Students’ Attitudes, Beliefs and Plans Regarding Career Planning and Post-College Life: Full Set of Preliminary Findings

November 17, 2010

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I. Review of Scholarly Literature

Planning and decision-making are both essential steps in the transition to adulthood and both can be linked to individuals’ attitudes and self-efficacy. Attitudes are related to a person’s feelings about an event or process, and self-efficacy is a person’s confidence in his or her ability to achieve certain goals or standards. People who use self-regulatory processes to make educated decisions are aware of different situations in which they have both ease and difficulty in making decisions, and they take adaptive and evaluative steps to guarantee positive outcomes. Individuals who have better knowledge of themselves tend to be more motivated and to have a better chance of finding a work environment that matches their personality (Keiner 2006).

Luzzo and McWhirter (2001) address the notion of self-efficacy as it relates to ethnic minorities. They found that ethnic minorities perceive more career-related barriers than European Americans and that they have less self-efficacy for overcoming these career-related barriers. This finding suggests that self-efficacy is intimately linked to one’s perception of the number or difficulty of barriers. Likewise, Feldt and Woelfel examined the importance of self-efficacy and outcome expectations in predicting career planning. Their results support the theory that self-efficacy is important for determining a student’s likelihood of attaining a job and job outcome expectations (Feldt and Woelfel 2009).

Abrahamson examined the relationship between anxiety, self-efficacy and career interests (2008). The study concluded that using measurements of self-efficacy and anxiety better predicted students’ occupational interests than only using measures of self-efficacy. This suggests that anxiety is an important factor in determining career interests. In terms of self-efficacy specifically, Abrahamson found that general self-efficacy scores are positively correlated with career skills self-efficacy scores; this suggests that a more global sense of self-efficacy is related to career search self-efficacy (2008). Abrahamson also found that anxiety and self-efficacy are negatively correlated and that career skills, confidence, and anxiety are negatively correlated (2008). This result suggests that a low level of career skills confidence is correlated with a high level of anxiety, which is then correlated with low self-efficacy.

Yang and Gysbers note that self-efficacy is an important construct for predicting career search behaviors and define career search self-efficacy as “self-appraised confidence in successfully performing a variety of career search activities;” more specifically, having a high level of career search self-efficacy “consistently predicts positive career search behaviors and outcomes” for an individual (2007:157). Yang and Gysbers conceptualize confidence and self-efficacy as fundamentally related because they define confidence as “self-efficacy related to successful career transition” (2007:159).

The present study uses Yang and Gysbers’ scales in order to develop indexes of self-efficacy in the career search process. In their study, Yang and Gysbers found that a decreased level of career-search self-efficacy and increased psychological distress are associated with a perceived lack of career transition resources. They also found that a higher level of anxiety is related to ambivalence in career transition (2007:168).
II. Method and sample

This study used a random sample survey that was distributed through an online, self-administered questionnaire. We asked about participants’ reported attitudes, beliefs and plans toward career planning, using a variety of question types as well as questions about participants’ demographic information. For the purpose of our survey, “job,” was defined as, “a relatively short-term means to financial stability which can entail full-time or part-time employment.” “Career,” was defined as, “a relatively long-term means to financial stability that may include multiple jobs and may or may not be related to one’s field of academic study or vocation.” Finally, in the survey, “vocation,” is defined as “a call that aligns with a person’s gifts and talents, and that uses the knowledge and skills gained through study and experience.”

The sample was drawn from St Olaf students in the fall semester of 2010. Students selected for the survey could enter in a drawing to win a gift card to the bookstore as an incentive to complete the survey. In order to develop our survey we examined the objectives of the Main Street Project, communicated with Main Street Project Committee Chair Steve McKelvey, and held a focus group of St Olaf students. We created a survey of 24 questions which was then combined with the survey of a research group studying career exploration. Our total number of respondents was 389 of 777, making our response rate 50%. 145 males and 236 females responded to the survey (8 did not specify male or female). 88 of the respondents were first year students, 105 were sophomores, 96 were juniors, and 93 were seniors (7 did not specify year).
III. Preliminary findings responding to Main Street Project Steering Committee questions

1. Planning for careers and post-college life

1.1 When do students think they should begin planning?
Several of our survey questions ask students when they believe they should begin career planning and when they actually do begin planning for their careers. Most respondents (67.3%) believe that students should start career planning before college, by first year or by sophomore year. This result indicates that the majority of students believe career planning should begin by sophomore year at the latest. This could suggest that first-year and sophomore students are willing to begin the career planning process. Only 3.9% of respondents believe that students should start career planning as seniors, and 88.9% of respondents agree with the statement “I expect to leave St. Olaf with a plan for my future career;” which means that most students expect to develop their career plan before or during college. Only 3.4% of respondents believe that career planning is unimportant.

