
**Summaries of Presentations
from the 2012 Convention in Louisville, KY**



What's Your Major? The Certainty of Uncertainty

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Are your students distressed when asked about their major or career plans? Are your institutional resources limiting your reach to these undeclared/exploratory students? "What's Your Major? The Certainty of Uncertainty" presented at the 2012 ACPA Convention held in Louisville, Kentucky highlighted a model career guidance course based on the Chaos Theory of Careers. The Chaos Theory of Careers is a theoretical framework for understanding the relationships between planning and chance, order and disequilibrium, and pattern and uncertainty (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The course offered at a four-year public university and regional campuses enables students to develop planning skills as well as coping skills for the unpredictability of the world of work. Within the course students learn how to link planning with chance happenings to remain flexible and adaptable as they navigate their careers.

The question "What's your major?" haunts students from the time they decide to attend college until they actually declare a major. Momentary relief afforded by that final decision regarding choice of major is soon eclipsed by the next question "What are you going to do with your degree?" In the face of unstable economies, technological advances, and global interconnections finding a place in the world of work is complicated at best.

On September 8th 2011, President Barack Obama addressed a joint session of Congress regarding job creation. President Obama pointed out that America's economic future hinges on the workforce. Colleges and universities contribute to the development of the workforce and a crucial aspect of this process involves assisting students in making career choices leading to productivity and job satisfaction. Students need assistance in developing lifelong skills to navigate their careers and compete in a constantly changing global marketplace (Chen, 2003; Grier-Reed, Skaar, & Conkel-Ziebell, 2009). Keenan and Gabovitch (1995) found that curricular approaches to career development lend themselves to increased student career maturity, ability to set realistic career goals and make career decisions. Mechur Karp (2011) indicated "the key [to curricular approaches] is to find ways to help students understand what their future might look like, and then give them the tools to get there" (p. 14).

Most career education has focused on developing planning skills (Borg, Bright, & Pryor, 2006) and outmoded person – environment matching models and over reliance on self-report interest, values, and skills inventories (Bright & Pryor, 2005). Despite the obvious attention to career development planning, research findings suggest that chance events are highly influential regarding individual career decision making (Betsworth & Hanson, 1996; Williams et al., 1998). Bright, Pryor, and Harpham (2004) revealed the variety of terms such as happenstance, chance, and serendipity in the literature describing the unpredicted events influencing career decision making. While the concept of chance events have been a mainstay in the career development literature, there are relatively few empirical studies oriented to the role of chance in career decision making. Nonetheless, Bright, Pryor, Wilkenfeld, and Earl (2005) identified chance events among the major influences regarding students' career development. Thus, in order to maximize adaptation to the complex and dynamic world of work, students need to learn how to incorporate both planning and chance into career decision making (Borg, Bright, Pryor, 2006). Career guidance is a vital resource for students as they prepare to contribute more fully to our nation's workforce. Career guidance courses are resource efficient. Career guidance efforts oriented to contemporary career development approaches grounded in theory are necessary to address the career development needs of diverse students. Chaos Theory is counted among the constructivist approaches of career development which provide a more inclusive understanding of career. Constructivist approaches emphasize holism and consider "the individual as central to the construction of their lives and careers" (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p.13).

The model one credit hour graded half-semester career guidance course meets twice weekly in a face-to-face format and enrollment is capped at 20 for each section. The course is recommended for second semester freshmen at the earliest and is suitable for students trying to choose a major, trying to identify a career trajectory within a major, or making a career change. Students enter the class searching for that one thing they would enjoy doing for the rest of their lives and have not considered that life will likely not follow the plan they set forth as a college student. Course objectives are oriented to broadening students' perspectives regarding career and life. Students explore the complex, dynamic, and unpredictable nature of work, reflect on career and life themes that influence their decision making process, identify overly rigid, narrow, or restrictive thinking patterns, gain skills to navigate change and chance encounters, and apply flexibility and adaptability to goal setting and attainment. Experiential teaching strategies are employed to energize the classes and assist students in making meaning out of the lesson contents to progress in their career development. See Borg, Bright, and Prior (2006), Bright and Pryor (2005), or Pryor and Bright (2011) for sample strategies related to the Chaos Theory of Careers. See also Lara, Pope, and Minor (2011) for sample experiential teaching strategies related to career guidance. For the model course discussion, reflection assignments, exploration and decision making activities through in class activities and homework empower students to add meaningful work to their lives.

While career guidance is not a new phenomenon in the collegiate environment, new approaches are needed to maximize resources and to support students facing the dynamic

world of work. Career guidance courses grounded in contemporary theories and career development practices, such as the model course presented at ACPA, enable practitioners to transform career education into impactful experiences that focus students on career development as a process rather than an outcome.

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