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West Chester University
Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs
THESIS



Interrupting the Urgency of the Undecided Student:
An Intentional Advising Approach

Nicole Phillips

May 2021

Interrupting the Urgency of the Undecided Student: An Intentional Advising Approach

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Science

By

Nicole Phillips

May 2021

Acknowledgements

I would first like to simply thank all those who supported me through this journey. Words cannot describe how extremely thankful I am to be surrounded by such loving and supportive people. I truly would not be where I am today without the good company of my family, friends, and professors.

To my siblings, thank you for paving the way and allowing me to be myself. Your unwavering confidence and motivation helped me across the finish line. To my parents, thank you for being the most influential people in my life. Your sacrifices, support, and reassurance guide me in everything that I do.

To Emily, Barrett, and my entire SAC family, thank you for allowing me to grow with you in all the memories we shared the past two years. You gave me a home at West Chester. I would also like to thank my friends for backing me in this entire process. A special shoutout to Delaney for being my thesis partner - we made it!

Finally, thank you to Jeff McLaughlin for all your encouragement through the writing process. I would also like to say a huge thanks to every professor in the HESPA program for being the ultimate role model and support system. I consider myself very lucky to be able to learn under your guidance and strive to be the professional you embody. A special thank you to Jackie Hodes for all that you do for this program and making it a priority to support every single person.

To all those mentioned above and those I might have missed, I would not have been able to finish this thesis without your help. Thank you for believing in me.

Abstract

The most significant decision in college a student can make is their choice of major. A popular opinion in order for students to persist and succeed in college is to declare as early as possible. However, research has found that many students entering higher education are not ready to make a commitment or unsure of their career aspirations. In this thesis, I will present a historical overview of the undecided student by addressing the characteristics such as self-efficacy and anxiety, provide a developmental aspect of indecision such as the lack of career identity, and introduce related theories such as the Career Decision Theory. Through addressing the best practices to help support undecided students, I will propose an intervention in which encourages students to explore their options in college. The Explorer's Pilot program, which will be implemented to incoming first-year students, looks towards the discovery of participant's identity through a career self-assessment, brings understanding to what it means to be an exploring undecided student, and supports individuals through one-on-one advising with an academic advisor. This program intends to challenge students to disrupt the urgency to declare their major by first taking a look at what informs them and then opening their journey to career exploration.

Keywords: Undecided students; Exploring; Major choice

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Chapter One: Introduction

Through my own experiences in higher education, I have developed an interest in how academic advisors can support undecided students through the academic process. In higher education, more students are coming to college with being uncertain about their career aspirations or experience difficulty in making a commitment. The choice of a major can be the most significant decision a college student will make and can impact a student's educational journey (Workman, 2015b). There is an abundant amount of pressure that is placed onto students to know their major at the beginning of their college journey. In this thesis, I will address the concern that rather than making a premature and uninformed decision, practices should be in place to encourage students to explore their options.

My Position

Looking back, applying to college was one of the most stressful experiences I have ever encountered. At the time, I felt like I had no direction. I didn't know what college I wanted to attend, what major I would pick, or what I wanted to do with my life. I just simply knew I had to attend college. I came from a college preparatory high school in Philadelphia with a 100 percent college acceptance rate. We were preparing for higher education the minute we entered the school's doors our freshman year. For college, I applied to multiple schools and I naturally decided to major in Early Childhood Education because I loved working with children. I always thought that if I went in as an undecided student that it would lessen my chances of getting into the university. I typically don't regret decisions I've made because I firmly believe every choice is a learning opportunity, but I often think about what would have happened if I did go into college exploring different academic programs.

However, I landed at a small private university in Pittsburgh and then, after one semester, I transferred to a large public university in Philadelphia to be closer to home. At this time, I still thought I wanted to be a teacher and continued with my major selection at the university. It wasn't until my spring semester second-year when I was placed into a classroom environment that I quickly learned teaching was not meant for me. Once I came to this realization, I was lost in finding a career path that best suited my abilities. I immediately sought out my advisor for help.

I was very fortunate to have an academic advisor who listened to my mid-college life crisis of wanting to switch my major. However, this landed me back at square one of questioning what direction to take. The advisor asked me to name potential majors I would be interested in and suggested neighboring majors since I was still attracted to a career that involved helping and serving others. She suggested Social Work and Human Development in the Education department. She gave me the contact information of the career center, the two heads of the departments, and sent me on my way.

It was challenging to determine what I wanted for my career but even more difficult being shuffled from one place to the next hoping someone was able to help me. I eventually went with the major that fit most with the previous credits I had taken so I would be able to graduate on time. Unfortunately, this seems like a common story within undergraduate students who are looking to change their major. I was lucky enough to enjoy my major and find my own direction through my experiences. Even though my advisor didn't directly help me in the situation of switching my major, I was able to develop a rapport with her during the rest of my time in college. Unconsciously, she helped me recognize that I wanted to help students the way I desperately needed by becoming an academic advisor.

Through the rest of my time at college, I wanted to engage in opportunities to see if academic advising was the path I wanted to go down. My advisor helped me with getting an internship as an academic coach in our success center. This year-long experience solidified everything for me. I was able to put my personal skills to use and find my direction through the experiences I was making.

Even though I look back on this tremulous journey, I still considered it to be a positive experience. I attribute many of my accomplishments to the experiences I endured during those years. If it wasn't for being placed into a classroom early on, I might have graduated as an early education teacher. If I didn't actively seek an internship in a related area to academic advising, I might not have found my intended direction. I believe it was the experiences that I went through that assisted me in my growth and development. These experiences range from finding a university that better suited my needs to being lost in the process of finding a career I could see myself in. But what guided me through and still does is trying something until it fits or in the event that it doesn't, I am able to learn something from that experience or interaction.

Due to this, I now carry this perspective that it is our experiences that forge our growth. I was fortunate enough to be able to explore what did and did not work for me in college. Switching majors benefited me because I was able to see another side of education that I never knew existed. This idea of exploration in college is something I never knew was possible. I was always set up to believe that everything needs to be figured out during your time at the university. I struggled when I went into college thinking I had it all planned out and it turned out it was quite the opposite.

Now, I bring my experiences and perspective with me in everything I do. Through my master's program, I have served as an intern in the academic advising offices at different

universities particularly targeting undecided students exploring their options. I have witnessed students going through occurrences similar to my story. Many students had become frustrated with being undecided and felt the pressure from themselves or others to find their career path. I also had the opportunity to schedule first-year students during orientation and found that many students who had come to the university as undecided had little or no direction in their intended career paths. It made me question as an advisor the resources we were able to give them to help assist the process. At that time, there needed to be more than giving them an array of classes to explore potential majors. Through my interactions of supporting students, I wondered what we could have provided to make students feel more prepared starting the fall semester. This brought me to my thematic concern and proposed intervention of targeting first-year undecided students in the summer session to explore their career and self-identity, gain exposure to occupations, and be supported through a one-on-one session with an academic advisor.

Broad Concern of My Thesis

Choosing a major is understood to be an essential step towards the completion of a degree. However, there is population of students who experience difficulty in making that commitment to a particular major (Bullock-Yowell, et al., 2014). While it varies across higher education institutions, it has been found that a large number of students enter college undecided or end up switching their major at some point during their time there (Bullock-Yowell, et al., 2014). For this reason, higher education professionals must seek to understand why students might be experiencing these struggles and provide ways of assisting this population of students.

There are many reasons a student might have difficulty choosing a major. Previous research has found that students have hard time in the belief of making their own decisions, experience anxiety, or career maturity (Bullock-Yowell, et al., 2014). Some students might

prefer taking a couple of courses before they declare their major. Others might struggle with their identity, have a lack of knowledge in potential careers, or decision-making skills (Bullock-Yowell, et al., 2014). However, it has been found that students who experience being undecided have benefited from increased access to information, career options, and interventions (Bullock-Yowell, et al., 2014). It has also been found that it can be a healthy process for students who are exploring their choice in major (Bullock-Yowell, et al., 2014).

In understanding why students encounter these barriers to choosing a major, it will assist advisors to be more effective in the resources they provide. It is also important to acknowledge what resources are out there for this population of students and what is lacking. Currently, institutions are trying to improve their academic success for undecided students through their first-year seminar course (Tampke & Durodoye, 2013). Another approach has been instilling a career-focused learning community in the residential halls (Tampke & Durodoye, 2013). There has even been an approach where academic advisors are living in residential halls combining their job as a resident director to work with undecided students (Workman, 2015a).

There has also been a notion for universities to prohibit the choice of major until the second year to prevent students from making the wrong choice. Liz Freedman (2013) expresses this idea as a way for students to be intentionally choosing their major instead of going through harsh implications of making the wrong choice. Through understanding the literature of the advisement of an undecided student coupled with the best practices, students need resources and time to explore their interests rather than being matriculated with an uninformed choice. To execute this idea, I plan to host a two day workshop emphasizing the students right to explore by understanding their career identity while working with an academic advisor.