1.2 When do students actually begin planning?
73.5% of respondents reported that they have already started career planning, and 39.9% of those students started planning before college. Of students who have already begun to plan for their careers, Table A depicts when those students began career-planning.

Table A: When Students Started Career-Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When Students Started Career-Planning</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before college</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore year</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior year</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior year</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

85.0% of respondents who have already started career planning started planning by sophomore year. Only 12.2% of respondents started planning during junior year and 2.8% during senior year. These statistics suggest that students in all class years will begin planning...
for their careers so career planning resources and services should be available to all students. Of students who responded that they have not yet started career planning, 85% expect to start planning before graduation, 72.3% of them expect to start planning during or before junior year, and only a small percentage of respondents (15.8%) expect to wait until their senior year to begin career planning. Thus most respondents believe that students should begin career planning earlier in their college career and indeed most students actually have begun career planning by sophomore year. Our data suggest that students not only value career planning but also perceive themselves as having already begun the process at some level.

2. Students’ feelings about the planning process

Table B gives the results for the analysis of attitudes toward post-college planning, career and vocation.

Table B: Attitudes toward Planning, Career, and Vocation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude in Regards to:</th>
<th>Percentage Of Respondents Who Feel Excited</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents Who Feel Anxious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning For After College</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Career After College</td>
<td>89.2%</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Vocation After College</td>
<td>91.0%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Since Anxiety and Excitement were measured in separate questions there may or may not be overlap between students who feel anxious and those who feel excited. This information is unknown.

Separate questions asked students about their feelings of anxiety or excitement in regards to planning, career, and vocation; therefore these categories surely overlap. Nonetheless, it is clear that the majority of students feel anxious and the majority of students feel excited about the post-college planning process, career and vocation. On a 4-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, 62.8% of respondents disagreed (cumulative percentage of Strongly Disagree and Disagree) with the statement “I feel that planning for after college is less important than academics.” This suggests that students feel that planning for after college is at least as important, and perhaps more important, than academics.

2.1 Self-efficacy and career planning

In terms of students’ feelings of self-efficacy, four survey questions addressed how prepared students felt for various career planning tasks. 66.6% of respondents agreed with the statement “I feel prepared to determine my own plans for after graduation”, 60.6% of respondents agree with the statement “I feel prepared for my career after college”, 77.0% of respondents agree with the statement “I feel prepared for my vocation after college” and 64.8% of respondents agree that they feel prepared for the post-college planning process in general. In every question the majority of students feel prepared for career planning. In addition, 70.9% of respondents agree with the statement “I feel confident about my ability to plan for my career”, 93.4% of students agree with the statement “I believe I can achieve my post-graduation goals” and 84.6% of students agree with the statement “I believe that I will be able to do what I want to do after graduation”. Therefore the majority of respondents also report feeling confident in their
career planning ability. These results suggest that students in general feel prepared to plan for after graduation and are confident in their own abilities to do so.

Using an independent samples T-test, we found a significant difference in self-efficacy between students who have already started career planning and those who have not. The difference is very remarkable, as the mean score on the self-efficacy index for students who have started planning is 18.32 and 12.84 for those who have not. These results suggest that encouraging people to start career planning may increase their career-search self-efficacy.

Of the students who have started planning for their career, as tested by a Pearson and Spearmen’s rho tests, there is no significant difference of self-efficacy as it relates to when they started planning. This may be not significant because career planning is subjective, and many respondents answered that they started planning before college. There was a difference between age and when they started career planning, so this may be a factor. Of the students who have not started planning, there is a significant difference at the .05 level of when students expect to start planning and their level of self-efficacy. This means that students who expect to begin planning earlier have higher levels of self-efficacy than those who expect to start planning later.

2.2 Attitudes and career planning
We used an independent samples T-test to test the relationship between the attitudes of students who have started planning for a career and the attitudes of students who have not started planning for a career; we found that there was statistical significance at the .01 level. The mean score on the attitudes index for students who have started planning is 10.04 with a standard deviation of 2.46 compared to the mean of 8.54 with a standard deviation of 3.11 for students who have not started planning. This means that students who have already started planning for a career have a more positive attitude about post-college planning than those who have not already started planning. This implies that helping students start planning for a career may lead to more positive attitudes regarding planning for after graduation.

