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TOWARD SUCCESS OF ONE AND ALL: CAREER COUNSELING FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

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This paper considers the unique cultural issues that minority students bring to the academic environment and the impact these issues have on career counseling for minority students. It examines the need for a constant dialogue on the issues faced by minority students in higher education and the concerns inherent in such an approach. Additionally, it offers support for providing minority career counseling services and includes suggestions for developing effective career counseling relationships with minority students.

Student members of ethnic minorities face great barriers to completing their undergraduate degree and successfully entering the work force (Bowman, 1993; Lee, 1991). This group of students often has difficulty finding positive role models and systems of support (Bowman, 1993). One area that may be deficient in serving these students is career counseling services. Crosson and Richardson state, "Comprehensive, culturally relevant counseling services are seen as crucial to promoting a college environment that is conducive to academic persistence" (cited in Lee, 1991, p. 23). Valuable counseling services for minority students must, therefore, be a part of an institution's offerings (Lee, 1991). This paper will first consider the unique cultural issues of minority students in career counseling and the need to establish a dialogue of issues framing one's work with ethnic minorities. An explanation of concerns in establishing minority career counseling services will follow. Finally, support for career counseling services targeting minority students and suggestions for developing effective career counseling relationships with these students will be considered.

Isolation, nonacceptance, alienation, racism, and unpreparedness are only a few of the barriers that many minority students face during their college experience (Saufley, Cowan, & Blake, 1983). Support and encouragement are needed to assist these students throughout the educational process (Fouad, 1993). And while counseling offices offer services for personal, academic, and career needs, these centers may not be designed or prepared to face the

challenges of working with ethnic minority students (Stage & Associates, 1993). Fouad (1993) adds that counseling services beneficial for traditional students may not be effective with racial and ethnic minorities. Career counselors must maintain a dialogue on the current issues impacting minority students to ensure that counseling sessions, programs and other resources take into account their unique characteristics and meet the needs of students from different ethnic backgrounds (Rifenbary, 1991). Issues that can be affected by one's ethnic background and cultural socialization include concepts of time, response to authority, perception of duty to others versus self, and methods of interacting within group settings (Anderson & Ellis, 1988; Delpit, 1988). These issues may play an integral role in the career development of a student through decisions of job location, level of authority, and compensation requirements. Career services professionals, therefore, should consider each topic a competency area for their own professional knowledge base (Rifenbary, 1991).

Despite the apparent need for career counseling services that reflect a knowledge of the issues facing ethnic minorities, there are concerns in maintaining such services. Vondracek and Schulenberg report this type of counseling to be too narrowly focused and suggest that it fails to consider the complete spectrum of student development in attempting to affect change (cited in Bowman, 1993). There is also an absence of ethnic minorities in research efforts and much of the literature. Moreover, consideration must be paid to the importance of role models in career development and counseling. With few minority professionals in most career fields and even fewer in graduate preparation programs, minority students are challenged to find much needed role models for both counseling and career investigation (Bowman, 1993; Parker, 1995).

David Ortiz, Assistant Director of Career Counseling Services in the Indiana University-Bloomington Career Development Center, postulates that a lack of minority professionals in higher education leads students to utilize administrators in campus advocacy offices, such as Latino Affairs, for career counseling (personal communication, February 28, 1996). Janice Wiggins, Interim Director of Groups Student Support Services Program at Indiana University-Bloomington, suggests the lack of minority professionals and minority students' requests of career counseling from non-career services professionals make it difficult for institutions of higher education to assess and promote the need for minority career counseling. Minority students may

perceive the absence of minority career counseling services as a lack of interest on the part of the institution (personal communication, April 10, 1996). Wiggins further states that career counselors should embrace the obligation to offer minority students the career development knowledge and support not readily available to them through their cultural socialization. By maintaining a dialogue on the issues that impact minority students, career services professionals will be positioned to remain connected with offices currently offering support and services to this population. Such collaboration will foster a trust in the career professionals among students, offer the professionals needed insight into the lives of minority students, and could result in an increase in referrals of students to career services professionals.

Information supporting the need to create a dialogue on minority student needs within career development continues to grow. For instance, many of the issues students face during career development are approached differently by members of different cultures. Minority students approach decision making, planning, concepts of time and self-worth, and values development from a perspective unlike their student colleagues in the majority population (Rifenbary, 1991). Rifenbary acknowledges that "cultural and ethnic influences are central to the career development process [and that] career development [programs seldom] focus on ethnic, culture, sex, or class origins" (p. 7). Family, separation from home community, and the individual's stage of their own racial identity development may also influence the minority student's career decisions (Rifenbary, 1991).

Bowman (1993) suggests that career counselors consider the following points prior to and during a counseling dyad with a minority student. First, students must be educated on the real barriers to ethnic minorities in the labor market. Second, the counselor must be prepared to provide direct advocacy to the student in regard to their ethnic identity and career plans. This may include verbal support, proper referrals to other campus services and adequate resources for minority focused career issues. Third, the professional should work to reduce the existing barriers whenever possible. Finally, raising the students' educational goals for the purpose of expanding future opportunities should be of paramount importance. Hawks and Muha add that the student's language, culture, and family should be incorporated into the programs whenever possible (cited in Bowman, 1993). By reviewing these points, the unique concerns for minority students become clear, and the need for services specifically addressing their unique issues is apparent.

No longer can we devalue the need for career counseling services or entirely value career counseling professionals that are knowledgeable and inclusive of the issues facing minority students. While concerns in establishing such efforts exist, they do not outweigh the field's obligation to these students who continuously struggle against barriers to success. By initiating and maintaining a dialogue on the issues facing minority students, career services professionals can best meet the needs of these students. To remain truly responsive to the changing college student population and to promulgate that diverse college community, we must offer services to address the needs of all components of that community.

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