Preview of Thesis

All the previous research has warranted concern for this population of students. Through my thesis, I want to understand why undecided students are encountering these barriers. I also want to look at how advisors can guide these students within the academic process while also encouraging them to explore their options.

Throughout this thesis, I will talk about my theoretical frameworks, such as my philosophy of education. In this chapter, I will delve into the idea of how our past and present experiences are a big contributor to our education through what Dewey calls the principle of continuity. In Chapter Three, I will lay out my research collected by giving a historical perspective of the undecided student, what factors might constitute a student to be undecided and how career and identity development might coincide with this population of students. This chapter will also look at the concern for advising now, such as promoting students to hold off on their decisions, as well as best practices in advising today. This overview will then transition in how the research based practices will be included in my own intervention, which will be described in Chapter Four. This chapter will introduce my intervention including the purpose, goals, and theories guiding my program. Finally, I will conclude my work with Chapter Five on the implementation of my program, along with the assessment and limitations to my design.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks

Philosophy of Education

We tend to believe that education is a basic right or need that is available to all individuals. However, this idea of a quality education is interpreted differently by many. When considering my personal pillars of what education should be and look like, I believe it should be equal for all no matter race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Educational professionals should not only meet the needs of every student, but we should also be owing educational debts to students who may have been neglected in previous years. This idea of owing past educational debts means we are breaking the cycle of passing students along the educational system and, instead, providing what they need (R. Whiting, personal communication, September, 2017). Also, I firmly believe that our past and present experiences are a big contributor to our education. Finally, the last pillar of my philosophy of education is that students must be critical examiners and be consciously aware of different perspectives.

If we truly believe that education is a basic right, every child should receive the same quality of education. One way to do this is through meeting the needs of students. Not one student is alike and some might struggle with time-management, motivation, interest, while others are challenged through decision-making, or anxiety. As we learn more about the educational system, it is apparent that every student learns through different approaches, paces, and experiences in and outside the classroom. Practices such as lecturing and regurgitating information to students are no longer effective means to supplying a quality education. Paulo Freire (1970) describes this type of learning as filling the students with the contents of the teacher's narrative. This idea of education now turns students into objects and just filling their minds with an abundance of information. We can see this in the classroom where teachers

deposit information to the students who in return patiently waits, memorizes the information, and the cycle continues.

This method, also known as the banking concept, is one without creativity in which students are a means to an end (Freire, 1970). In this method, students are praised and judged on how good of a student they are based on their willingness to obtain information without questioning. Freire (1970) makes the argument that this is another form of oppression due to the lack of questioning and just accepting what is given to students. Rather than lecture styles, a new way of learning would be more beneficial to students, such as the interchangeable role between students and teachers (Freire, 1970). This can be seen through educators not automatically assuming the role of a 'teacher' or 'expert' but can also be a learner in the classroom (Freire, 1970). In other words, everyone is jointly responsible for growth and has the capacity to do so.

However, as systems are expanding into a new age of learning, not every child makes the cut. The quality of education is not the same across the board. In saying this, what needs to change? I argue that one way we can change the educational system is through a concept called educational debts. Through my undergraduate years in the college of education, this term 'educational debts' has always stuck with me throughout my learning. Unlike in terms of money, educational debts are those in which a student is entitled to for a quality education but instead was deprived throughout their years in the system (R. Whiting, personal communication, September, 2017). I believe that every child is entitled to a quality education, one that is challenging and also accepting. It is this type of education that is most likely to promote positive growth inside and outside the classroom.

In education, we tend to look to the future. We assess where students are currently, where students should be, and the journey to get there. However, I think constantly looking to the future

could be detrimental to a student's success. It is critical to also understand their past experiences and assess how a student got to where they are in that moment. Whether that means examining what was missing in a student's educational journey or what past experiences have formed them, taking a peek into the past can be just as important as forging them into the future. This idea of past experiences shaping the people we are today is something that John Dewey (1938) argued. He went on to explain that every experience lives on in a further experience or what he defined as the principle of continuity (Dewey, 1938). A part of what a person goes through is going to be carried onto the next experience and so on. We hold traces from each experience and carry them with us to the next interaction. In return, that experience can shape our future occurrences due to what had happened before.

This theory of principle of continuity can also tie into the idea of paying educational debts throughout learning. In this case, educators would have to look into past to understand what the child was lacking in their educational development. Based off this theory, their lack of experiences has shaped their learning for the future. One way to attempt to undo this is providing what should have been there in the first place. However, parts of the past are permeant, but I believe we can try to make up for those experiences.

Now that the past is considered, I think present experiences also play a huge role in our education. The idea Dewey (1938) presents about educative and mis-educative experiences is something I think highly of and should be considered when shaping young minds. Dewey (1938) explains this concept as not every experience will be educative and some may limit the capacity for future growth. This type of mis-educative experience is stunting the growth of students by not allowing them to have their own opinions and find their own truth.

In order to avoid this kind of mis-educative experience, educators have to instill students with positive experiences. In all, this would allow students to grow and enlarge the possibility for growth. The lessons learned from this experience can expand what a student may go through in the future. This idea goes back to what Dewey explains as the principle of continuity, in which a positive experience in this instance will allow for more growth in the future (Dewey, 1938).

What you created yesterday will create today or will create tomorrow, but the positive experience would have deepened the quality of your involvement. In this case, it is the educator's role to put students in the position for a positive experience.

Since I believe experiences contribute to education, it is only fair to conclude that not every experience is learned in the classroom. I think a person's environment is something that can heavily affect a student and every educator should consider. Ultimately, everyone is exposed to a different environment, in which there may be similarities, but never one experience is the same. Educators should be mindful that each individual child might not have learned something in their past classes or have a surrounding environment similar to a 'typical' student. It is the educator's responsibility to conduct an environment that is going to shape positive experiences that will lead to the growth and development of the student. That might be through looking in the past and focusing on the present in order for students to acquire skills that could possibly help in the future. However, this idea of constantly prepping students for the future may mean that we are sacrificing the present. Not that I completely disagree with looking towards the future, but we should be making more of an emphasis on the here and now.

If we want any change, it has to start with our education and how students should be critically aware and questioning societal norms. As educators, the aim is to provide opportunities for potential growth and transformation of a person. In order for growth, students need to be

taught to think for themselves and develop their own opinions. One potential way is for students to be reflective in their learning and aware of their past knowledge and how that can be translated into the present and future. Education should be a universal option where it is equal for all, looks at the student as whole, and teaches them to be reflective.

By establishing the pillars by which my philosophy of education resides, it can also be addressed in my thematic concern. As stated, my three pillars rely on equality by looking at a holistic view of the student, contributing past and present experiences to who they are, and encouraging students to be critically aware of themselves and other perspectives. As my thematic concern investigates how academic advisors can support undecided students, the values and philosophies will inform and be implemented in my proposed intervention.

In academic advising, there is not a specific approach to help guide and support an undecided student. In providing equal access to every student, advisors must look at the student holistically to understand who they are. Just as Dewey (1938) described the banking model as an ineffective means to provide information, using a transactional approach to advising will result in a similar fashion. This transactional approach in advising is what Burns Crookston called perspective advising (Wanko, 2018). This form of advising is more of an informational exchange. There needs to be an interchangeable role between students and advisors that allows students to have a stake in their own experience (Wanko, 2018). For instance, it is the academic advisor's role to guide students but ultimately it is up to the student to determine what is best suited for them.

A significant aspect to advising undecided students is looking at identity development. Through research, it is known that career identity is a contributor to a student's undecidedness (Gordon & Steele, 2015). Erikson (1968) reported that identity formation is a critical aspect in an

individual's adolescence. One way to build upon those skills with a student would be to assess their past and present experiences that contributes to who they are. One advising perspective called the developmental approach focuses on students assimilating new knowledge and behaviors and integrating those patterns to their new experiences (Gordon & Steele, 2015). Students are then able to bring what they previously learned into their new experience. As an advisor, it is extremely beneficial to sit down with students to assess what might be influencing their indecision. Advisors can develop these skills through meaningful and reflective conversations that facilitate skills such as problem solving, decision-making, and goal setting (Wanko, 2018).

Advising undecided students can be a challenge because students are just at the beginning stages of their identity development. For students to be critically aware means they are able to be reflective in who they are. One advising model, called the Career Decision Theory, explains that in order to make a decision, individuals must go through a series of tasks in which they are critically exploring who they are (Gordon & Steele, 2015). These stages will help them identify their strengths, establish goals, and internalize their decisions. As an academic advisor, their role is the help guide students to making this realization. Building upon my philosophy of education, such as providing equal access, holistically looking at who students are, and urging them to be the agents of change in their own lives can help develop my intentions in higher education.

