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# CAREER ADVISING

## THE INTERSECTION OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL INFORMATION

*Dorothy Burton Nelson*

All advisors receive career-related questions from students, such as "What is the best college major for me?" "What career(s) can I enter with this major?" and "What do I need to do to get accepted by my desired professional or graduate school?" Many students equate decisions about college majors to career choices (Gordon, 2006). Even advisors who focus primarily on academics need enough information to respond to career-related questions and address assumptions. Advisors transitioning from a purely curricular perspective to one that incorporates career advising must appropriately assess information and guide students through the complexities of integrating knowledge about themselves, the workforce, and career-related decision making. Minimally, advisors demonstrate familiarity with the skills employers seek, describe ways the college curriculum builds these skills, and provide information or referrals that will expand students' comprehension of the job prospects in their field so that they can make informed educational and career decisions. To enhance their overall effectiveness as agents of long-term student success, advisors must know the basic components of career advising.

## Building a Knowledge Base for Career Advising

This chapter focuses on the internal (or institutional) and external informational needs for effective career advising. Internal information includes knowledge about academic programs; curricular requirements; policies and procedures; special populations and services; institutional rules, regulations, and organizational structures; and technologies used in advising and registration. That is, it advances advisor efforts in moving students into, through, and out of the institution (Higginson, 2000). For career advising, external information includes data on the workforce, labor market, and economy as well as supply and demand shifts, internships, professional associations and schools, job search strategies, and so forth. New advisors should note that two additional types of information contribute to effective career advising: knowledge of the student's characteristics and an understanding of decision-making dynamics (Gordon, 2006; Holland, 1973; O'Banion, 1972/1994/2009; Parsons, 1909).

## Obtaining and Managing Information for a Career-Advising Model

Career advising most fully integrates internal and external information for students (Higginson, 2000). Therefore, to advise students effectively regarding careers, advisors must possess both a full understanding of and the facility to access internal and external sources of information. Advisors may use a career-advising model as a framework to help them identify the essential information they need to learn and subsequently deliver to students. Although a number of good career-advising models assist advisors, in this chapter, I focus on a modification of Virginia Gordon's (2006) 3-I process.

In *Career Advising: An Academic Advisor's Guide*, Gordon (2006) described the competencies and the knowledge bases necessary for those who engage in career advising. The 3-I model focuses on understanding students and their advising needs, identifying the resources that best inform the career-advising process, and undertaking the necessary steps for helping students integrate information into an action plan for effective career decision making. The 3-I framework is composed of the following interactive and continuously used components:

- inquire,
- inform, and
- integrate.

### Inquire

Through the inquire phase of Gordon's (2006) 3-I model, advisors gain an understanding about students, including insight into their situations and informational needs. Advisors enter this phase at the beginning of the advising session or when students present with problems or questions. In this information-gathering process, both advisor and student ask and answer questions that span students' academic and nonacademic lives, such as personal, financial, or institutional concerns. This complex interaction typically extends over several advising sessions. New advisors must recognize advisee questions that appear related to academics but reflect career concerns:

- Is this the right major for me?
- What can I do with this major?
- Is this the right major for getting a job in _____?
- I really don't find my _____ classes interesting.
- I've been thinking about changing majors.

These inquiries and statements, among others, suggest that students are experiencing career-related information deficits (Gordon, 2006, p. 49) such that they do not see ways occupations relate to a chosen college major. Specifically, they may lack informational or experiential knowledge about occupations that interest them. Furthermore, they may not know how to acquire relevant data about careers. The collaborative

process encourages the advisor and advisee to sort through the student's issues, concerns, and questions as they determine the precise information needed for effective decision making or issue resolution.

## Inform

In the inform phase, the advisor helps the student acquire self-awareness about occupations of interest and the educational requirements for the related major. Like the inquiry component, it involves collaboration: Although students can surf the Internet to obtain career-related information, Alice Reinarz and Nathaniel Ehrlich (2002) found that students comprehended this retrieved data better by working with an advisor. Students gain self-knowledge by employing instruments that elicit information about their personality and other characteristics, such as interests, abilities, and values as well as personality type. Therefore, advisors can help students by connecting them with resources that reveal aspects of their personalities and other characteristics.