We used a Spearman’s rho test to test the statistical significance between students’ attitudes and when they started planning for a career; we found statistical significance at the .05 level. This means that students who started planning earlier for a career have a more positive attitude about planning for after graduation than those who started planning later. This suggests that implementing programs to younger students about career planning could help increase their positive attitudes. We used a Spearman’s rho test to test the statistical significance between students’ attitudes and when they expected to start planning for a career and found no statistical significance between the attitudes and when they expect to start planning for a career. So there is no significant different between the attitudes of students who expect to begin planning for a career sooner and those who expect to start planning for a career later. This test indicates that there is no need for targeted outreach for students who have not yet started planning for a career, but will in the future.

3. Correlation between self-efficacy and attitudes
We used a Spearman’s rho test to examine the relationship between students’ attitudes and level of self-efficacy. We found that the two were of statistical significance at the .01 level. This means that there is a positive correlation between the two variables (see Table C). This suggests that programs implemented to increase the level of self-efficacy or positive attitudes could in-turn increase the levels of the opposite variable—self-efficacy or positive attitudes.
3.1 Do different groups of students have different average measures of self-efficacy or attitudes?

3.1.1 Year in school

In order to compare students’ year in school with students’ self-efficacy, we used a Spearman’s rho test between year in school and a 28-point self-efficacy scale, and found that there is a significant, moderate positive correlation between the two variables. *This suggests that students who are closer to graduation have higher levels of self-efficacy, and therefore promotes working to develop career-search self-efficacy in students earlier in college.*

There was no statistically significant correlation between students’ year in school and their attitudes. We used a Spearman’s rho test with an 18-point attitudes scale to determine whether or not the two variables had statistical significance. *This indicates that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of students who just entered college and those who are closer to graduation.* This suggests that there is no need for programming to improve attitudes about post-college planning for underclassmen.

3.1.2 First Generation students

14.4% of our respondents identify as first-generation college students, and we compared their levels of self-efficacy with students who did not identify as first-generation, transfer, exchange, or international students. The mean level of self-efficacy for first generation students is 17.20 with a standard deviation of 5.78, while the mean level of self-efficacy for non-first generation students is 16.79 with a standard deviation of 5.63. *We used an independent samples T-test to compare levels of self-efficacy of first generation and non-first generation students.*
college students and found no significant difference in levels of self-efficacy between the two groups. This suggests that no further career-search self-efficacy programs are needed for first-generation students specifically.

The mean score on the attitudes index for first generation students is 9.21 with a standard deviation of 2.52, and the mean score on the attitudes index for non-first generation students is 9.71 with a standard deviation of 2.75. We used an independent samples T-test to examine the relationship between first generation students and non-first generation students and found no statistical significance. This indicates that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of students who are first-generation students and non-first generation students. This suggests that there is no need to help improve the attitudes of first generation students about post-college planning.

3.1.3 Gender

In order to study gender as it relates to students’ self-efficacy we used an independent samples T-test between males and females, and found no significant difference in self-efficacy between the two groups. The mean level of self-efficacy for females is 16.59 with a standard deviation of 5.54, and the mean level of self-efficacy for males is 17.26 with a standard deviation of 5.8. We found no statistically significant difference in levels of self-efficacy between genders. This suggests that there is no need for gender-specific programs regarding career-search self-efficacy.

The mean score on the attitudes index for females is 9.59 with a standard deviation of 2.57, while the mean score on the attitudes index for males is 9.7 with a standard deviation of 2.96. We used an independent samples T-test to test the statistical significance between female and male students and found no statistical significance between the attitudes of the two groups. We found no significant difference between the attitudes of students and their gender. This suggests that there is no need for targeted outreach for the different genders.

3.1.4 Race

We felt that it was important to test for differences in self-efficacy between students who do NOT identify as non-Hispanic white (about 18%), and the 82.0% who do identify as non-Hispanic white. Students who identified as non-Hispanic white have a mean level of self-efficacy of 16.95 with a standard deviation of 5.61 while those who identified as something other than non-Hispanic white have a mean level of self-efficacy of 16.33 with a standard deviation of 5.84. We used an independent samples T-test to test the relationship the self-efficacy of white and non-white students, and found no significant difference between the two groups. This suggests that there does not need to be targeted outreach to encourage students of minority races to develop career-search self-efficacy.

