Charting a New Path: Assessment and Research in Practice

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Panel Overview

The need for assessment and research in career services offices

The design of established assessment and research positions

- Several approaches:
  - University of Colorado-Boulder, Colorado State University at Fort-Collins, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ohio University
- Addressing the questions:
  - How or why was the position created?
  - What are the primary purposes of the position or goals to be achieved?
  - What are some primary projects and strategies used?

Question & Answer

After the presentation, resources available online at www.careercenter.Illinois.edu/research

- Assessment/research position description
- Assessment plans
- Sample assessment brief

Note that most thumbnail pictures in this presentation preview the resources you can access on this website.

Also, join our Assessment & Research in Career Services (ARCS) Listserv to stay in touch!
The Need for Assessment & Research in Career Services

Calls in higher education for evidence that students receive a good “return on investment.”
- *The College Scorecard* initiative (White House, 2003)

Advocacy for student affairs as a partner with academic affairs in student learning and development.
- *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1996)

Embracing assessment in career services aligns our work with the central missions of our institutions – education, research, and service.
- Career professionals are educators, and assessment demonstrates what is learned – contributing to the educational mission of higher education institutions.
- Knowledge that is generated and shared, where appropriate, may also contribute to research and service missions.
What is assessment?

Assessment is...

◦ a continuous process

◦ of gathering and interpreting evidence

◦ to tell a story about the effectiveness of career interventions

◦ for the dual purposes of continuous improvement and celebrating successes.

*This resource is available through the NCDA Career Resource Store.*
How Are Assessment and Research Related?

- **Research studies** test theories and hypotheses, affirming or reconceptualizing how we understand a problem or situation.

  The purpose of research is to generalize beyond the study participants with the hopes of informing understanding of the phenomena in the world.

- **Assessment** aims to inform and improve one’s own practice by collecting enough evidence to reasonably inform decisions and actions.

  It is not necessary to examine all angles of a question for nuanced understanding. Rather, assessment focuses on guiding good practice.

- Both research and assessment may use similar methods to achieve their different goals.
What Can We Assess / Research?

Needs: What might we do for and with clients?

Participation: Who did (or did not) participate?

Satisfaction: How comfortable or content were participants? How engaged were participants?

Outcomes: What difference do our efforts make? Why do our programs and services exist?
  ◦ Academic performance indicators
  ◦ First destinations
  ◦ Learning
Example Assessment and Research Positions:

Exploring history, design, strategic directions, and outcomes
Building the Case for an Assessment / Research Position

CU-Boulder underwent a CAS review in 2012 where it was determined there were gaps in our assessment initiatives.

An assessment ‘A-Team’ consisting of staff members was created.

Leadership Team began discussing a desire to have more than program evaluation and the idea of bringing in a dedicated researcher.

Additionally, for more than 10 years the career center attempted to persuade intuitional research to launch a destination survey without success.

The confluence of these events led to discussions about creating a research position.

In early fall 2013, we hired Dr. Kevin Glavin to be our Research Program Manager.
Primary Purposes / Goals

Qualifications:

• PhD in Education, Counseling or similar Social Science discipline.
• Minimum 3 years experience in research, with preferred emphasis in areas of career development.
• Publication of research results in refereed scholarly journals.
• Experience overseeing data collection and management, contributing to the creation and maintenance of online tools and databases.

Goals:

• Destination Survey (Graduate Destination Project)
• Establish an Assessment Plan and Research Agenda
Highlighted Project: Strategic Planning

‘Two Steps Forward, One Step Backwards’

Strategic Planning Process

Revising: Vision, Mission, & Core Values

Vision > Mission > Metrics > Constructs

Metrics Include how Career Services impacts or influences:

◦ Student Engagement
◦ Retention
◦ Process Towards Graduation
◦ Confidence in Career Transitions

Goal is to ensure our assessment efforts are working in the same direction across the Career Services Department and the Division of Student Affairs.
Building the Case for an Assessment / Research Position

Confluence of events – new director of IR, new director of Career Center, new institutional focus on graduation survey

Division focus on learning outcomes and diversity outcomes

Need data to tell the “story” of career services on campus beyond usage statistics and satisfaction surveys

New director brought focus on continuous improvement

Restructured office – Associate Director of Technology Services retired, created Associate Director of Assessment & Strategic Initiatives in place
Primary Purposes / Goals

Qualifications:
• Master’s degree (preferred in Psychology, Student Affairs, Counseling, Education or related field); minimum of 5 years’ professional experience
• Minimum 3 years’ experience working with higher education and/or employment data or assessment
• Familiarity with survey use and assessment tools such as Excel, Access, Campus Labs, Qualtrics, Survey Monkey or other online program review and survey tools
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Goals:

• First Destination Survey
• Evaluate current assessment and create a strategic Assessment Plan for the office
• Oversee gathering of usage statistics for the office
• Establish Career Center Student Advisory Board
Highlighted Project: First Destination Survey

President’s Cabinet Approved Survey – 1 survey coordinated by Career Center and IR

Data gathering integrated into online student portal “RamWeb” & cap and gown pick up for commencement

Collaborated with IR for demographic information & information from National Clearinghouse

Used HepData to gather additional data from LinkedIn on graduates

Increased response rate for at graduation survey by 6 percentage points and ended up with a final knowledge rate of 76%, our highest rate ever by 11 percentage points
Highlighted Project: First Destination Survey, 2

Worked with CSU Communications & Creative Services to present data

Data now “owned” by entire university and being used by Admissions, Alumni/Development, the Provost’s office and President’s office – will be featured in the next Presidential Fall Address
Building the Case for an Assessment / Research Position

2004-2005 Engaged a new perspective on assessment in career services, embracing the learning outcomes assessment movement in student affairs.