Purpose of Higher Education

While formed with humble intentions, higher education institutions have the capacity to operate as an elaborate system functioning similarly to a business model (Labree, 2017). Universities have turned into a dominate system, in which money, accreditation, and status are largely at the heart of institutions (Labaree, 2017). As a whole, universities have many flaws

whether that be the lack of access or focusing on the numbers of retaining students and graduation rates. With the formation of universities, there is a social exclusion where certain institutions have the prestige and status and in return can be selective in their applicant of students. With that status comes more opportunities, such as better jobs and pay, but it is not accessible to everyone (Labaree, 2017). However, formed out of that hierarchical system, is the development of colleges that are more accessible, but may bare the least award compared to those with a higher status (Labaree, 2017).

With keeping those flaws in mind, universities still have a common purpose of centering their success around helping students both academically and socially. While keeping attendance and completion rates up is important, it should not be the main purpose or focus of higher education. The purpose of higher education is to provide a safe environment that encourages students to grow, explore, and learn more about themselves inside and outside the classroom. Universities should not only value education as a top priority but create meaningful experiences. It has been found that for students to persist they must be integrated both academically and socially (Leppel, 2001). While students main concern for attending college is to get a job after graduation, universities give students the opportunity to learn about their identity on their own terms. There are many students where college is the first chance they have to explore their interests aside from parental influences. The college experience gives students the opportunity to make decisions on their own, grow independently, and mature during their undergraduate years.

Academic advisors play a huge role in a student's journey by helping form their career and identity development. They are able to make a major impact on students by guiding them through skills such as self-efficacy, decision-making, goal setting, and identifying strengths and interests pertaining to their career choice. Advisors have the unique job in which encourages

students to form these skills through their academics but also through their experiences, such as internships, clubs, or activities. As mentioned before, students need to feel connected to the university both academically and socially. While, advising is a part of academic affairs, advisors also have the chance to connect students outside of academics and encourage them to get involved on campus, which will also help form those developmental skills.

Those who work at universities, whether in academic or student affairs, have the distinctive job to bridge the gap between students feeling like a number in a large institution to guiding them to their independent growth. Since students are now asserting their independence during their time at college, a higher education professional has the opportunity to guide them while allowing them to make their own decisions. This could be accomplished through challenging students on new ways of thinking and developing their growth with positive experiences. It is important to look at the student holistically by observing the student as whole rather than just their academics. Student affairs professionals can look at their past, consider what might have been missing in the process, and provide help but with the intention that students can then independently achieve this on their own. Keeping these perspectives in mind, this philosophy and understanding of how higher education institutions operate can also translate in my proposed intervention by taking a critical action approach.

Critical Action Research

Critical Action Research is the act of questioning how we understand where our knowledge is coming from and how we convey that knowledge to others (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003). Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury define action research as, “bringing together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions of pressing concern to people and more generally the flourishing of individual person and their

communities.” (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003, p. 10-11) In this, critical action research’s purpose is to have a shared commitment to social change.

One guiding practice of critical action research is to embrace that knowledge is socially constructed and challenges unjust social, political, and economic systems (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003). In order to be a critical examiner, you must look through the lens of individuals who are experiencing those current inequalities. This type of research includes the respect for people’s knowledge and addressing the issues confronting them and their communities (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003). It should be the individuals going through the current situation to determine how to bring about change rather than the experts. In the same way Freire (1970) believed in educators not automatically assuming the role of the expert, action researchers also guide themselves in being reflective and learning from the surrounding community. Reasonably, a critical action examiner is one who works in conjunction with the community or individuals to achieve the desired change. Brydon-Miller (2003) describes an action researcher by saying they embody, “A respect for people and for the knowledge and experiences they bring to the research process, a belief in the ability of democratic processes to achieve positive social change, and a commitment to action, these are the basic values which underlie our common practice as action researchers” (p. 15).

This framework is an important lens to use throughout higher education because as student affairs professionals we are advocating for the students we serve. Critical action research embodies all the characteristics and standards of what should be provided in higher education. Students have spaces in higher education to be themselves and critically aware of the actions and knowledge they are obtaining. When considering students experiences and their future, they should be consulted on what they feel are the best practices and what changes need to be made.

Student affairs has the potential to operate just as the critical action framework, as in the researcher should be reflective and the individuals immersed in the issue be the expert. Students themselves know best on the resources they need. Rather, higher education professionals could be a guiding force in their life to help them with their journey.

Through using this framework on my thematic concern, I am looking at how academic advisors can guide and support undecided students to their career path. Through this lens, academic advisors could give students the tools necessary to determine their strengths, skills, and interest that will eventually lead them to a career choice. Since, this can be a difficult decision, students should not be alone on this journey, but rather have the active support of advisors to guide their way.

When working with undecided students, many students are not ready to make a decision when entering college and need assistance with career and identity development (Gordon & Steele, 2015). My proposed intervention to help support this population of students is hosting a two day bridge program in conjunction with the university's orientation for 20 first-year students. Students will be able to engage in their self-exploration process by introducing a career identity self-assessment, potential majors, and one-on-one experience with an academic advisor to analyze their strengths and interests. Through the lens of critical action research and the philosophy position, this intervention is intended for students to start their own self-discovery with the help of academic advisors and peer mentors. The design of the program is for students to take away as much as their willing to put into it, with the hopes that it will impact their future experiences. Rather than focusing on a transactional format, students will be able to be reflective in their own career identity and hear perspectives from other's experiences.

In the next chapter, I am going to review the literature related to the academic advisement of undecided students, in which highlights the historical context as well as areas such as characteristics of undecided students, developmental aspects of indecision, the Career Development Theory, and related factors. I will also address the current state of advising undecided students by now addressing this population as ‘exploratory’ and introducing practices that encourages students to explore their options.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

As the enrollment of undecided students continue, more undergraduates will be entering college not ready to make a decision about their career (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Advisors need to have the ability to address students' needs and barriers, in which they experience in order to deliver an effective approach on decision making (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014). Advisors also need to understand the decision-making process to choose appropriate techniques for helping undecided students gain direction (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014). To implement these techniques, we first must learn the all-encompassing layers of who an undecided student can be, which will be outlined in this chapter. Before introducing the historical overview, I would like to address some common definitions used within this population of students.

An undecided student is defined as a student who enters higher education without declaring a major. On the contrary, a decided student is one who enters college with being accepted into a specific major. It is also important to note that as more research has been conducted there has been a recent accepted change in language to describe an undecided student. This change, while not accepted universally, now describes undecided students as exploratory. By calling an undecided student exploratory, this changes the narrative and negative undertone of a student not knowing their career intentions when arriving to college. While these two terms are interchangeable, most if not all research refers to students as undecided. For the purpose of this review, I will also refer to this population of students as undecided.

History

Much research has been done throughout the history of learning more about undecided students in higher education. According to Gordan and Steele (2015) in their book, *The Undecided College Student: An Academic and Career Advising Challenge*, the first recorded

study about undecided students was conducted by R.B. Cunliffe in 1927. This study, which was published in the *Personal Journal*, found that nine percent of the students who responded to the survey reported they were undecided (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Since then, researchers have recorded as low as nine or as high as 61 percent of students as being undecided (Gordan, 2015).

In the early research, scholars were looking at indecision compared to other problems, such as students attending college versus those who were not (Kilzer, 1935; Gordan & Steele, 2015). Researchers were focused on differentiating students who were undecided compared from those who were decided (Ashby, Wall, & Osipow, 1966; Gordon & Steele, 2015). Early studies also wanted to hone in on what caused indecision from occurring in college students. They concentrated on psychological factors such as anxiety and identity (Gordan & Steele, 2015; Goldstein, 1965). Researchers also looked at areas such as career decision problems or difficulties and career self-efficacy as having a direct or indirect link to students causing them to be undecided (Gordon & Steele, 2015).

Through this historical overview of the undecided student, we will look at early research of indecision itself, the characteristics of an undecided student, who has the potential to be an undecided student along with influences, and why students might have a hard time deciding. As my thematic concern concentrates on how advisors can support students exploring their options, there must be an all-encompassing overview of who these students are and the challenges they face.

Indecision

Research suggests that undecided college students are comprised of a complex, heterogenous group with their reasons for indecision being varied (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Career indecision is one of the most researched issues in vocational psychology. Researchers

have reported many different factors related to indecision among college students. These differences are largely due to varied definitions of indecision among researchers (Gordan & Steele, 2015). As previously stated, in the beginning of the research, experts were looking at how students make decisions rather than concentrating on their indecision (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Today, indecision is considered an important topic on its own, as evidenced by research on the causes and challenges undecided students could face. According to Gordan, indecision is currently considered as a developmental phase that is part of the decision-making process.