Career assessment tools may help clarify students' personality profiles, which further aid advisees in determining realistic career and academic directions. The occupational aspect of the inform phase also involves student use of resources to generate career options commensurate with their personality profile or assessment results. Such tools may yield many occupations of potential fit or interest, but advisors can help students narrow down the options to those with the highest levels of congruence to personality assessment results. In addition, advisors direct students to additional information about occupations. In the inform phase process, students' potential college majors often emerge.

The inform phase requires the development of the most extensive and complete integration of internal and external knowledge bases by advisors and may represent the most challenging phase for new advisors without prior training on or experience with career advising. Seasoned career advisors can readily select the appropriate career assessment and prepare individuals for, administer, and interpret formal or informal assessments such as the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)* (CPP, 2009a; The Myers-Briggs Foundation, 2014), *John Holland's Self-Directed Search* (PAR, Inc., 2013), and other interest inventories (e.g., COPS [EDITS Online, 2012], or the *Strong Interest Inventory* [CPP, 2009b]). Veteran career advisors also display knowledge about multiple career exploration resources (print, electronic, and experiential) and connect students to the most appropriate ones for their unique searches. Finally, they know the characteristics of students who have demonstrated success in specific majors and can use that insight to connect other students to potential majors.

During their first year, new advisors learn academic requirements as well as the nature of major course work as they gain familiarity with the characteristics of students successfully completing specific majors (internal information). If their advising responsibilities relate primarily to academic concerns, they should learn to recognize career-related questions (see inquiry phase) as well as communicate the location of

on-campus career-related services (e.g., for assessment, exploration, resume writing, experiential learning opportunities, and job search readiness and strategies as well as interviewing and placement).

New advisors benefit from knowing a few career exploration resources. The largest and most credible body of workforce information, the U.S. Department of Labor, categorizes and condenses pertinent occupation information into user-friendly databases, including the interactive O*Net Online. Additional resources include the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (OOH) (online and hardcopy) by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (n.d.). Both OOH and O*Net rely on ongoing research and data collection on an array of workplace information. For example, specific job description entries include data, collected over a 10-year period and projected for the upcoming decade, on work tasks, environments, and locations; projected growth or decline of hiring; technological influences; experience and educational requirements; wages; special features; and so forth. The entries are based on general trends in the workplace that affect all occupations as well as those specific to a particular line of work and related occupations.

New advisors begin to grasp the ways skills gained in academic programs prepare students for various occupations and the ways competencies required for specific occupations connect to academic majors. However, because the breadth and depth of knowledge required for mastery of the inform phase may overwhelm them, advisors should remember that they do not bear sole responsibility for answers to student questions; in fact, their ability to make proper referrals to campus and community reflects best practices.

After they view themselves with a more objective, realistic perspective and can connect their characteristics to suitable occupations, students should demonstrate more comfort with and excitement about choosing a college major or place more energy in their current major because they can initiate planning with the end goal in mind (Covey, 1990). Guiding students through this phase can be one of the most exciting and meaningful components of the career-advising process.

### Integrate

In the integrate phase, advisors and students examine, evaluate, and synthesize the information they have acquired (Gordon, 2006). The information that students have gained about themselves, suitable occupational options, and related college majors provides the foundation for this phase, but students must apply their knowledge to make decisions regarding a career or major. Gordon (2006) noted that the decision-making characteristic of this phase links both of the previous parts of career advising. Students, explicitly or not, make decisions on a daily basis, including the option of declining to choose. Some students remain unmoved in the integrate phase; therefore, new advisors must recognize the dynamics that expedite or inhibit the decision-making process and should note behaviors such as reticence, dependence, or negativity.

