Careers in Counseling and Psychology

For Masters Level Graduates
A Guide to Choosing the Right Career Path

Edited by Audrey A. Lucas, Ph.D.

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Careers in Counseling and Psychology for Masters Level Graduates
A Guide to Choosing the Right Career Path

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Section One

Careers in Counseling and Psychology
STUDENT AWARENESS OF CAREER COUNSELING AS A CAREER CHOICE

Students in graduate counseling programs often enter these programs without realizing the exciting career possibilities that are available to them if they choose to become career counselors. Many students enroll in counseling degree programs because they know they want to help people and associate helping people with providing personal or mental health counseling to clients. They are often unaware that a career as a career counselor would provide them with the opportunity to work with diverse populations in a rich array of counseling settings where they can utilize creative delivery methods to fulfill their desire to work as helping professionals (National Career Development Association, 2000).

Career counseling may be especially attractive to students who aspire to work as helping professionals but are not interested in focusing on pathology. It emphasizes the importance of helping individuals to make realistic career choices based on interests, skills, and abilities. Career counselors use both traditional and non-traditional counseling methods, including those such as: guided imagery and hypnosis. Career counselors often encourage their clients to go beyond traditional jobs and to seek the job of their dreams. Some of the career resources that encourage this creative approach are books like *Do What You Love, The Money Will Follow* (Sinetar, 1987); *The Live Your Dream Workbook* (Chapman, 1994; *To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love*...
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(Sinetar, 1995) and the career counseling classic *What Color Is Your Parachute* (Bolles, 2008). Becoming a career counselor could be a good choice for students who are goal-oriented and creative.

Many students become aware of career counseling as a professional career choice when they when take a required career counseling class as a part of their graduate studies. Graduate students are often surprised at the array of settings in which they can work as career counselors, such as schools, colleges, government agencies, and private industry. They are intrigued when they discover the diversity of the populations that need specialized services from career counselors, including minorities, persons with disabilities, immigrants, substance abusers, the mentally ill, returning women, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender clients. Entrepreneurial students may be inspired by the idea of owning their own business to work with these and other special populations.

Some students who enroll in graduate counseling and psychology programs have had prior exposure to the field of career counseling as career counseling clients themselves. They may have been inspired by having had a positive experience with a career counselor and are entering the field because of this positive interaction. Others may be interested in obtaining graduate training in the field of counseling because they are currently working in a job related to career counseling that does not require a degree and wish to develop their counseling skills to better serve their clients.

**CAREER COUNSELING: A DIVERSE FIELD**

The term “career counseling” is often used interchangeably with “career development,” “vocational counseling,” or “vocational guidance.” Professionals who work in these fields are called “career counselors,” “vocational counselors,” or “vocational education counselors.” The use of these different terms exists because the history of career counseling can be traced to the simultaneous growth of two different perspectives (Gladding, 1996; Herr and Cramer, 1999). The first is the career guidance movement, with its focus on vocational guidance, which has
historically grown out of school and government interventions devised to provide individuals with vocational information and assist them in finding employment. The second is a more comprehensive career counseling approach. It is called the career development approach and it recognizes the importance of job placement but places additional emphasis on career development as a complex career counseling intervention. This approach assists individuals with occupational choice, including the role of values, identity, interests, abilities, and decision making skills. The career development approach acknowledges that career choice is not a one time decision but a series of decisions across the lifespan (Herr and Cramer, 1999).

Although career counselors focus their interventions on assisting clients with career development issues, the distinction between career and personal counseling is not always clear. The literature shows increasing support for the idea that career counseling and personal counseling are closely intertwined (Blustein, 1987; Brown, 1985; Nagel, Hoffman, and Hill, 1995). A position paper written jointly by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision and the National Career Development Association underscores this premise (National Career Development Association, 2000). For while the initial focus of the intervention in career counseling is usually to assist a client with career issues, sometimes these issues cannot easily be separated from those that may arise during personal counseling. Career issues can have an effect on the mental health of the client, for a person who is unhappy with his or her work may exhibit signs of being depressed or anxious. This perspective suggests that successful career counselors must be prepared to recognize the importance of incorporating personal counseling skills as a part of the career counseling process. For example, a person who has been laid off from work not only needs assistance with finding a new job, but with negotiating the often confusing emotional reaction to this job loss which has been likened to the Kubler-Ross stages of death and dying: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Borgen and Amundsen in Herr and Kramer, 1996, p. 96). In this instance, the task of the career counselor is to assist the client with his
or her job search while acknowledging the need to provide personal helping skills to assist the client in healing from the emotional devastation that may arise as a result of job loss.

