

Characteristics and Satisfaction of Students Who Used Career Counseling Services

Wei-Cheng Mau, Amber Fernandes

This study investigated differences in use of and satisfaction with career counseling services as a function of sex, race, and age based on a nationally representative sample of college graduates of different ages, gender, and ethnicity (N = 10,080). Results showed significant race and age differences in use of career counseling services and gender differences in satisfaction with the services.

One of the most important career developmental tasks for young adults attending college is making a successful transition from school to work. For many college students, acquiring a satisfying career is the main reason for pursuing a college degree. A recent Gallup survey sponsored by the National Career Development Association showed that 60% of college graduates would try to get more information about job and career options if they were starting over (Gallup, 1999). The survey also indicated that more ethnic minorities than Whites and more traditional (18 to 25) than nontraditional students (26 and over) reported a greater need for career assistance.

The student population in higher education is becoming more diverse than ever before. In 1966, for instance, women made up 44.4% of the college population. By 1994, the percentage of women increased to 54% (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (1997), between 1991 and 1995, as the enrollment of White students decreased, the number of minority students increased steadily—Hispanic undergraduates by 26%, Asian Americans by 24%, Native Americans by 14%, and African Americans by 9%. In 1999, nontraditional college-age students accounted for about 38% of all college students. Especially prevalent among older students, women accounted for 54% of all college students and 57% of nontraditional college-age students. Among students aged 35 and over, 62% are women (U.S. Census Bureau). The characteristics and needs of these populations, and consequently their use of campus services, vary widely (Brown & Linnemann, 1995; Luzzo, 1999; Spicer, 1990). The effectiveness of career counseling practices depends largely on the manner in which the unique needs of diverse populations are recognized and addressed.

Recent discussion on school-to-work policy has prompted a debate on the validity of policy and practice in career development related to cultural minorities. For example, Brown (2000) has suggested that theories and practices of career development need to have a foundation based on “culturally sensitive constructs and practices” (p. 374). Davidson, Heppner, and Johnston (2001) have urged that diversity must be incorporated in transforming career centers for the new millennium. Lent and Worthington (2000) have stressed the importance of empirical evidence in validating theories and practice. Surprisingly, in our literature review, we found very few studies examining how career counseling services meet the needs of cultural minorities.

Most of the use and satisfaction studies have focused on university support services. Several important factors influencing use of university support systems have emerged, such as gender (June, Curry, & Gear, 1990; Robertson, 1988), age (Brown & Linnemann, 1995; June et al.; Spicer, 1990), ethnicity (Delphin & Rollock, 1995; Lippincott & Mierzwa, 1995; Solberg, Ritsma, Davis, Tata, & Jolly, 1994; Spicer), and the size and location of the college or university (Elton & Rose, 1973). Although these studies contribute useful information about these groups, they do not provide an overall comparison of their use

patterns and satisfaction. Understanding racial and gender differences in help-seeking behaviors and outcomes would enable counselors to tailor culturally relevant career services for individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Mau & Kopischke, 2001). We attempted to include these important factors in our study with a nationally representative sample of college students. Specifically, we investigated the differences in use and satisfaction as a function of sex, race, and age. Two major questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. To what extent have students used career counseling services? Does use of career counseling services differ by gender, race, or type of student (traditional vs. nontraditional)?
2. For those who have used career counseling services, how do they perceive the quality of these services? Does satisfaction with career counseling services differ by gender, race, or type of student?

METHOD

Participants

Data for this study were obtained from respondents in the Baccalaureate and Beyond 1993-1994 survey (B&B: 93/94) sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's NCES (1996). The participants of B&B: 93/94 (N = 10,080) were a subsample of the students selected for the 1993 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS: 93), a nationally representative sample of all postsecondary students. The B&B: 93/94 sample represents all postsecondary students in the United States who received a baccalaureate degree between July 1, 1992 and June 30, 1993.

The sampling procedure for the NPSAS: 93 survey was carried out by using a stratified, multistage sample design with postsecondary institutions as the first-stage unit and students within the institutions as the second-stage unit. The institution sample was stratified by type of control (private vs. public), highest degree offered, size of enrollment in professional programs, graduate student enrollment, and the number of bachelor degrees awarded in education. Of the 12,731 B&B: 93/94 eligible students from NPSAS: 93, 92% or 10,080 were successfully contacted and participated in the B&B: 93/94 first follow-up study. The final sample consisted of 43.4% males (n = 4,377) and 56.6% females (n = 5,703). Eighty-six percent of the sample categorized themselves as being of Anglo-Saxon descent, 6.0% as African American, 5.0% as Hispanic, 3.0% as Asian or Pacific Islander (AAPI), 0.7% as American Indian, and 2.3% as "Other" or not indicated. With regard to age, 78% were younger than 26 years and 22% were older than 25 years.