The mean score on the attitudes index for students who identified as non-Hispanic white is 9.66 with a standard deviation of 2.59; the mean score on the attitudes index for students who identified as a race other than non-Hispanic white is 9.54 with a standard deviation of 3.34. We used an independent samples T-test to test the statistical significance between the attitudes of students who identify as white and those who identify as a race other than white and found no statistical significance between the attitudes of the two groups. We found no significant difference between the attitudes of students who identity as white and those who identity as a race other than white. This suggests that there is no need for a plan to increase positive attitudes about post-college planning for students who identify as a race other than non-Hispanic white.
4. Students’ attitudes and feelings of self-efficacy regarding careers and post-graduation life

4.1 Students’ Employment Expectations for After Graduation

16.8% of respondents said they expect to begin a career right after college while everyone else said they expect to within 5 years after graduating or later. Thus students do not expect to begin a career immediately after graduating college.

53.0% of respondents expect to find a job right after completing undergraduate studies and 20.6% of respondents expect to find a job right after completely graduate or professional studies. Thus 73.6% of students expect to find jobs after they finish their studies whether undergraduate or graduate.

An additional survey question asked students how they believe their job right after graduation will help them. Most respondents (52.7%) believe that their job will help them earn financial independence. These results suggest that a majority of students believe that the most important aspect of a job after college is to earn financial independence. Students are thinking about the need to be financially independent.

4.2 Students’ Expectations and Aspirations Regarding Financial Independence and Dependence

The results of survey questions regarding students’ aspirations and expectations of financial independence are listed in Table D.

Table D: Students’ Expectations and Aspirations Regarding Financial Independence and Dependence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Financial Independence</th>
<th>Percentage of Students Who Agree That They Want</th>
<th>Percentage of Students Who Agree That They Expect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete Financial Independence</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially Financially Dependent on Parents/Guardians</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially Financially Dependent on Someone other than Parents/Guardians</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely Financially Dependent on Parents/Guardians</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely Financially Dependent on Someone other than Parents/Guardians</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% because students were allowed to check all that apply in order to accommodate students who might be partially financially dependent on both parents/guardians and someone other than parents/guardians.
Most respondents (75.6%) might expect to be completely financially independent but only 22.4% expect to be completely financially independent after graduation. Additionally, while only 33.2% of respondents want to be partially financially dependent on their parents/guardians, 76.6% of respondents expect to be partially financially dependent on their parents/guardians. It is also interesting to note that very few students expect to be completely financially dependent on their parents (8.5%), and even fewer want to be completely financially dependent on their parents (1.3%). Thus while most students want to be independent financially, most are realistic about the probable necessity of being at least partially dependent on their parents after graduation. Most students do not expect to be completely financially dependent on someone else; the majority of respondents expect to be partially financially dependent on someone other than their parents/guardians.

4.2.1 Self-efficacy as it relates to students aspirations and expectations of financial independence or dependence

Our survey defines both “job” and “career” because we asked about them as separate entities. We examined the relationship between when students expect to find a job after college and their self-efficacy using a Pearson correlation test and found no significant difference between students who expect to find a job earlier and their level of self-efficacy.

We tested when students expect to begin a career after college and their self-efficacy using a Pearson test and found no significant difference between students who expect to begin a career earlier and their level of self-efficacy. However, an independent samples T-test indicated that students who expect to find a career right after college have significantly higher levels of self-efficacy than those who expect to find a career 5 years or later, as a group. The mean level of self-efficacy for students who expect to find a career immediately after college is 18.81 with a standard deviation of 6.92 compared with the mean of students who do not expect to find a career immediately after college is 16.45 with a standard deviation of 5.28. This shows students feel confident they will be able to find a career at some point, but those who expect to find one right away have higher self-efficacy. This suggests that students with higher levels of self-efficacy feel that they’ll be able to find a career right away.

We used an independent samples T-test to examine the relationship between students who want to be completely financially independent and those who do not; we found no significant difference in self-efficacy between the two groups. This indicates that students who desire financial independence or dependence have similar levels of self-efficacy. This suggests that desired financial independence is not a factor in a student’s level of self-efficacy.

We used an independent sample T-test to examine the relationship between students who expect to be completely financially independent and levels of self-efficacy. The test showed that students who expect to be completely financially independent have higher self-efficacy than those who do not expect to be completely financially independent (significant at the .01 level). This suggests that there is a large difference in self-efficacy and whether or not students expect to be financially dependent. Those who expect to be financially independent have higher levels of self-efficacy than those who expect to be partially or completely financially dependent. This suggests programming may be needed to show students how to become financially independent after college, considering that most reported they want to be financially independent.