Career counselors may therefore incorporate personal counseling in their work to varying degrees depending on the setting in which they work and their personal comfort with working with these issues. Even if they choose not to address these issues in their practice, they need to be trained to recognize the need for this type of intervention so appropriate referrals can be made.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

Career counselors may emphasize one theoretical orientation in their work, but they are generally eclectic in their approach and may employ both traditional counseling theories and those career counseling theories which have evolved out of a deeper understanding of career development. Career counseling has moved beyond its initial role in its early years of providing career information to match people with jobs, to today’s understanding of career development as a more complex process involving the role of self-concept, decision-making, and development across the lifespan (Andersen & Vandehey, 1999).

One of the earliest approaches to career counseling is the trait and factor approach introduced by Frank Parsons in 1909 which matches an individual’s talents with the characteristics of a job (Herr and Cramer, 1996). One of the most well-known applications of this approach is John Holland’s theory which links six personality types with six work environments and suggests that people are more satisfied with their work when their personality traits and the characteristics of their workplace are congruent (Holland, 1973). The psychodynamic approach focuses on career choice as the fulfillment of unconscious wishes. Roe (1957) has developed this concept and places special emphasis on the influences of early parenting and child rearing in shaping career choice. Developmental theories like those of Ginzberg (1972) and Super (1990) focus on career development across the lifespan. They suggest different stages of career
development as a process of stages that unfold across a lifetime. Cognitive and behavioral approaches such as those proposed by Tiedemann and O’Hara (1963) which focuses on decision-making across seven stages of development and by Knefelkamp and Slepitza (1976) which emphasizes a hierarchal structure of career decision-making in college students may also be utilized. These are just some of the career counseling theories that can be integrated when conducting career counseling.

Career counselors may also incorporate traditional counseling theories to explain the motivation for career choice and to provide assistance with career development. Those who work from a psychoanalytic approach may incorporate a Freudian perspective may view career choice as the satisfaction of unconscious needs (Gladding, 1999). A Jungian perspective would also look at unconscious motives but is also likely to utilize the concept of the archetypes as well as Jungian personality theory as expressed through the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCauley, 1985). An Adlerian approach would look at the role of birth order and may explore the client’s feelings of inferiority and need for social interest (Herr and Cramer, 1996). A Rogerian person-centered approach would emphasize the importance of the career counselor’s providing empathy, congruence, and positive regard to help facilitate the client’s ability to make appropriate career choices. An existential therapist would encourage the client to recognize that he or she has both ultimate freedom and responsibility for career choices. The behavioral therapist would focus on getting clients to adapt healthy behaviors that would facilitate career choice and the cognitive behaviorist would emphasize the importance of recognizing thought patterns that can help or hinder career development (Gladding, 1996). In essence, any of the personal counseling theories can be employed to assist client’s with their career development.

SKILLS NEEDED BY CAREER COUNSELORS

The paper Preparing Counselors for a New Millennium (National Career Development Association, 2000) argues that career counselors must
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possess a multitude of skills in order to deliver services effectively in a global economy. They must have an awareness of career counseling theories and demonstrate good helping skills. Career counselors must be familiar with ways of accessing local and global job trends. They must also be aware of career counseling resources, both print and non-print, to assist clients in understanding occupational choices. These include traditional sources like the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009–2009) and O*net, as well as more frequently updated sources available on the internet. Career counselors must be familiar with career counseling assessments, including computerized assessments such as DISCOVER and computer assisted guidance systems. They must also be aware of best practices when using and interpreting assessments. Career counselors must be able to help clients with short and long-term career planning. In addition to working with individuals, many career counselors teach workshops and conduct career counseling groups. This means they must be trained in group counseling processes and educational delivery systems. This paper suggests that career counselors also need to pay attention to the spiritual dimension of career counseling as the choice of a career may be a spiritual process of finding one’s life purpose or avocation and not just locating a job.