Variables

Three independent variables were analyzed in this study. The first was gender: male and female. The second, age, was divided into two categories: traditional (younger than 26 years) and nontraditional (26 years or older). The age categories emulate the breakdown found in past literature on traditional and nontraditional student research (Keller & Rogers, 1983). The third variable, ethnic identity, consisted of four categories: White, African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American or Pacific Islander. Participants of American Indian origin were not included in the analysis because of the small number of the subsample.

The dependent variables investigated were: (a) the use of career and job counseling services, and (b) satisfaction with the career and job counseling services. Participants were asked whether they ever used the career and job counseling services at the sampled school and whether they were satisfied with the service. Three variables were included in the analyses as control variables—GPA, the risk index, and institutional type and size. The GPA was based on cumulative undergraduate grade average points. Because different institutions used different grading systems, values were assigned to this variable to bring all the reports to a common scale. The risk index value depicted the number of risk factors (factors that might deter graduation) associated with each respondent (NCES, 1996). Seven risk factors included

in the composite index are: (a) having delayed enrollment, (b) lacking a high school diploma, (c) being enrolled part-time, (d) having financial independence, (e) having dependents other than a spouse, (f) being a single parent, and (g) working full-time. The third variable, type and size of institutions, was divided into 14 categories: (a) public, under 1,000 enrolled; (b) public, 1,000 to 2,499; (c) public, 2,500 to 4,999; (d) public, 5,000 to 9,999; (e) public, 10,000 to 19,999; (f) public, 20,000 or more; (g) private, nonprofit, under 1,000; (h) private, nonprofit, 1,000 to 2,499; (i) private, nonprofit, 2,500 to 4,999; (j) private, nonprofit, 5,000 to 9,999; (k) private, nonprofit, 10,000 or more; (l) private, for-profit, under 300; (m) private, for-profit, 300 to 999; and (n) private, for profit, 1,000 or more.

TABLE 1
Percentage of Students Who Used Career Counseling Services and Percentage of Reported Satisfaction

	White	African American	Hispanic	Asian	Male	Female	Traditional	Nontraditional
Used	48.1**	53.0**	45.9**	53.2**	49.1	48.0	57.1***	38.8***
Satisfied	74.6	71.3	74.2	79.3	72.7**	76.0**	75.1	73.8

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

TABLE 2
Logistic Regression of Use of Career Counseling Service

Variables	b	Wald	df	p	Exp(b)
At-Risk status	.201	70.91	1	.000	1.22
School type	.290	17.72	13	.168	0.69
Student type	.048	65.20	1	.000	1.05
Race	.307	15.07	3	.002	3.37

RESULTS

Results of chi-square analyses as summarized in Table 1 suggest significant differences as a function of race, $c^2(3) = 10.93$, $p < .012$, and student type, $c^2(1) = 315.75$, $p < .000$. We found no significant gender differences in the usage of career counseling services, $c^2(1) = 1.08$, $p < .300$. A greater percentage of African American (53.0%) and Asian American and Pacific Islander (53.2%) students used career counseling services compared to White students (48.1%). Hispanic students (45.9%) were the least likely to use career counseling services as compared to other groups. More traditional students (57.1%) than nontraditional students (38.8%) used career counseling services.

Results of satisfaction with career counseling showed significant gender differences, $c^2(1) = 6.77$, $p < .009$. No significant differences were found for ethnic identity, $c^2(3) = 4.65$, $p < .200$, or student type, $c^2(1) = .98$, $p < .322$. More female students (76.0%) than male students (72.7%) reported satisfaction with their university career counseling service.

Results of logistic analysis on usage and satisfaction of career and job counseling services are summarized in Table 2. The beta coefficient (b) value in the logistic regression tables represents the change in log odds of the dependent variable occurring related to one unit change in the predictor or independent variable, with other variables held constant. The $\text{Exp}(b)$ is the predicted change in the odds of the independent variable occurring associated with one unit change in the predictor variable with all other predictor variables held constant. Wald statistic is the square of the ratio of b to its standard error. GPA and at-risk status were first entered as block variables. The type of institution and size controls were entered second in the logistic model. Age, gender, and race were entered last as block variables in the equation.

As can be seen in Table 2, at risk status (Wald = 70.91, $p < .000$), student type (Wald = 65.20, $p < .000$), and race (Wald = 15.07, $p < .002$) significantly predicted the use of career counseling services. Being a traditional, African American, or Asian American student increased the odds of using career and job counseling services. The logistic model accounted for 8% of variance. Gender (Wald = 7.60, $p < .006$) was the only significant predictor for satisfaction of career counseling services. Female students were more likely than male students to be satisfied with career counseling services. The classification rate for satisfaction prediction was 74.6%.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics of students who used career counseling services and the relative importance of the factors predicting usage and satisfaction with these services. We were especially interested in the differences in use by gender, race, and student type (nontraditional vs. traditional students).