Until the point of decision difficulties, advisors may not have recognized undercurrents of internal or external influences affecting the student. Inhibiting factors, such as family pressures, economic shifts, and workforce supply and demand fluctuations as well as levels of career self-efficacy and clarified self-concept, among others, may impede the career decision-making process (Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz, 2004). According to the Sampson et al. (2004) readiness model, career decision-making inhibition factors fall into two categories: capability and complexity. Capability factors are internal to the person and delay or impede career decisions. Complexity involves environmental factors, or dynamics external to the person, that curb readiness to move forward. Indecision related to internal or external pressures may indicate the need for referrals to other campus support services, such as a counseling center or career services office.

In addition to an extensive internal and external knowledge base, advisors working in the integrate phase must understand the decision-making process; therefore, they may benefit from identifying a decision-making framework to guide their practice. Robert Lock (2004) identified five decision-making coping styles that can help advisors to identify obstacles and to encourage student management of them in the decision-making process:

- *Unconflicted adherence* is typified by little consideration of options and a resistance to explore based on preference for the known, familiar, and comfortable.
- *Unconflicted change*, also characterized by little purposeful deliberation or exploration, is often seen as arbitrary or impulsive change when the decision maker acts according to a gut feeling.
- *Defensive avoidance* involves exaggerated anxiety such that decisions are delayed, exacerbating stress levels and perpetuating a vicious cycle.
- *Hypervigilance* may logically follow defensive avoidance for those facing the immediacy of decision making. Hypervigilant decision makers tend to panic over imminent decisions, characterized by redundant and obsessive thought processes. Quite often, fear of negative consequences serves as the precipitating culprit. All important decisions may evoke a certain level of worry, which typically elicits caution and thoughtfulness.
- *Vigilance* is characterized by attentiveness and caution, a demonstrated understanding that action allows one to manage and reduce inordinate affective responses, such as anxiety. Vigilant decision makers understand timeliness and the need to take certain risks. (pp. 310–312)

Advisors can certainly teach vigilance in decision making. Specifically, they can serve as role models and managers for making healthy and productive decisions (Lock, 2004). To engage students in the vigilant decision-making process, advisors use tools that will demystify impending decisions. For example, when asking a student about career and academic concerns, the advisor should use a system for recording student

issues as clearly and accurately as possible. As conversations progress, written documentation captures thoughts and ideas that contradict or confirm prior information; moving data from the compartments of the mind to the printed word creates a powerful means of seeing patterns and confusion. Tools, such as worksheets, matrixes, and computer record-keeping systems, increase clarity and reduce redundancy, thus promoting effective decision making.

The vigilant decision-making style emerges in Gordon's (2006) 3-I model. In the inquire phase, advisors help advisees see the impending decisions so they can set up the next logical step: brainstorming options and gathering necessary information for choosing. Finally, in the integrate phase of the 3-I model, advisors model assessment and evaluation of information such that the student can determine ensuing consequences of potential decisions. Becoming a vigilant decision maker requires focus on rational thought and separation of fantasy from fact.

Decision making and action may appear to be culminating events for a person engaged in the workforce exploration process, but decision making is neither a disconnected, an isolated, nor a one-time activity, nor does it necessarily yield a stable outcome that terminates the process. For this reason, phases in Gordon's (2006) 3-I model are interactive and interwoven; each component can be revisited at any point in the career exploration process. In the integrate phase, the advisor may need to return to the inquire and inform phases to gather more information about the student, workforce, or other factors.

## Decision-Making Follow-Up

Students may make career decisions relatively early, before taking many classes in their major or participating in firsthand experiences, such as internships in their chosen fields. For example, a pre-medical student shadowing a doctor may reconsider the desire to tackle the stress they witness in a medical practice. Advisors help students evaluate the effectiveness of their decisions and goals by monitoring their academic progress and discussing the positive or negative impacts of experiential learning experiences on their decisions. Advisors also assist students in navigating through their remaining college years, making necessary adjustments to their academic plans as necessary.