Within the topic of indecision, a common interest area would be identifying the characteristics influencing indecision. Tyler (1953) was one of the first researchers to claim a number of reasons for career indecision. She found that a student's family, such as parent expectations, or the opinions of others was a relevant reason for students deterring their decisions. According to Gordan, one of the earliest studies on undecided students was completed by Holland and Nichols with their purpose of validating an indecision scale (Holland & Nichols, 1964; Gordan & Steele, 2015). During the process, reasons connected to undecided students were identified. They found through their study that students' personal development and intellectual curiosity could affect their indecision. Simply put, students were having a hard time narrowing down their choices and interests (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Other researchers such as Zytowski (1965), found that students' indecision might represent their avoidance of committing themselves to a career direction.

Another notable cause for career indecision could be decision-making difficulties. According to Brown (2012) in summarizing the research of career decision literature, career choice difficulties include prior decisions made, which could be portrayed as a lack of readiness. Undecided students may also encounter decision-making difficulties throughout the process,

such as a lack of information, unreliable information, and internal conflicts such as their identity (Brown et al., 2012).

Characteristics of Undecided Students

Throughout the early studies on indecision, characteristics started emerging from the literature and gave educators a better idea of who these students were. As described as a heterogenous group, there is the potential to have multiple causes and characteristics of an undecided student. Common characteristics mentioned in literature of an undecided student were choice anxiety, career identity, career self-efficacy, and maturity (Gordan & Steele, 2015).

Early in the research, Goodstein (1965) looked at the concept of choice anxiety in undecided students, which is still considered as a characteristic occurring today. Through his research, he found that students were having a hard time making a decision, which provoked a feeling of anxiety (Goodstein, 1965). He also noted that the “societal or educational pressure to make a choice intensified their anxiety” (p. 32). He also found a second set of students that had a hard time making a decision about anything (Goodstein, 1965). He described this type of anxiety dealing more with the process itself rather than making the decision (Goodstein, 1965).

According to Gordon and Steele (2015), research has confirmed that in most undecided students there is a presence of anxiety. Understanding what is causing anxiety in undecided students, such as the process or the decision itself, could provide the clarity for advisors and students on where to start their development.

Along with anxiety, career identity has also been identified as a large contributor to students' indecisiveness (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Erikson (1968) reported that identity formation is a critical aspect in an individual's adolescence. He found that when a person's vocational identity is not formed, making a career decision is challenging. Marcia (1966) was

able to categorize four ego identity development phases based off of Erikson's ego-identity status (Gordon, 2015). The four phases, which will also be addressed further in this paper, are

- Diffusion which is defined as "individuals who have not made a commitment, but have experienced an exploration or crisis period" (Gordon & Steele, 2015; p. 35).
- Foreclosure which is "referred to individuals who have made a commitment without an exploration or crisis period" (Gordon & Steele, 2015; p. 35).
- Moratorium which has "indicated that an individual has been involved in a period of crisis" (Gordon & Steele, 2015; p. 35).
- Identity Achievement which is defined as "individuals who have experienced exploration or a crisis before making a commitment" (Gordon & Steele, 2015; p. 35).

Based off of Marcia four ego identity status, Gordan and Kline (1989) assessed the relationship between career decidedness and identity. They found that students who had made a decision about their careers were higher on the achievement stage compared to those who were undecided. This achievement stage refers to those who have experienced exploration before making a commitment (Marcia, 1966). Meanwhile, undecided students were more likely to experience the stages of diffusions and moratorium (Gordan & Kline, 1989). These two stages are where individuals have not made a commitment and will experience a crisis. This idea of identity development will be further discussed in the next section. One important aspect that Gordan and Steele (2015) highlights from research using the Marcia ego-identity is that career indecision might be placed in a more positive light if there were consideration for identity exploration. If students were given a meaningful exploration experiences, it may be a better alternative for those who are not ready to make a career decision.

More recently researchers have been looking at characteristics such as career self-efficacy and maturity among undecided college students. Career maturity is defined as the readiness of an individual to make an informed, age appropriate career decision. The earliest studies completed on career maturity was by Donald Super (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Through his research, it has made professionals look at how career maturity is a critical task that needs to be addressed especially in individualized advising (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Too often, we see students being forced by universities to make decisions at the time they are not developmentally ready (Gordan & Steele, 2015).

Self-efficacy is also important influence on undecided students. Self-efficacy can be defined as the confidence individuals have in their ability to master tasks. Early research on self-efficacy in relation to indecision found that students who have less confidence in their ability were more likely to be undecided (Gordon & Steele, 2015; Taylor & Betz, 1983). Students may limit their goals for a particular career because they do not believe they can reach their career aspirations (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014). Advisors working with undecided students should consider increasing small accomplishable goals to build their confidence. Bullock-Yowell et al (2014) suggested, “Collaborating with students to set smaller, easily achievable tasks that demonstrate to them their ability to successfully navigate the decision-making process will incrementally boost their sense of personal accomplishment” (p. 30). Having a sense of career self-efficacy means that students will be more open to exploring career alternatives (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014). Forming this skillset will not only help students find potential careers but will also equip them with the confidence to make the decision (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014).

Anxiety, identity development, self-efficacy, and maturity are only a small portion of the characteristics of undecided students. According to Brown and Rectors (2008), they have

identified over 50 variables that has been investigated as common characteristics of indecision (Gordan & Steele, 2015). A few recorded include career information needs, lack of motivation, career myths, internal and external barriers, and chronic indecisiveness. (Gordon & Steele, 2015; Brown and Rectors, 2008).

Influences on a Career Decision

Along with understanding potential causes and characteristics of undecided students, literature valued looking at possible influences on making a career decision. Similar to previous discussions, this section has the potential to have many influences. For this paper, I will be looking at family influences and retention on its potential impact on an undecided student.

Family relations in conjunction to career decisions have been studied for a long time and continue to hold weight in this discussion. The role that parents play in a student's career decision could be crucial because they have the potential to be the biggest influence in their life (Berríos-Allison, 2005). One studied completed by Simmons, (2008) found that students relied on their parents for advice about career decisions and used them for processing their decisions. With this type of influence, families have the opportunity to be supportive toward students in their indecision by encouraging them to explore course in college. According to one study completed by Workman (2015b), majority of students found their family members to be a positive influence, however some were beginning to feel the pressure to make career decisions towards their second year of college. While some students may have parents very involved in their career choice, others may have a lack of family influence (Workman, 2015b). In this scenario, students do not see their family as a large influence, whether that is positive or negative, on their decision making (Workman, 2015b).

While most parents are supportive in students career decision, there is a high level of involvement parents play in the current generation (Workman, 2015b). Advisors working with students who struggle with indecision need to understand the family influence whether that be a positive experience, negative experience, or students feeling completely disconnected toward their families. By understanding this family structure, advisor can identify the influences being placed onto student and help them realize their own wants and interests.

Along with family influences, retention has also been a highly research topic area, not only for how it affects students but regarding higher education in general. When students drop out there is a large negative outcome for students, such as student loan debt. However, there is a lack of research done to compare the persistence of undecided students to those are declared. Only one study was completed in the past 30 years in which compared the retention of decided and undecided students (Leppel, 2001; Spight, 2020). Spight (202) found that, “The lack of scholarship on the topic has resulted in administrators and advising practitioners frequently operating under the unsubstantiated belief that major declaration helps students persist to graduation” (p. 95). In the Leppel (2001) study, it found that compared to declared students, undecided students performed at a lower rate, both academically and in terms of persistence. However according to the recent study completed by Spight (2020), there are no differences, in terms of persistence, between students who are undecided compared to those who are declared. Research has found that it is the students matriculated as declared and later change their major who are at risk of dropping out of college (Spight, 2020).

Contrary to the popular opinion, undecided students are not at a higher risk of dropping out (Spight, 202). The implications of this new data could prove influential for policies and the way we look at support for undecided students. Since the lack of early declaration of a major

does not affect the persistence of a student, policies and programs should be designed to allow students to take the time to explore possible majors (Spight, 2020). Academic advisors, who largely play a role in guiding students in their exploration, should support students without pressuring them to quickly declare. Sometimes, it takes time for students to find a major that is compatible to their interests and requires a moment to explore, especially since students might be unaware of all the academic programs (Spight, 2020).