Since the role of the career counselor is so diverse, there have been many attempts to identify essential skills and objectives for the effective career counselor. *The Career Counselor’s Handbook* (Figler and Bowles, 1999, p. 38) identifies twelve key skills of the career counselor: clarifying content, reflecting feeling, open-ended questioning, skill identifying, value clarifying, creative imaging, information giving, role-playing, spot-checking, summarizing, task setting, and establishing the Yes, Buts. They have also identified six objectives of career counseling: helping clients assume responsibility, imagine career ideas, use one’s favorite functional and adaptive skills, deal with negative emotions, know how to determine steps to a career goal, and choose work that has meaning and purpose (Figler and Bowles, 1999, pp. 25–30).
The National Career Development Association (www.ncda.org) has defined twelve competencies to effectively facilitate career development. The Career Development Competencies as defined by the National Career Development’s Career Development Facilitator curriculum (National Career Development Association, n.d.) include the following: helping skills, labor market information and resources, assessment, diverse populations, ethical and legal issues, career development models, employability skills, training clients and peers, program management/implementation, promotions and public reform, technology, and consultation.

**SPECIAL POPULATIONS AND SETTINGS FOR CAREER COUNSELORS**

Career counselors may work in a variety of settings including schools, colleges, the government, private industry, and private practice. In their work they may address the needs of many special populations, including African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. Career counselors, like all counselors, should therefore have training in working with diverse populations (Atkinson, 2004) and must be especially sensitive to their career differing counseling needs (Herr and Cramer, 1999). They should also be trained to work with these diverse populations at different ages and stages in different settings across the lifespan: individuals of elementary, middle and high school ages; college students of all ages; and early adulthood to post-retirement ages.

**CAREER COUNSELING IN THE SCHOOLS**

Some career counselors work with students in school settings whereas others may work with them at government, community based, or private practice settings. Career counselors agree that elementary school students would benefit from early interventions which would introduce them to careers, help them understand their strengths and weaknesses, break down stereotypes, and provide valuable role models (Gladding,
Middle school students would also benefit from these interventions plus more targeted interventions that would help students to identify appropriate careers, and understand the educational requirements and earning potentials of different careers. Additionally, high school students need to learn resume writing, interviewing, and job search skills. These services are often provided by both school counselors and career counselors.

CAREER COUNSELORS IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Career counselors are also needed at the college level to assist undergraduate and graduate students of all ages. Career counselors often work in college or university career centers and provide career counseling, conduct career workshops, and hold job fairs. Career counselors assist students in understanding the marketability of their college majors and master's degrees and provide them with assistance in resume writing, interviewing skills, and job search skills (Gladding, 1999; Herr and Cramer, 1996). They also assist them in identifying further educational training that might be needed for certain professions.

CAREER COUNSELING WITH ADULTS

Adults are in need of career counseling at different points during their lifetimes (Herr and Cramer, 1996). In the early years, adults may need counseling to develop a sense of career direction. Later adults need assistance with mid-life career changes. Employees who are in the workforce often have to cope with the need for additional training in order to further their careers. They need guidance to assist them in choosing appropriate training programs and to understand the implications of these choices. Individuals who are laid off or unemployed often need help in finding appropriate training or work where they can use their experience and transferable skills for new positions. Older workers often need assistance with career planning as they retire from their careers. Many older workers need assistance in creating post-retirement careers.
OTHER CAREER COUNSELING SETTINGS

Career counselors may also work in private business or in government or community settings. In these settings they respond to the needs of their clients according to the parameters defined by their place of work. They may assist persons in finding appropriate training, coping with unemployment, locating jobs, or changing careers.

Those who work in private practice may tailor their services to work with special populations such as adolescents, women, minorities, retirees or executives. They have the most freedom in their work style and work hours and may also deliver services to the community such as workshops and seminars.

CERTIFICATION AND TRAINING

Master’s degree trained career counselors typically have degrees in counseling psychology, mental health counseling, career counseling, community counseling, and related fields. These degrees are usually offered through college or university counseling, education, or psychology divisions. Most of these degree programs identify themselves with the counseling profession by affiliating with the American Counseling Association (ACA). ACA is the professional organization for professional counselors. ACA acknowledges the importance of career counseling as a competency area for all counselors.