As students gain more decision-making experience, advisors can track their academic progress to suggest timely and important adjustments to goals and academic plans as well as gauge the appropriateness of the original decision. Over time, advisors must gain in-depth knowledge about academic requirements, course sequencing, prerequisites, and course availability (internal information) for the major as well as courses required for students' occupational or postgraduate goals (external information). They also recognize signs of student struggle in majors, such as poor grades, withdrawals from major classes, avoidance of major course work, and lack of

progression in the field of study, as well as better performance in elective or non-major courses.

## Career-Advising Interviewing Techniques

Each phase of the career-advising process—inquire, inform, integrate as well as deciding, mapping, and tracking—involves a complex advising interaction requiring strong interviewing skills. New advisors can use an established career interviewing construct by Norman E. Amundson (2003) to guide them in these interactions and gain a better understanding of their students. Amundson identified five lines of questioning to help advisors interview students regarding careers.

- Elicit the idea or belief component of understanding by asking questions that reveal the student's thoughts and situations: "What concerns do you have about your academic plans?"
- "Gather confirming and disputing evidence" about information previously gleaned from a student: "Can you identify any reasons that you should not pursue the_____ field?"
- "Seek information about concept development"; that is, determine the development level of the student's ideas: "How long have you considered this field?"
- Determine social supports for making career decisions: "How did your parents/friends/spouse respond to your thoughts?"
- Determine both positive and negative impacts of the decision by helping the student evaluate and confirm decisions: "What do you see as the positives of making a career change at this time?"

This interview process can be an exploration and discovery process for the student and advisor such that it clarifies the type of additional information that may be needed. The basis of Amundson's (2003) interviewing technique involves toggling back and forth to reveal confirming and contradictory evidence (pp. 104–107).

## Career Advising in Action: A Case Study Using Gordon's 3-I Model

The dynamics involved in career advising may present challenges for advisors who lack formal career-advising training, but all advisors benefit from a basic understanding of career advising. The case study presents application of Gordon (2006) 3-I career-advising phases: inquiry, inform, integrate, and follow-up. For each phase, the

necessary advising knowledge, as characterized by Higginson (2000), and the interview techniques of Amundson (2003) are identified.

| **Gordon's (2006) 3-I Model** | **Amundson's (2003) Five Lines of Questioning and Higginson's (2000) Internal and External Knowledge for Advisors** |
|---|---|
| **Phase: Inquire** | |
| The week before registering for spring classes, Reggie meets with an advisor. In the meeting, Reggie expresses lack of clarity about a major, is "burned out" with school, and wants a semester of "easy" classes before making a decision about a major. The advisor, Dom, notices that the grade report showed adequate progress but did not reflect Reggie's abilities. Dom asks if they could put aside scheduling concerns for a minute and talk about Reggie. Specifically, Dom asks about Reggie's most pressing career-related concerns and any career goals past or present. Reggie had thought about being a teacher, but had recently rejected that idea. | **Elicit the idea or belief presented by the student:**<br>*"What concerns do you have about your career plans?"*<br>Recognizes career-related issues<br>Uses knowledge about academics (or majors) to recognize risk statements by students |
| Dom probes Reggie about the aspects of teaching once considered attractive as well as the reasons this option no longer is under consideration. Reggie had liked the idea of working with children, enjoyed helping at a preschool, looked forward to extended time off over the summers, but expresses discouragement based on many complaints from teachers about low pay and national or state mandates that limit their ability to work effectively with children. | **Gather confirming and disputing evidence:**<br>*"Can you identify any reasons that you should not pursue the_____ field?"*<br>*"Explain your doubts about going into this field."*<br>**Seek information about concept development:**<br>*"What were the most attractive features to you?"*<br>*"What caused you to begin doubting your decision?"* |
| In response, Dom asks Reggie to consider learning more about the field of teaching and other career fields. Dom also suggests that Reggie undertake a career assessment to learn more about personal interests and identify strengths and talents. Reggie agrees and completes an informal screening version of *John Holland's Self-Directed Search,* a personality assessment. | **Advisor knowledge needed:**<br>Identifies appropriate assessments (external) and career exploration (external)<br>If advisor is not conducting the assessment, refers student to appropriate office (internal) |