Types of Undecided Students

Now that the characteristics and influential impacts have been discussed, it is time to address who are undecided students. The largest population of undecided students would comprise of incoming first year students. This group might not be ready to commit to an academic major at the time they enter college. In order to get accurate advising interventions, Gordan and Steele (2015) offer suggestions for discussions with first year students such as “determining their level on indecision, reasoning for entering college, and why they are undecided” (p. 102). Although first year students make up the largest group of undecided students, they are also the easiest to approach through an advisor’s lens (Gordan & Steele, 2015). She suggests determining specific areas of need based on individual advising sessions. The area of need could be classified as informational, developmental, or personal concerns, as described in the following.

Similar to previous research, Gordan and Steele (2015) describes undecided students as lacking the information needed to make a decision. What she describes as informational needs, students require assistance in assessing their personal interests and goals, as well as awareness on information about academic or occupational areas (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Even though most universities list academic majors and curricular information on the website, undecided students

might need the assistance of interpreting the information (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Students might also need help understanding what a job might entail. For instance, advisors work with students to understand their interests and skills and whether or not this aligns with the skills and strengths needed for a particular career.

Undecided students also lack the skills of forming a decision, which has been seen in the previous literature. Gordan and Steele (2015) describe this as developmental skills in which they might know the sufficient information but need advising guidance for forming decision-making skills. Rather than being impulsive with decision making, students can talk with academic advisors to be more reflective in their thinking. Finally, students might be fighting personal conflicts or concerns such as not having the same values or interests as the job entails. For instance, Gordan and Steele (2015) give the example of a student wanting to make a lot of money but wanting to go into teaching or social work. Students in this category might also have a conflict in interest and ability. By saying this, students might not have the strongest ability in the major they are interested in or their strengths may reside in a major in which they have limited enjoyment. Another instance would be having an energy conflict where they can't put in the amount of energy to obtain their goal. Finally, students could also be in conflict with someone who is close to them, such as family member. Similar to family influences discussed in the section above, these students might want to please someone instead of separating their own needs and wants from others.

Sampson et al., (2004) were also able to outline three types of undecided students. They found that students could be undecided-deferred in which students put off their decision in order to explore by taking a few classes before they declare their major. They also felt students could be undecided-developmental, which is similar to what Gordan (2015) described as lacking the

identity development to make a decision. Another aspect considered by Sampson et al. (2004) is undecided-multipotential. They found students could have an overabundance of interests and talents and the options could be overwhelming.

Through individual advising, it is important to identify how a student might fall into these specific areas as it could be the causes of a student's indecision. This could also be done through group advising or a seminar course by students exploring their identify through self-assessments and allowing major exploration.

Another group of students that is important to consider would be first-generation undecided students. These students are the first in their family to attend college and may need assistance. In addition to the general informational concerns such as registering for classes and what courses to take, first-generation student might be less familiar with technology or less likely to have previous access to tutors or support services (Gordan & Steele, 2015; Elam, 2007). Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) suggested that first-generation students might need assistance with developing self-efficacy skills, goal setting, and determining outcomes from their college experience. Recommendations to help target this specific group of students include interventions that are creative, such as reaching out to older students who identify as first-generation (Petty, 2014).

Another key group of undecided students would be those who are upper class students. Typically, universities require students to identify their major by their third year. However, even then, students still might not be clear on their direction. Gordan and Steele (2015), said that "even though these students may have tested their ideas through coursework and other experiences, they still find it difficult to narrow down their choices and is forced to make a

decision” (p. 118). In this instance, a more confrontive conversation needs to happen where the advisor is discussing what potential majors to give up or how to combine them.

Another instance of an advanced undecided student would be one that may not be excelling in the intended major and needs to reset their interests and goals. Another example would be students who want to declare a major that is popular beyond university limits on admittance. Gordan and Steele (2015) describe these as oversubscribed majors such as nursing, engineering, and computer science, in which the college cannot handle the amount of desire for the major. Another reason could potentially be that upper-class students are not ready to make a choice. In some experiences, the student might not have enough exposure to exploration courses, work experiences, or information. A student might identify with one or multiple experiences described above and need to be encouraged to explore to prevent them from getting to their third-year and then asking for help.

The three subgroups of undecided students described above are just a small portion of the potential categories for this area. A more in-depth type of undecided upper-class students would also include those who change their major, student athletes, older students, transfer students, those who come from community college, international students, and multicultural students (Gordan & Steele, 2015). For the purpose of the history of who could be an undecided student, I wanted to encompass the most well-known types but acknowledge that there are many other subgroups.

Related Factors

An overlapping concern when looking at undecided students is understanding identity development. Even though there is not a specific theory or approach to target undecided students, it important for advisors to understand the full grasp of theoretical approaches to recognize how

students engage academically and within themselves (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Briefly described in the above sections, researchers have made the connections in looking at how we can assist undecided students and understand their development. This type of development is important when considering how students view themselves and how they face issues as their lives progress. A person's development occurs throughout their life span and is composed of different stages. Two identity development theories relevant to college students are those of Baxter Magolda (2001) on Self Authorship and Marcia's (1966) Ego Identity Statuses.

Developmental Approach Overview

When looking at undecided students through a developmental perspective, we are looking at different characteristics and needs that are specific to each student. Gordan and Steele (2015) approach the developmental methodology through a perspective of viewing undecided students as those who are engaged in developmental tasks to adapt and change rather than individuals looking for an academic major. Through this approach, we must look through the lens that all individuals develop through a continuous cycle at their own pace. Through previous research, we have learned that undecided students are heterogenous, implicating that professionals cannot easily group them together or make generalized assumptions about them.

An aspect of the development approach would be to view a student's life or development in stages. This could be beneficial to understanding undecided students by looking at their level of maturity or readiness to commit to a career (Gordan & Steele, 2015). Many undecided students are not ready to make important decisions at the start of the college journey (Gordan & Steele, 2015). According to Gordan and Steele (2015), through the approach, "as students assimilate new knowledge and learn new behaviors, they must integrate them with existing knowledge patterns, so they can function successfully at more complex and appropriate levels of

thought and behavior” (p. 71). In order to continue the cycle of these stages, students must bring what they previously learned to their new developmental stage.

Baxter Magolda’s Self Authorship Theory explains four phases in the journey to find one’s beliefs, identity, and interests (Patton et al., 2016). The first phase, following formulas, talks about how young adults follow the plans laid out from external forces, however, they are framed to sound like their own idea (Patton et al., 2016). For undecided students, they might have a hard time coming to terms with their own choices because they might have been heavily influenced by a family member (Leppel, 2001). The second phase, titled crossroads, explains how the progression along the journey only to find out the initial plans do not work well, and new plans are needed. (Patton et al., 2016). This phase also describes this idea of being defined by others and seeing the need to create their own sense of self. However, young adults are not ready to act on their desire to be autonomous and may fear the reactions of others (Patton et al., 2016). This phases also describes a lack of fulfillment. The third phase talks about becoming the author of one’s life and the ability to choose one’s beliefs (Patton et al., 2016). Through exploration and self-knowledge in learning how to understand themselves through their interests and values, students will be able to come to their own realization of what they want. Finally, the fourth phase is internal foundation or a sense of who they are (Patton et al., 2016).

One thing Baxter Magolda Theory of Self Authorship does not address is this idea of exploration or how to get to each phase. Similar to this theory, Marcia Ego Identity Statuses addresses identity development through how adolescents are experiencing exploration and commitment. This theory focuses on four statuses to explain how young adults experience and resolve a crisis through actively questioning their values and goals along with attaching ownership (Patton et al., 2016). It is also interesting to note that there is no order to these

statuses. Instead of being fixed stages in the student's development, this theory focuses on the ability of it being flexible and fluid, in which students can continuously flow in and out of these statuses.

The first status of this identity development is called foreclosure. In this status, students accept the views and values of their parents. There is no exploration but rather commitment to other's views, which is similar to what I explain in the first phase of the Self Authorship Theory (Patton et al., 2016). Students who are experiencing this status may not want to go in a different direction because of authoritative figure in their life. Moratorium is another status and is described by Marcia where students are questioning values of other in order to find their own (Patton et al., 2016). However, in this stage students may be exploring but there is little to no commitment. During this status, students might experience anxiety and grappling between forming their own identity and conforming to the authority of others. The next status is described as identity achievement, in which is most likely to come after a period of crisis and exploration (Patton et al., 2016). Students are able to sort out their choices and in return are capable of making a commitment. In the identity achievement status, students will also be able to establish goals (Patton et al., 2016). Throughout this status, students are experiencing the most exploration because they have a solid enough identity foundation to investigate alternatives and demonstrate risk-taking. Finally, the last stage is diffusion where students are unable to explore and commit (Patton et al., 2016). These students are more likely to go with the flow and could potentially experience a lack of interest in exploring their life choices.

Reiterating, these stages presented by Marcia could be fluid and students may experience any one of these statuses at a given time. In terms of undecided students, academic advisors' goal would be students obtaining the identity achievement status, where they have a solid foundation

of their identity to explore and make decisions. However, these four statuses are helpful to advisors in understanding where students might be in their own identity development and assist them through these stages.