ACA has two professional divisions associated with career counseling, The National Career Development Association (NCDA) and the National Employment Counselors Association (NECA). Each of these associations has opportunities for representation at the state level. Members of these associations include professionals in business and industry, rehabilitation, government, private practice and education. They each publish a professional journal and set standards for best practices as career counselors.

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Accredited Programs (CACREP) provides guidelines for certification of counselor education programs. Although not all counseling programs are
CACREP accredited, most voluntarily choose to follow the CACREP academic guidelines which identify eight core counseling areas: human growth and development, social and cultural diversity, relationships, group work, career development, assessment, research and program evaluation, and professional identity. Graduates of counseling programs who become career counselors therefore usually have training in these areas.

Educational attainment in these content areas is the basis for eligibility for national certification as a National Certified Counselor (NCC). This certification is granted through the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) (www.nbcc.org). The test used to qualify for NBCC certification requires competency in career counseling. This test is used by many states for the testing portion of the requirements for state licensure in the states where licensure is required. Although requirements vary from state to state, most require the completion of 48 to 60 hours of course work in the eight designated content areas, the passing of an exam, and supervision by a mental health professional beyond the masters’ degree. Individual state requirements can be viewed at the ACA website or by contacting the state’s department of mental health licensing board. The requirements to be certified or licensed to practice career counseling and to administer and interpret career assessments also vary from state to state. Some career counselors who have master’s degrees in counseling opt to become licensed as licensed professional counselors in their state. Many career counselors, however, are able to provide career counseling without state licensure or certification.

Students who graduate from a CACREP accredited program or a graduate program which follows CACREP guidelines will be required to take at least one three credit course in career counseling. Some graduate programs offer degrees in career counseling or specializations or certificates where students can enhance their career counseling skills by taking additional career counseling coursework or receiving additional supervision in this area. Students may also further their training in career counseling by choosing practicum and internship experiences in
career counseling settings. They may also choose to receive post graduate supervision in this area. Many students graduate with a counseling degree and then receive on the job training as a career counselor.

**CAREER DEVELOPMENT FACILITATORS**

In recognition of the fact that career counseling consists of both persons with master’s degree training in counseling and those who work in the profession without this training, the National Career Development Association (NCDA) developed the specialized certification of Career Development Facilitator (CDF). This certification is designed to provide training in career counseling competencies, especially for those who do not have master’s degree training. The training provides coursework in career counseling areas identified by NCDA as being essential for the delivery of effective career counseling services. This optional training is nationally recognized and may be an optional certification for counselors working as career counselors.

**NEED FOR CAREER COUNSELORS**

The need for career counselors is growing as the world of work becomes more complex. Job seekers are often bewildered by the thousands of jobs that are available to them and the continual changes in requirements and training for these jobs. Additionally, as more people reach retirement age they are finding that they need to supplement their incomes with additional income. This population is seeking career counseling to assist them in finding career direction. The Department of Labor’s reference The Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008–2009 edition (www.bls.gov/oco/ocos067.htm) uses the terms career and vocational counseling interchangeably under the general heading of counselors. It suggests that educational, vocational, and school counselors work in the schools by providing occupational information and sometimes by running centers and career education programs. It further reports that the majority of career and vocational counselors work outside the
school setting and are involved in helping individuals with career decisions. Vocational counselors explore and evaluate the client’s education, training, work history, interests, skills, and personality traits. They also arrange for aptitude and achievement tests to help the client make career decisions. They also work with individuals to develop job-search skills and assist clients in locating and applying for jobs. In addition, career counselors provide support to persons experiencing job loss, job stress, or other career transitions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008–2009).

Since this source combines career and vocational counselors with educational and other kinds of counselors, the exact figures for those working as career counselors are unclear. However, according to this resource, the need for counselors is expected to be above average. Salaries for educational, vocational, and school counselors in May 2006 were $47,530. Those who work in private industry may have higher salaries. The salary for career counselors who have well-established private practices may also be higher. Career counselors often supplement their incomes by doing additional workshops or consulting.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:**

American Counseling Association, 5999 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia 22304. www.counseling.org

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, American Counseling Association, 5999 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia 22304. www.cacrep.org


National Career Development Association www.ncda.org

National Employment Counselors Association www.neca.org
REFERENCES