We used an independent samples T-test to compare students who desire complete financial independence after college and students who do not desire complete financial independence, and found no statistical significance between the scores on the attitudes index of the two groups. There is no significant difference between the attitudes of students who desire financial independence and those who do not. This suggests that there is no need for increased programming to improve attitudes about post-college planning for students who may or may not desire financial independence.
We also used an independent samples T-test to compare students who expect complete financial independence after college and students who do not expect complete financial independence, and found that there was statistical significance at the .01 level. The mean score on the attitudes index for students who expect to have financial independence is 10.36 with a standard deviation of 3.01, and the mean score for students who do not expect complete financial independence is 9.42 with a standard deviation of 2.6. Students who expect to have financial independence have a more positive attitude about post-college planning. This indicates that students who do not expect financial independence have less positive attitudes.

4.3 Residence after graduation

Respondents were also surveyed on their expectations and aspirations for post-graduation residence. Most respondents (72.8%) do not expect to move back into their parents'/guardians' house after graduation. 80.3% of respondents agree that their parents/guardians would be okay with them moving back into their house after graduation and 79.3% of respondents agree that it would not be their first choice to move back into their parents'/guardians' house after graduation, but they would be willing to do so if necessary. Thus, while most students neither expect nor want to move back into their parents'/guardians' homes after graduation, most are realistic about the possible necessity of this situation.

4.3.1 Self-efficacy and attitudes related to residence after graduation

We used an independent samples T-test to compare students who expect to move back home and those who do not, and found no significant difference in self-efficacy between the two groups. This suggests that where a student plans to live does not relate to their career-search self-efficacy. We used an independent samples T-test to test the statistical significance to compare students who expect to move back home and those who do not expect to move back home, and found statistical significance at the .05 level. The mean score on the attitudes index for students who expect to move back home after graduation is 9.17 with a standard deviation of 2.79 and students who do not expect to move back home have a mean score of 9.8 with standard deviation of 2.66. This means that students who do not expect to move back home after graduation tend to have a more positive attitude about post-college planning. This might suggest the importance of creating programs which help students find affordable living opportunities after college.

5. Vocation

5.1 The importance of having a career and a vocation

The vast majority (96.1%) of respondents felt that it is important to have a career; within that percent, 78.6% strongly agree that it is important to have a career. Additionally, 90.2% agree with the statement "It is important for me to have a vocation". Thus the majority of students value having a vocation. Additionally, 79.0% of respondents think it is important that their career and vocation are one in the same, yet only 21.0% of respondents believe that their career and vocation will be one in the same. 26.2% of respondents believe they will develop their vocations by the time they graduate; therefore, vocational development programs and services are valuable to students during college.

5.2 Planning and vocation

The survey asked students about whether they felt that they had already discerned a vocation and if they had a concrete plan for after graduation. While 77.9% of respondents said they feel called to a particular vocation, only 31.3% of respondents believe that they already have a vocation. Evidently, students feel there is a difference between feeling called to a
particular vocation and already having a vocation. Perhaps feeling called implies a more fluid and overarching paradigm, while actually having a vocation implies a more concrete and certain plan. This notion would fit with the fact that only 35.7% of respondents said that they already had a concrete plan for after graduation. Of course, percentage reflects the total of all class years and, therefore, may reflect the distance first years, sophomores and even juniors and seniors feel from graduation at this point in their college careers.

5.3 Vocational development

We used an independent samples T-test to compare students who already have developed a vocation or expect to develop a vocation by the time they graduate, and those who expect to develop a vocation after graduation. We found close to significant difference between the two groups at the .06 level. This means that students who have expect to develop a vocation by the time they graduate have slightly higher self-efficacy than those who do not, but it is not quite significant at the standard .05 level. This suggests that students with higher levels of self-efficacy are likely to have developed a vocation by the time they graduate.

5.3.1 Vocational development and positive attitudes

We used an independent samples T-test to test to compare students who expect to develop a vocation before leaving college and those who do not expect to develop a vocation before leaving, and found statistical significance at the .05 level. The mean score on the attitudes index for students who expect to develop a vocation before leaving college is 10.0 with a standard deviation of 2.64, and the mean score for students who do not expect to leave college with a vocation is 9.29 with a standard deviation of 2.77. This indicates that students who expect to develop a vocation before leaving college have more positive attitudes about post-college planning than those who do not expect to develop a vocation until after leaving college. This suggests that helping students develop a vocation may lead to a more positive attitude about post-college planning.
Sources Cited


Appendix A: Survey