Career Decision Theory

Since advising and career services go hand in hand, it is also important to look at the relationship of how undecided students relate to their career development. One theory discussed is the Career Decision Theory by David Tiedeman and R. O'Hara (1963). This theory explains that in order to make a decision, individuals must go through a series of tasks. In preparation of making a decision, the process is in two phases, planning and action. However, most students who are considered undecided will go through the planning phase in order to come to a career decision. The planning phase is comprised of four stages, which are relevant to understanding an undecided student.

The first stage described in this theory is the exploration stage. Students will experience anxiety about the future, unsure of the process of exploration, and have no plan in place. Particularly for undecided students, this stage will help them identify their strengths and how this will relate to academic programs. Once the exploration stage is established, students will approach the crystallization stage. In this stage, students are progressing toward a choice and recognizing alternatives. They might have made a tentative choice on their career decision, as well as weighing the benefits and challenges to other majors. The crystallization stage is where many undecided students are at in their career development. It is important that students feel supported through their exploration of alternative majors, whether that be through accurate information or academic courses.

The next stage Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963) describe is the choice stage. This is where students made a commitment to a particular goal. Most students who enter college are starting in the choice stage. If a student's choice is realistic, they are able to move onto the next stage. However, if the choice they made is not realistic, they may regress. A student may go through the stages at any time and recycle them when a career decision is to be made. Finally, the clarification stage is the last stage in the planning cycle. This stage is where student internalize their decision since they have committed to a major. It is then the advisor's job to help an undecided student to recognize a plan of action.

Related Professional Experience

A main contributor to developing my thematic concern was my internship as an academic advisor. With the opportunity to work in New Student Orientation at a satellite campus, I was able engage with incoming first-year students. My main role in this internship was to meet with incoming students and guide them through the scheduling process, including picking out their Fall semester classes. This temporary advising position was not geared towards a specific major, so I was able to work with various student populations. I worked with international students, student participating in bridge programs, decided majors, but mostly helped those who were undecided.

A large portion of my job consisted of two things: the preparation for the advising appointment and covering resources in the initial meeting. Since this advising appointment was part of orientation, there were tasks incoming students had to complete before meeting with me. Students were to complete their math placement test and career interest form before our session. The purpose of the career interest survey was for students to list up to three potential majors they were interested in. As for my preparation, I would look at the math placement score and the

potential majors they listed to come up with possible courses the student could take. In the session, together we would go over the university's Bulletin, which would outline the curriculum for every major offered. From there, we would discuss the potential majors, go over the math placement, and finally end the session with picking courses together based on their interest.

Since I was meeting with a large majority of undecided students, I found similar patterns occurring during our session. It appeared that a large majority of the undecided students were unsure of their interests or changed their minds often. It was possible that they listed one major and show up to the appointment indicating another instead. There were even times where students would signify later in the summer that they changed their mind completely and wanted to change their schedule for more accurate classes. There were many times where undeclared students would come into these sessions completely exploratory, meaning they wouldn't know what interests they had and how that would intersect with potential majors.

Through this experience, it made me realize that there is gap between reaching exploratory students before they come to schedule classes. While this is just the first semester in their long journey of self-exploration and career development, advisors have the potential to reach students early on to help them understand the exploration process. This is the root of my thematic concern by understanding how advisors can support undecided students and bridge the gap by prompting exploration early on.

Current State of Concern

Through the research, we have learned that students may need to go through identity and career development before they are truly able to come to a decision on their major. When considering this population of students, it is important to be aware of how they are described. Similar to what Gordan and Steele (2015) referred as putting indecision into a positive light and

allowing for exploration, many universities and advisors now describe the population of undecided students as exploring (Lorenzetti, 2011). While this is not a universally accepted term today, the benefit of using the expression ‘exploratory’ to describe students now takes out the negative undertone of being unsure of one’s career decision. This term ‘exploratory’ expresses the idea that students are open to their options rather being unwilling to declare. By switching the language, students are now invited to explore options and be assured that it is acceptable to not know their career goals. By using the word ‘exploratory’, it places less demand for declaring their major and encourages them to discover their interest. As a result, new arguments for this population of students have emerged.

One recent argument has been made that universities should prohibit choice of a major until the second year of college (Freedman, 2013). In her argument, she attested that 20 to 50 percent of students are entering college as undecided and close to 75 percent of students will change their major at least once before graduation (Freedman, 2013). There are many affects that could have on major choice, such as family, general interest, and assumptions about a job, that choosing a major too early could have negative effects. These negative effects could reflect on retention, student’s learning, and career goals (Freedman, 2013).

Incoming students might think that choosing a major as early as possible is the key to graduating in four years. However, a report published by the Education Advisory Board found that students who change their major are more likely to graduate from college compared to students who settle on their career path early on. This report is attempting to challenge this notion the changing one’s major will extend graduation and increase debt. They found that students who settled on their final major during their second through eighth term did not influence their graduation rate. Some opinions to this research were that students who change

their major may be doing so as their interest and maturity changes. Through their findings, they suggested that colleges should be encouraging the exploration of major in the beginning or continuing to allow student to change majors.

Best Practices

Through the years as higher education professionals began realizing that undecided students were an important population to reach, interventions and programs were initiated to address the challenges they face. Some interventions that are in place today at universities are advising centers specifically for undecided students, living learning centers, and first-year experience courses.

At some institutions, advising centers to have been designed for undecided students in order to target their specific needs. This type of advising center can provide a space for this population of students to know exactly where to go to obtain help. These centers also provide professional advisors who are trained to work with this specific population. Together, the advisor and student will design an individual approach based on their interests, needs, abilities, and values (Gordon & Steele, 2015). The benefit of using an academic advising center for undecided students as an approach would potentially give advisors the ability to works with a smaller population for students. However, this might not always be the case as it is depended on how many students are undecided. Advisors would not be linked to a specific discipline or major but well-rounded in addressing all the universities' offerings.

Another intervention strategy for undecided students is designing a living learning community in residential halls. This type of approach would require undecided students living in a residential hall specifically for those who want to concentrate on their career planning. A living learning center targeting undecided students would mean that incoming first year students can

navigate the adjustment of college in a supportive environment. Students would enroll in two or three courses in common, which could include a first-year seminar. This program would also include career-related activities in the residential hall. (Tampke & Durodoye, 2013). This could be beneficial to incoming first year students to not only obtain the academic help they desire but be integrated socially with individuals who face similar challenges.

Another popular intervention universities will implement is a first-year seminar (FYS). This is often used to matriculate students into the institution by providing support resources for entering students (Tampke & Durodoye, 2013). In a national study completed in 2008 to both two-year and four-year institutions, it found that 84 percent reported offering a first-year seminar (Tampke & Durodoye, 2013). Depending on the university, a FYS course could be an extended orientation or academic seminar (Tampke & Durodoye, 2013).

While these are all common best practices implemented in universities today, I wanted to propose a program in which highlighted these approaches, while making it new to higher education. To include an intervention that both addresses the academic needs similar to a FYE course, but also integrates students socially, such as a learning community, was important to me. I also appreciate the idea of highlighting exploring in college rather than expecting students to make a premature and uninformed decision about their major. By taking all these practices along with the research about indecision, my proposed intervention, the Explorers Pilot Program, will individually address the needs of incoming undecided students in the summer before they start their first semester. Through a two day workshop, students will be encouraged to learn about themselves through a self-assessment, explore their options, and work with an academic advisor to start to discover their interests. All of these components will be further identified in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Program Design

In this chapter, the proposed intervention will be discussed by first outlining the purpose, goals, and learning outcomes of the Explorers Pilot Program. It will then discuss the key theories in the way that have informed and guided the practices of the intervention. Then, the Explorers Pilot Program will be outlined through the implementation of the main components, which has been formed by the research in chapter three. Finally, this chapter will address the potential challenges to arise from the implementation of the intervention and take into account the best practices from the global community for academic advisors.

Introduction, Purpose, and Goals

In order to help support undecided students, the proposed intervention is the Explorers Pilot Program, whose purpose is to engage students in the exploration process by introducing a career self-assessment, providing information about potential majors, and establishing a one-on-one experience with an academic advisor. This program will serve first-year students on a voluntarily basis and be conducted in the summer before orientation. This will allow students to be introduced to what difficulties an undecided student might experience and implement support as early as possible. Students might be apprehensive about the career decision process and having a program to assist them could make a difference on retention and/or rate of changed major. This program will take place over two days before students' initial orientation with the university to help them with their academic process and assist them in getting acclimated to the campus. The program will have three main components where students discover their career identity through a self-assessment and learn about exploration in college, hear from panels members, and meet with an advisor.

