regarding state agencies (e.g. Vocational Rehabilitation).

References