| **Phase: Inform** | |
|---|---|
| After Reggie completes the Holland screening, Dom reviews the output, noting that all six Holland personality types make up Reggie's personality structure, but with the Social-Artistic-Conventional typings emerging as dominant. Dom explains that the interests and social personality type are associated with helping professions; specifically, artistic types are drawn to situations in which they are free to create and express themselves, and conventional types like to work within structure and predictability. | **Gather confirming and disputing evidence:**<br>*"What qualities or characteristics do you possess?"*<br>*"What would make you a good _____?"* |
| Reggie expresses happy surprise by these results, noting that some of these personality traits would have remained unexplored without the assessment, but they seem to fit extremely well. | **Seek information about concept development:**<br>*"What were the most attractive features to you?"* |
| Dom further explains that using the Holland code to seek jobs highly correlated with the personality type increases the likelihood of job satisfaction. Reggie begins gathering information about occupations. | **Advisor knowledge needed:**<br>Adapts *John Holland's Self-Directed Search* results to occupational choices (external) |
| Reggie has access to many career search resources, but Dom recommends O*Net Online because it is easy to use, can be accessed from Reggie's residence hall, and is current and accurate. Dom shows Reggie how to access the site and how to enter the dominant Holland types to start the search. Reggie finds that using all three dominant types as input yields only four jobs, but that reducing the Holland types to two results in a huge list. Dom notes that Reggie must go through the larger list and write down the job titles that sound interesting. Reggie finds five titles, but other than elementary school teacher, the titles seem unfamiliar. Dom points out the hyperlink associated with each title, which can be used to find out more about each job. Dom suggests that Reggie use a worksheet so that the same information (educational and experiential requirements, flexible time, job security, and wages) is documented for every job title written down. Reggie makes another appointment after completing the search process. | Connects to tools for learning more about careers (external) |

| **Phase: Integrate** | |
|---|---|
| When Reggie returns, Dom asks about the most attractive jobs found to date. The information made Reggie feel very positive about teaching. Upon Dom's request for an explanation, Reggie reports discovering that although working with behavioral problems drove some teachers away from the field, other teachers cited this work as challenging and exciting. | **Determine the social supports:**<br>*"Have you discussed your concerns or ideas with anyone?"* |
| In addition, two other jobs on the list sounded interesting and also required a degree in education. Dom and Reggie outline the positives and negatives of the jobs explored. Dom asks if Reggie has enough information to make a decision, and Reggie responds in the affirmative with the intention to declare an education major. | **Advisor knowledge needed:**<br>Helps develop decision-making skills (conceptual/relational)<br>**Determine both positive and negative impact of the decision:**<br>*"What are the consequences you will face when making this decision?"*<br>*"Can you accept those consequences?"*<br>*"Is there anything you can do to minimize the consequences?"* |
| Dom discusses the timing of Reggie's decision, while also asking about other concerns that might warrant waiting a while—possibly taking time to reflect and identify other questions or concerns before moving forward. | *"Explain the benefits of making the choice right now versus waiting awhile."* |
| Reggie does not feel more time is necessary, and so Dom describes the process for declaring a major and locating the requirements for it in the institutional online catalog. Dom then instructs Reggie to read the information very carefully, jotting down questions for their next advising session. | **Advisor knowledge needed:**<br>Explains institutional procedures and policies (external) |
| **Phase: Follow-Up** | |
| Reggie and Dom meet again to develop a plan to graduate with an education major and to select specific classes for the upcoming term. Dom indicates a desire to meet with Reggie until graduation to discuss career and academic goals as well as address any obstacles or challenges Reggie may face. | Uses institutional resources and knowledge of course sequencing to create a plan to graduation (internal)<br>Identifies risk factors or challenges associated with major (internal and external) |

*Note. John Holland's Self-Directed Search* (SDS) (PAR, Inc., 2013); *O*Net online* (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.).

