

## Career Services/Developmental Advising

### Project Summary

Students who are undecided about their career plans are less likely to be retained, and the data and student focus groups have shown us that career support and advising services are important but not used. In order to provide adequate services, a three-point initiative is proposed:

1. Combine career and academic advising into a single operation, charging all advisors to do initial/developmental advising (including clarification of career goals and direction), and designating one counselor/advisor as the lead/specialist in this area who will physically have an office in the Career Center.
2. Provide baseline training for all advisors for first-level career advising and specialized training to the one designated counselor/advisor.
3. Secure specialized software tools, both for student assessment and back-office management to professionalize career service operations and extend services.

This is the first phase of what is expected to be a larger career and advising service upgrade that will evolve based on experience with this initiative and the other components of the “College Experience” plan. It is primarily addresses the most immediate need of non-directed students who need career guidance and focus.

### The Details

SPC students who have not selected realistic career goals require specialized career and academic guidance in order to decrease their risk of dropping (or stopping) out. Due to budgetary constraints, SPC’s current advising practice emphasizes addressing students’ immediate issues, including academic schedule planning. This practice works adequately for students who have high levels of career readiness and capability and who have already identified their career goals. Our current prescriptive advising practice cannot address the in-depth needs of those with low levels of career readiness and capability.

The 2011 CCSSE data show that more than 99% of faculty and 84% of students stated that career counseling was “very” or “somewhat” important. It’s surprising then that in terms of satisfaction only 43% were “very” or “somewhat” satisfied, 11% “not at all” satisfied, and 46% responded “NA.” In terms of use, only 5% of the students used the services “often,” 21% “sometimes,” and 74% “rarely/never” or “not at all.” Career services at SPC are nearly invisible, with students in a focus group expressing surprise at the services offered and one indicating another student she knew was paying an outside organization to provide career services.

Similarly, the SPC 2010-11 Enrolled Student Survey Report exposed that of the 34 student services offered, two of the five lowest-ranking in student satisfaction included academic advising (32<sup>nd</sup> place) and career counseling (29<sup>th</sup> place). Both services also ranked in the top seven for performance gap, which calculated the difference between the ratings of importance and satisfaction. Clearly, students are not satisfied with our current level of service. The SPC Enrolled Student Survey results, the new financial aid policies and the excess hour surcharge for students continuing at state universities necessitate change in current practice. Addressing student’s career decision early in their academic careers is critical for decreasing drop out and “stop out” rates as well as reducing overall time to graduation.

Recognizing this service gap, one of the strategic areas identified by the Council of Campus Provosts to enhance the “College Experience” was in career services. A large, diverse, twenty-plus member Committee was formed with the goal of strategizing to improve our career services. SPC student focus groups revealed discontent regarding current SPC career services. The desire for career exploration and occupational information emerged as areas of weakness, among others. Members of the Career Services Project Committee reviewed industry literature, solicited professional organizations for referrals, and researched over 100 institutions nationwide, focusing on five exemplary models who

integrated academic and career advising to various extents. Key leaders at these institutions were interviewed, methods that might benefit SPC students were identified and the Committee brainstormed ways to infuse best practices into our career services model here at SPC. An action plan was created to coalesce academic advising and career advising, meeting students' level of need with maximum impact for a minimal investment given current budgetary constraints. This approach involves infusing career discussion into all advising sessions, identifying each student's career guidance needs, and differentiating our levels of service appropriately.

Developmental advising necessitates guiding students through the identification, clarification and realization of their personal, academic, career and life goals. Currently, SPC's prescriptive advising style emphasizes short-term academic schedule planning, but it does not address the bigger issue of the students' academic goals being appropriate and reasonable. In order to reach the goal of "finishing what you start" and improving retention rates, students need and deserve trained career and academic advising assistance to formulate realistic career paths and academic plans immediately upon enrolling at SPC. In order to accomplish this goal and approach student needs holistically, the fusion of career and academic advising is logical.

In order to provide differentiated levels of service in academic and career advising, a specially-trained career and academic advisor\* who case manages (initially FTIC) students with the highest level of career indecision is proposed. (\*Note: the reference listed here is for an advisor, but it may well be that a counselor-level position is more appropriate for the work to be accomplished – at least a counselor in the sense that the industry-standard and best practice reviews reveal that individuals doing advanced career services work require masters degrees.) This specially-trained advisor would help students identify barriers to decision-making and formulate a short term career action plan for career exploration as well as interim academic planning. Ideally, this advisor can refresh his/her skills in career services by completing the blended Career Development Facilitator (CDF) training offered through the National Career Development Association and should already have a strong knowledge of academic advising at SPC. Each campus provost will identify the best way to structure this newly created specially trained career and academic advisor position, taking into consideration the unique needs of each campus and its facilities.

Incoming FTIC students will complete a seven item questionnaire (eventually included within a larger "intake" form completed immediately after placement testing as part of the new Student Coaching System or SCS) whose results will indicate if students have career goals, if they have researched these goals, and if they have linked them with academic programs. These career questions serve to classify students by advising "need" levels. Students are directed to professionals according to their need level: (green level) general advisor, (yellow level) general advisor + Career Information Specialist or (red level) cross-trained career and academic counselor. Remaining fundamental services relating to job search and employment will be handled by current Career Information Specialists (CIS). These individuals will also participate in the Career Development Facilitator (CDF) training.