Career counseling is one of the most frequently used services compared to other university student services (Carney, Savitz, Weiskott, 1979; Fernandes, 1999). About 50 % of the students included in this study have used career counseling services at least once during their undergraduate study. AAPI and African American groups had the greatest percentage of students who had used this service. Contrary to widely held beliefs that minorities underuse counseling services, the current study revealed that African American and Asian American students were more likely than White students to use these services. Perhaps ethnic minority groups are more open towards seeking career counseling as opposed to personal counseling or perhaps student services are now more effective at advertising themselves as receptive to the needs of diverse ethnic groups. Further study may verify these contentions. The high percentage of AAPI students who sought career counseling lends some support to prior research findings that suggest that these students tend to perceive career concerns as more important than other personal psychological concerns (Fernandes; Mau & Jepsen, 1990). Low career decision-making self-efficacy is a widespread cultural factor among Asian students (Mau, 2000), which may partially explain their help-seeking behaviors. In addition to addressing their career concerns, counselors working with Asian American students need to be aware of repressed personal psychological needs and work on self-efficacy issues.

In general, the majority of students who used career counseling services indicated that they were satisfied with the service. Although we found no gender differences in use of career counseling services, we found more female students were satisfied with the services. These results might be understood on the basis of prior studies conducted on gender differences in expectations of counseling services. These studies indicated that female students had more positive expectations of the counseling process and the facilitator and expected to be more committed to the experience than male students did (Hardin & Yanico, 1983; Robertson, 1988).

One of the most significant findings from this study is that student type was the most significant determinant of career counseling service use. Consistent with previous studies (Brown & Linnemann, 1995; Greenland, 1988; Kasworm, 1980), the current study suggested that the probability of using career and job counseling decreased with age. Several reasons may be offered to explain why nontraditional

students use career and job counseling services infrequently. Nontraditional students are more likely to have prior job experience, more practical knowledge, and consequently more confidence in their career choices. They may thus have less need for career and job counseling (Kasworm, 1980; Thiel, 1984). Nontraditional students are more likely to work fulltime and have a family (Kasworm, 1980; Brown & Linnemann, 1995). As a consequence, they may spend less time on campus and attend classes at times that fit in with their work and family commitments, including evenings and weekends when most counseling service offices are closed. Nontraditional students are also more likely to have well-established connections with services in their community and may be less aware of programs on campus. Therefore, they would first look into resources in their community for help (Kasworm, 1980; Brown & Linnemann, 1995).

TABLE 3
Logistic Regression of Satisfaction of Career Counseling Service

Variables	b	Wald	df	p	Exp(b)
School type	-.432	17.36	13	.183	0.86
Gender	.199	7.60	1	.006	1.22

Implications

Given the fact that Hispanic students were least likely to use career counseling services, aggressive outreach efforts that target this group and that are tailored to increase use may be helpful. Counseling professionals need to take a proactive role in reaching this population. For example, Flores and Spanierman (1998) have suggested that flyers be posted in the community at establishments that serve these targeted students. Providing information and making a presentation at a Hispanic American student association meeting may be more appropriate than waiting for students to seek counseling help at the center. Consideration should be given to taking programs and services to locations where various subpopulations of students naturally congregate (Bishop, 1990). The ability to reach out effectively to minority students will be increasingly important, and service delivery systems must be adapted to accommodate such populations.

Although the current study does not show that AAPI and African American students use career services less often than White students, it does indicate that approximately 50% of these students did not use career counseling services during their undergraduate study. We believe more efforts can be made to increase the use of career counseling services. Counseling professionals need to be more sensitive to potential barriers that may inhibit some students from seeking professional help. Needs assessments can be conducted to examine the unique concerns of this diverse population (Davidson et al., 2001). The type of services provided through the career center should be appropriate to the needs of all students including the culturally diverse. When professionals acknowledge the unique factors of these students, their cultural beliefs, attitudes, and types of career concerns, the students may be more likely to return for continued services.

Counselors who are interested in increasing the use of services by nontraditional students may want to make themselves more available and flexible during evenings and weekends when those students are more likely to be on campus and enrolled in classes. Creativity in programming that would make nontraditional students more aware of the programs and services available on campus should be applied. Rayman (1999) has made several excellent suggestions on how to be responsive to the needs of nontraditional students.

In summary, the current study has shown significant differences in use of career counseling services as a function race and age. Hispanic and nontraditional students were the most likely to underuse the career counseling services. Counselors in higher education need to examine their services to ensure

that unnecessary blocks preventing students from accessing career and job counseling services have been removed. Specific programs may be established for these underserved populations. Career centers must reconsider how, why, where, and when they are reaching their clientele. New approaches that appeal to a much more diverse population must be implemented (Bishop, 1990; Davidson et al., 2001).

This study was exploratory in nature. Several questions emerged from it that warrant further investigation. Issues such as why students do not use services and how students within each group differ need to be addressed to formulate a conceptual framework that can both predict the use of services as well as improve students' satisfaction with these services. As is true of any study using general, broad-based survey data, our study was limited to the survey questions available in the questionnaire. For example, the questionnaire did not survey the reasons students did or did not seek career counseling help. These questions need to be addressed in future studies.

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