The goal of the summer workshop is for students to start thinking about their career choices and interests. Ultimately, there is an urgency placed onto students to declare their major as soon as possible. However, the intention of this program is to place an emphasis on exploring their options and taking the time to learn about their own career identity development before declaring a major. Through this discovery, the students will focus on how to explore majors as an undecided student as well as be introduced to others who might share the same concerns. To accomplish this, the learning outcomes for the three components of the intervention are as follows:

- Component 1: Introduction and Discovery
 - Program Activities: By engaging in team bonding activities, students will be able to identify one to two peers to rely on next semester.
 - Program Introduction: Through this presentation, students will be able to describe three advantages of being an exploratory student.
 - Self-Assessment: By completing the Strong Interest Inventory assessment (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.), students will be able to apply their results to a potential career interest.
 - Scavenger Hunt: Students will identify two resources available on campus that they would consider using in the fall semester.
- Component 2: Panel Discussions
 - By attending the panel discussion, students will be able to distinguish potential careers from those they would like to exclude.
- Component 3: Advising Sessions

- Students will schedule two classes that align with their interests based off their Strong Interest Inventory assessment (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.) and participation in panel discussions.

Theory to Practice

Through the research, three theories have influenced the Explores Pilot Program, which includes the Baxter Magolda Self Authorship Theory, Marcia Ego Identity Statues, and the Career Decision Theory. The Self Authorship Theory explains four phases in which describes the journey to find one's beliefs, identity, and interests (Patton et al., 2016). To review what was proposed in Chapter Three, students experience these four phases on exploration and self-knowledge in order to better understand themselves. Through these phases, students experience a hard time coming to their own ideas and choices because young adults tend to follow plans laid out by others (Patton et al., 2016). However, without those external forces, students are required to determine if their plans are best for themselves by exploring their options. In return, students can then become the author of their own life. In terms of the intervention, undecided students have a hard time coming to terms with their own choices because they do not have a sense of who they are. This intervention addresses the beginning stages of their journey to discovery by introducing students to how to explore their interests in college. Students will be presented with information on what it means to be an exploring undecided student and also take the Strong Interest Inventory Assessment (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.) to start the process. This intervention is at the beginning stages of student's identity development by being introduced the summer before they attend college and recognizes that developing self-authorship skills can be a lengthy process.

The Marcia Ego Identity Statuses also connects to the Self Authorship Theory because it addresses the student's identity development through exploration and commitments (Patton et al., 2016). This theory focuses on four statuses to explain how young adults experience and resolve a crisis through actively questioning their values and goals along with attaching ownership (Patton et al., 2016). Through this theory, students experience anxiety with forming their own identity, which in return forms a period of crisis. In a period of crisis, students evaluate their interests and in exchange are able to explore those options. Students will then be able to sort out their choices and make a commitment. This intervention addresses these components by assuming students are experiencing anxiety from a lack of commitment and implements ways to evaluate their interests. By completing a pre-assessment, students will be reflective in their current passions as well as tracking their progress through writing prompts and goal setting throughout the program.

Finally, the Career Decision Theory describes how students must go through a series of tasks in order to come to a decision (Gordan, 2015). Through these tasks, students identify their strengths and relate that to their academic program, recognize potential career alternatives, and then make a commitment (Gordan, 2015). All the while, academic advisors are there to help students feel supported during their exploration. For this intervention, the program focuses on the first component of the planning phase within the theory, which is called the exploration stage. In this stage, students experience anxiety, unsure of the process of exploring, and have no plan (Gordan, 2015). This intervention solely focuses on trying to alleviate the stress of the undecided student by explaining in detail the process of exploring options in college. By beginning to work on identity development through establishing strengths through the Strong Inventory assessment (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.), students will be able to start their plan. Students will also

experience different pathways through a career panel in which introduces potential majors or eliminates options for students. Finally, the start of their exploration plan is formed with their advisor through a one-on-one appointment by identifying classes that align with their interests.

These practices encourage students to be the agents of change in their own educational journey by making them responsible for their own decisions with the assistance of academic advisors. Based on these theories in which guide the informed practices, the intervention wants students to be reflective in their own development. To execute these practices, the program will be outlined in three components: Introduction and Discovery, Panel Discussions, and Advising Sessions.

Program Proposal

This program is intended for incoming first-year students who are truly undecided. In order for students to be considered for the program, they must not know their career path or have a difficult time choosing between multiple options. The purpose of this intervention is to target students who are unsure rather than others who are categorized as undecided but waiting to be accepted into their program of interest. It will be advertised through email to all students who are considered undeclared but as this is a pilot program, only 20 students will be selected to participate. The letter of interest sent out to students can be viewed in Appendix A.

This pilot program will be in conjunction with the university's orientation and will be held two days prior to the first orientation date for all 20 students. By having the students participate in early June, this allows participants to have first access to classes and gain an understanding of the campus before others. In order to successfully lead this program, there will be five academic advisors, along with four peer mentors who will be assisting them. While this is a two day program, the advisors will become their full-time academic advisor throughout the

school year. To be mindful of advisors already existing large caseloads, five advisors participating in the program ensures a 5:1 ratio during the intervention and prevent added stress in the upcoming academic year. Along with assisting advisors, the peer mentors have the responsibility of leading team bonding activities and late-night programming. Since peer mentors also play a vital role in the intervention by leading tasks, it would be preferred that candidates were at one time undecided themselves. By having peer mentors who were once undecided, it could be a tremendous benefit to participants by witnessing first-hand someone who was once in their shoes. Along with being a role model, the peer mentors could have relevant information to share about their own experiences.

Pre-program

The first aspect of the program will happen before the in-person events take place. After the initial interest letter is sent to students, they will be directed to the university's academic advising website to learn more about the program. If they would like to partake in the program, students will fill out a pre-assessment, which is outlined in Appendix B. Since the target population is for truly undecided students, the pre-assessment will act as a filtering system on who is most applicable for the program, which will be determined by the academic advisors. The pre-assessment will cover questions such as their current interests and why they might have a hard time making a decision. This pre-assessment will also act as a baseline for the participants growth and success in future advising appointments. Once students are notified about their acceptance, they will have to complete an online task list to prepare for a successful transition into the program. This task list will include the completion of the Strong Interest Inventory assessment (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.) and filling out the necessary information to have students stay on campus, such as any accommodations, dietary restrictions, and emergency

contact information. Students will be taking the Strong Interest Inventory assessment (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.) to give them the tools to explore potential careers that match with their interests. Students will be taking this assessment prior to the program to maximize the amount of time academic advisors have with the students. The task list will be completed a week before the students arrive on campus. This gives the advisors enough time to review each applicant's results from the career assessment and prepare for the workshops.

Component 1: Introduction and Discovery

The first component is the introduction and discovery phase, which will take place on the first day of the program. This discovery phase will be organized into two parts, which can be outlined through the program schedule in Appendix C. Students will be asked to arrive on campus at 9 AM, where they will be welcomed by the five academic advisors and four peer mentors. While students are being checked in and accompanied to their residential halls, a welcome breakfast will be available to those who are participating in the program. After the welcome breakfast, the students will gather in the university's student union in a classroom setting. Since this is the first time students are stepping onto campus with the possibility of not knowing anyone, it is important to start off with establishing a rapport. For this reason, the first two hours of the day will start off with team bonding and ice-breaker activities.

Even though nametags will be provided, each student will go around and say their name, preferred pronouns, and where they are from to establish a group cohesion. This will then lead into the first group icebreaker. The first ice breaker is called the Three P's. In groups, students will share three facts about themselves: one personal, something professional, and something peculiar. Peer mentors will describe the activity and then each share their Three P's for demonstration. Then the students will be sorted into groups of five to share with their peers. This

activity is designed for students to start to get to know each other in a smaller setting. Students will be given 15 minutes to complete the activity and then come back as a group. The next game they will participate in is called the 'beach ball'. This activity involves a plastic beach ball where there are different get-to-know you questions written on it. These questions can range from, "What is one thing you are looking forward to this summer?" or "What is your favorite food?". There will also be questions more intentional towards the program, such as "Name one interest or hobby" and "What is one thing you hope gain from this experience?". Since this is a larger group of 20 students, this will last a half an hour.

To transition into the start of the program, students will then participate in an agenda questionnaire. This activity will start off with the advisors briefly describing the workshops and activities that will take place in the span of the two days. Students will then be placed into groups of five. The structure of the activity will allow students to brainstorm with their group about specific questions they have about the program. Students will write these questions down and then re-convene as a big group to discuss these questions. This allows students a chance to ask any questions or express concerns that have not been addressed so far.