Future projects to assist this special population of students may include specific SLS1101 College Experience work and a review and update (if needed) of SLS1301 Career and Life Planning class content. SPC will continue to aggressively explore additional internship and job shadowing opportunities, and partnerships with agencies such as Work Net Pinellas. Options such as expanded AS program career advising by academic departments, greater involvement by SLS 1126 mentors, and greater use of targeted faculty-as-advisors can also be explored.

Creating ways to identify our undecided/undeclared students is a major issue that needs to be addressed if we are to assist students who have not made their academic degree program choice. Currently, PeopleSoft is not programmed to differentiate between students seeking a General AA degree (or degree without a template), and those students who have not yet decided upon an academic degree program. This concern was reviewed and programming is scheduled to differentiate the "undecided" and "other" AA students. Other areas under review by the Career Services Project Committee are further refinements in the "flow" of students as they need and/or seek career services, better options for integrating career exploration into academic courses/assignments, and more ways of developing new partnerships and creating better career pathways for SPC academic programs.

Like the integration of academic and career advising and services, another change students will see by fall is the selection of new comprehensive student assessment tools (i.e., FOCUS 2 which addresses all four of the dimensions of career choice – a person’s interests, skills/strengths, values and personality -- and also has a less robust version that can be immediately imbedded in SLS 1101), and back-office software products (e.g., Optimal Resume) that automate many services. These two software solutions will give the newly integrated career and academic advising operations much greater visibility and a tool-set for providing more extensive services tendered more professionally.

With the support of college leadership, SPC can improve career and academic advising services in a cost-effective way. The initiative will also move us closer to aligning our operations with those we identified during the “best policies and practices” review, and with the criteria established by professional organizations and SACS accreditation standards.

### Summary Metrics

1. Summary (why the work is necessary): To start what they finish, students have to know where they are going so they know how, where to begin and where to head to finish. Developmental advising (finding out where students are and then guiding them along a realistic path – sometimes by first identifying it – will aid in retention and completion.
2. Details (features)
  - a. What’s being done: The advising philosophy will change from a prescriptive (fill in the blanks) approach to working with students in defining where they want to go with their lives and careers and then giving them the information and the tools to get there. Since so many students either haven’t decided on or are unsure about their career choice, the initiative includes expanded contact and tools for assisting students in exploring and pursuing career and job choices.
  - b. Who will do the work (advisors, faculty, etc.): The work for this initiative will primarily be accomplished by advisors, including specially trained staff in the Career Development Centers on the campuses. One of the advisors will be housed in each Center, and will focus on working with FTIC students during that critical first term to help them review career options based on strengths, values, personality and interests. Advisors will also integrate their work with SLS 1101/1126 instructors and mentors in an enhanced segment of the SLS 1101 curriculum focusing on careers. Longer term, other staff (e.g., lead instructors in A.S. programs) will be part of a larger team using advanced career planning and placement tools to further prepare students for “what’s next.”
  - c. How will the work be done (faculty referral, monthly, phone calls, computer, meeting, etc.): As part of the intake process in the new Student Coaching System, FTIC students will be asked a series of questions about their life and status including questions about their future career and academic program, specifically if they have one they are pursuing and how certain they are about their choice(s). Based on those responses, students may be directed to work with the Career Center to complete a battery of assessments to help them define potential career interests. This referral will be followed up with phone calls and meetings as necessary. The work will also be coordinated with SLS 1101/1126 instructors and mentors.
3. Timeline
  - a. When will the initiative launch and how will we scale it out, i.e.: Fall 2012 - MLP 3.0, Spring 2013 - MLP 4.0: Developmental advising and the move of an advisor to the Career Center, and the use of new career assessments and related career services and back-office management tools (e.g., resume writing software) will begin during the late summer, following the initial training of all advisors. This summer and early fall will be a “soft/pilot” launch of sorts, since fall term registration is currently underway. Fall 2012 with the full implementation of the Student Coaching System, integration of new tools, and hiring

and training of new Career Center personnel, the full developmental advising and career center referral system will be in place for students registering late in the fall term for Spring, 2013.

- b. Identify student groups being served: As with most of the other “College Experience” components, this initiative will focus on FTIC students. The emphasis will be on working with students during that critical first semester to get them on an appropriate career/program path and then comfortable in using the tools, including MyPlanner, to navigate to the finish line.

4. Assessment measure for success

- a. How will we know the initiative was successful: One of the small sidelights of this initiative is a change in the A.A. sub-plans to differentiate between students who are in an “other” A.A. program path vs. students who are “undecided.” Once in place, the key assessment measure will be the reduction in the number of undecided students. We also will be looking at improving the scores on CSSEE and the “Enrolled Student Survey” cited earlier, that note that advising and career services are important services that are not matched in satisfaction and use.
- b. When will the project be assessed: The project will be assessed annually as part of the surveys noted, and each semester through the B.I. system (looking at both the “undecided” and the retention numbers. It is anticipated that the Career Services group will continue to do focus groups to collect qualitative data on how the new systems and software are being received by students.