*This resource is available through NASPA.
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2005  Developed our first set of office-wide learning outcomes for The Career Center.

2006-2008  Began small scale assessment projects to gather evidence of effectiveness and seek continuous improvement. Began to develop a reputation for excellence in assessment, both across campus and within our professional associations.
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2014 Seeing new positions created at UC-Boulder and CSU-Fort Collins, we argued that our peer institutions are establishing these roles – cutting-edge career services offices are involved in assessment and research. We have an established foundation to do this well. Start full-time position in Oct. 2014.
Primary Purposes / Goals

The Career Center engages research and assessment efforts to explore the intersections of education and career. We examine the:

- value of career services in colleges and universities
- impact of career development programming on student learning; career exploration, decision making, and management; student engagement; retention; progress towards graduation; degree completion; and post-graduation success
- career and education outcomes for recent college graduates

Our goal is to enhance career education experiences and outcomes of college students and graduates, at our institution and across the country.

We support & conduct research related to career development & higher education.

University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign: Associate Director for Assessment & Research
The Strategy: Beginning with the end in mind

1. Ask the questions:
   ◦ What do we want clients to know, do, demonstrate, value, or feel following a career intervention?
   ◦ How have clients changed as a result of the career intervention? What difference should the career intervention make?

2. Design and implement a career intervention that leads to the learning outcomes. *(Teach to the test.)*

3. Ask what clients gained or learned.

The Value: Learning outcomes shift our focus from process to outcome, providing richer information to share with key stakeholders and to inform continuous improvement.

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<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tr>
<td>“What are we going to do this year?”</td>
<td>“How will clients change as a result of what we do? How will they learn and grow?”</td>
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<td>Assessing by counting (e.g., how many participants) and asking how satisfied</td>
<td>Assessing by documenting change; showing results</td>
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Highlighted Project: Learning Outcomes Assessment

A sample of Learning Outcomes Assessment projects conducted by counseling and assessment staff members at The Career Center between 2005 and 2014.

- **Resume Rubric Study**
  Blind review of final product resumes to evaluate differences in quality between students who used resume review services and those who did not. Statistical analysis demonstrated significant differences in quality.

- **Post-Counseling Outcomes Reflections**
  Students asked to stop at computers after counseling appointments to offer a brief, one-minute reflection on their experience, with prompts asking what they learned and what they would do as next steps. Responses coded according to Bloom’s Taxonomy and office-wide learning outcomes. Results used to inform counselor supervision and training.

- **Latino(a) Networking Event Pre-Post Survey**
  Students responded to likert-scale learning outcomes questions on brief pre-post surveys. 95% response rate obtained for both surveys. Differences observed over time on all outcomes presented. Open-ended questions included to request students’ reflections on learning.

- **NASPA Career and Professional Aspirations Benchmarking Survey – Analysis of Users vs. Non-Users**
  For our institution’s data, we compared responses of those students who reported using career services to those who do not use career services, finding interesting differences in self-reported networking and advice-seeking behaviors, as well as career development outcomes.
Building the Case for an Assessment / Research Position

The merger of “career” and “leadership” at OHIO

New mission, vision, and strategic priorities

Effectively showcase career and leadership development to stakeholders

Systems Perspective - “Career” is a national hot topic, demand for outcome data, career services have difficulty telling our story and demonstrating our value, academic partnerships, cutting edge career offices are assessing and evaluating services and resources

Started assessing at a micro-level to highlight potential value

Provide examples and show value to institutional leadership

Associate Director of Assessment started June 5th
Primary Purposes / Goals

Qualifications:

• Master’s Degree from an accredited institution in Higher Education, Counseling, College Student Personnel, or related field.
• Three years of experience in research and/or assessment
• Experience overseeing data collection and management
• Familiarity with survey use and assessment tools such as SPSS, Excel, Access, Campus Labs, Qualtrics, or other online program review and survey tools

Goals:

• Establish an Assessment Plan and Research Agenda
• Demonstrate value of career and leadership development
• First Destination Survey
Question and Answer
For More Information…

We’ve collected a set of resources for you to reference, including:

- Assessment/research position descriptions
- Office assessment plans
- Sample assessment briefs

Find them at www.careercenter.Illinois.edu/research and

Join the conversation! We are starting an Assessment & Research in Career Services (ARCS) Listserv.

Share your business card or provide your email address to join. Or, email your request to arcs-request@lists.Illinois.edu

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