## Summary

Career advising makes meaning of academia. The extensive information needed for delivering effective career advising spans internal or institutional dynamics as well as external, or workforce, factors (Higginson, 2000). Using a student-centered career-advising model allows advisors to effectively identify knowledge areas to master, organize, and manage. Using an established framework for interviewing in combination with a career-advising model helps ensure that new advisors ask students questions that move them toward making informed, appropriate college-major and career decisions.

The ultimate goal of career advising, however, involves more than finding and accessing career information. It hinges on helping advisees transform information into knowledge applicable to their decision making (Carr & Epstein, 2009). Academic programs become alive and meaningful to students fortunate enough to engage with advisors in discussions that involve more than curriculum topics (Glennen & Vowell, 1995). In addition to helping students meet goals, this process contributes to an exciting and challenging career for advisors.

## Aiming for Excellence

- To connect and become comfortable with career development and career advising, first accept that everyone goes through the process. Writing about your own career journey may help you connect with others sorting out the same or similar issues. It will also help you connect with tasks involved in career advising. Begin by writing your own career autobiography and consider the reasons you liked or disliked certain jobs. Identify the most satisfying work-related experiences. Think about influential people in your work choices and pinpoint the reason they exerted an impact. Determine career-related questions or struggles that remain unanswered or unresolved. Identify obstacles overcome or in your current path.
- Conduct a scavenger hunt on campus to discover the available career-related resources. Visit identified units to learn more about their role, scope, and mission. Ask permission to observe or audit one or more career classes to build your career knowledge base.
- Sign up with Career Services to learn about the career development process as students experience it. Become familiar with the assessment instruments used and the educational requirements (if any) for administering them to students. If pencil-and-paper assessment tools are not used, request access to any online career assessment and exploration programs used by your institution (e.g., Focus 2, Kuder, SIGI$^3$). Pretend to be in the process of making important decisions: You may reconnect with an ignored calling.

- Practice administering one of your favorite assessments with a willing colleague (or family member). Your practice should include helping students prepare for the assessment, administering the instrument (if part of the advising role), interpreting the results, and helping the person understand ways to use the output in making important decisions. Investigate information sources that can help answer the ubiquitous question "What can I do with a degree in____?" Review the data until you can easily name 5 to 10 of the most common jobs associated with any given major and typical employer types (e.g., federal or state agencies, retail stores, private firms, major hospitals, hotels and restaurants, entertainment). Become familiar with key personality characteristics for each of the common jobs because they relate to high levels of job satisfaction.
- Become a member of NACADA to gain access to all published and online materials. Join an electronic mailing service (e.g., Listserv) that deals with career advising and development to communicate with a broad community about situations, concerns, and questions. Share and compare best practices. Networking with others across institutional types proves an ancillary benefit as you become a recognized commodity in a professional organization. Get involved!
- Register in a career development course with the aim of equipping academic advisors with career-advising skills.

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## Applications and Insights

### Occupational Exploration Worksheet

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Occupational Title: _____

Three primary, daily work tasks for this occupation:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Technology tools or innovation unique to the occupation:

_____

_____

What math courses will provide the necessary background for this occupation?

_____

What other courses are listed in the "special knowledge" section that are also included in your curriculum?

_____

_____

In the skills and abilities section, which of the listed skills are among your strongest?

_____

_____

Which of the listed skills and abilities are those you will have to work to develop?

_____

_____

What Holland interest code is associated with the occupation?

_____

Which work styles come easiest to you?

_____

Which work styles do not come easily to you?

_____

List the specific training, education, and qualifications needed for entry in this occupation:

Training:

_____

Education:

_____

Qualifications:

_____

How many people currently work in this field?

_____

Explain the demand or lack of demand for employment in this field.

_____

What is the job outlook?

_____

What is the median salary?

_____

Name some related occupations:

_____

Write a statement of how this occupation is or is not a good fit for you. Explain in detail.

_____

_____

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