Then students will individually take time to write down on a piece of paper a goal of theirs to complete by the end of the program. From the research, it has been found that setting small achievable tasks can successfully boost their sense of personal accomplishment (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014). This goal will not be shared with the rest of the class but collected by the advisor, which will be addressed in the individual advising session. It should be known to the class that this is a short term goal and could be simple and non-academic as establishing friends for the start of the semester. Students will have the rest of the time allotted to them to brainstorm and hand in to the advisors. Once they are done, they have the rest of the time to themselves to

take a break before lunch. After these activities, this will lead us into lunch in the union ballroom, where students can step out of the classroom mindset and in a more relaxed manor. The peer mentors will also be seated at their tables to continue discussions and build the rapport among the group.

After lunch, students will then proceed back into the classroom and start with the introduction into the program. This will be broken up into two parts: Program Introduction and Self-Assessment. The program introduction will be first and last for an hour and a half. This portion of the program will include what it means to be an undecided student and also look at the emotional state of exploring options in college, such as anxiety of choice. In this section, academic advisors will discuss who is an exploring undecided student. They will talk about how students might have many major interests or may have no idea at all. They will also look at common stressors one might encounter from being an undecided student, which may range from pressures students place on themselves or the stress from others.

Through a presentation, advisors will address the who, what, when, and why of an undecided student. The presentation will start off with describing the academic advising department, who specifically works with the undecided student population and what they represent. This is where the mission and objectives of the department will be laid out to students. Next, the advisors will describe the characteristics of who an undecided student may be. This will include students who may struggle with deciding between many interests, may have a hard time finding their interests, or simply have applied to the major but have yet to be accepted into the program. For design purposes of the Explorer's Pilot Program, advisors will concentrate on the first two characteristics. The presentation will also focus on why students might decide to go into college undecided. They will also look at the benefits of exploring, such as the opportunity

to learn about interests, lessen the chance of changing majors, and receiving more advising recourses. It is also important to look at some of the challenges students might face as they explore options, such as stress or pressure from themselves or even family members. The advisors will also address a typical timeline of being undeclared, such as explaining the range of students declaring their major at the end of their first year or beginning of their second year. However, the suggested maximum time for students to be undeclared would be the end of their second year. The objective of the program is to have students declare by the time they start their third year.

During the one hour lecture, students will have the opportunity to ask questions and gain clarity of what it means to be as an undecided student. This lecture will then transition in how the program will help students in this process. It will be known to students that this program is not meant for them to declare or force them into a major. Rather, advisors will emphasize that this program will be meant to start the exploration process and help ease students in their first semester. This will then lead into a half hour break where students will have the option to grab a snack.

After the break, the second portion of the first day would be to assess the Strong Interest Inventory, which they had completed one week prior. According to Myers-Briggs Company (n.d.), who produces the assessment, the Strong Interest Inventory provides individual insight on their interests to help develop potential careers. It explores people's personality through six areas such as realistic, artistic, investigative, social enterprising, and conventional (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.). This will then lead to 30 specific area of interest that are related to fields of study (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.). In order to administrate the results of the test, the five advisors will be trained to lead the sessions. Since, the academic advisor are the ones who are

directly working with the students, both in the program and in the future, it is important that they interpret the results. Advisors will then lead the hour and a half session by first describing the assessment and then break into groups of four. This will reflect the four students the advisor will see in the one-on-one advising appointment the next day.

Students will then have another half hour break to transition into the bonding activity, which will be a campus resource scavenger hunt. Again, they will be broken up into five groups of four students. They will be given a list of hints of places on campus to visit and a map of the campus. The students must match the description of the place by taking a photo to prove they were there. This 45 minute activity will allow students to get out of the classroom and get to know their future campus more in depth. The learning objective is for students to be able to identify resources on campus that they could potentially use in the fall semester. There will be a time limit placed on the scavenger hunt where everyone can come back together to see if they were able to answer the questions correctly. There will be a small prize to the group that wins. The students will then proceed to dinner, which will be followed with an hour break to go back to their residence hall. At the residence hall, the peer mentors will then be responsible for ending the night with their choice of late night program.

Component 2: Panel Discussions

The second day of the program will start off with morning breakfast provided to students in the dining hall. Afterwards, the students will then return back to the student union. This is where they will attend a panel discussion. Panel members will be recruited through Alumni Relations and will consist of individuals in a range of professions. Rather than focusing on specific majors, the panel members will be recruited by different concentrations or pathways, such as Arts and Humanities, Health Sciences, Social Work and Education, Music, Sciences and

Mathematics, and Business and Public Management. This panel discussion will give students the opportunity to see how individual journeys played out in college. This is also allowing students to eliminate or maybe even consider a specific pathway.

The goal would be to provide two professionals from each concentration. All together there would be 12 individuals from different professions to allow students to see a variety of careers. A peer mentor will lead the session, which will take place for an hour. This will allow 15 minutes for students to ask questions and then 15 minutes to network after the session. The questions prepared for the session will be as followed:

- Could you please introduce yourself by telling us what major you entered in college with, if you had one? Also, could you tell us if you changed your major and a brief description of how you got to where you are today.
- What educational experiences do you think helped lead you to this career?
- In terms of your college experience, what would you consider your biggest challenge in navigating your career choice and how did you overcome that?
- What advice would you have for an incoming undergraduate student who is unsure of their future?

After the panel session, students will come together in the classroom to talk about common themes in the discussions and debrief about what they heard. Once the debrief has come to a closed, the students will head to lunch in the student union. After lunch, they will gather back in the classroom to have a 30 minute individual brainstorming session. This is where students can think about what they have learned the past day and half and prepare for their advising session. Some prompts for the free-write would be:

- What is one takeaway you have learned about yourself since participating in this program?
- If you could list out your career interests and rank them, what would that look like?
- What concerns do you have about your choices above?

Component 3: Advising Sessions

In the afternoon, the main component to take place would be one-on-one advising sessions with all the students. Since there are five advisors, each will be responsible for seeing four students in all. In order to make this process more organized, the students will be placed into four groups (A, B, C, and D) and consist of five students in each. To view the schedule, please refer back to Appendix C. Group A will be the first hour block where they will see the five advisors. During this time, the other students will be placed in their group and completing other activities and workshops fully led by the peer mentors. These activities include a campus tour, a workshop on D2L and the course catalogue, and a peer mentor Q&A.

The campus tour, which will be led by the peer mentor, will be less informational but more personalized from the peer mentor's point of view. This led tour would include possible places and services that might have helped them through their first year. The peer mentor Q&A will also allow students the opportunity to ask questions in a small group setting. The conversation would include things the peer mentor wish they would have known when they were a first year student. The format and discussions points would be up to the students and peer mentors themselves.

The D2L and course catalogue workshop would be the formal academic session led by the peer mentors. Students would be led to the computer areas where the peer mentor can show

students how to log into their D2L account. This service is used by students to view their classes, syllabi, and upcoming assignments. While the student's classes will not appear on the D2L account since they are not registered, the peer mentor can demonstrate through their account. As an undecided student, it is also important to utilize the course catalogue, where all the university's majors and minors are located. The students will be able to see a program overview such as the description, policies, and a curriculum sheet. They will also be able to view specific courses within that major and a description of that course. It is vital that these students be introduced to these resources so they can utilize them in the future.

While the alternative sessions are occurring, students sit one-on-one with an advisor. During the advising session, students will be able to get to know their advisor on a more personal level. In this session, students will go over the personal goal determined at the beginning of the program, talk about their career assessment, discuss the panel, and review the writing prompts completed earlier. This advising appointment will be semi-structured with a guide that advisors will follow along with potential guided questions advisors can ask, which can be viewed in Appendix D and Appendix E. Students will then evaluate their interests and how they might align with potential classes or majors. It is our hope that this is where students will be able to start their exploration phase and be able to come to the appointment having some interests from the program. Finally, the session will end with forming a full class schedule for the fall semester that at least reflects two classes the student wants to explore their interests in, which would determine if the learning outcome has been met.

After this four hour period, students will then have a half hour break, which will be followed by dinner in the dining halls. After dinner, the students will gather in the student union one last time to come together with the advisors to end the program. This will give students a

chance to ask any lingering questions and know the next steps from the rest of summer up to the first semester. Then the students will enjoy a fun activity, such an outdoor or indoor movie depending on the weather. While, this will be the end of program, students will be staying on campus to complete their university's orientation. Gaining all the information they have learned throughout the program and getting acclimated to the campus will help the students be able to take in all the vast information from orientation without it being overwhelming. Now that the students have been on campus for two days, they will have a feel for the atmosphere and hopefully be less apprehensive about completing orientation. They will also have the comfort of 20 other students who they have bonded with and can rely on throughout their undergraduate years.

Next Steps

One main concern throughout the program is the turnaround time for a student to change their mind. While this is completely acceptable and expected in the exploring process, it is important that their classes reflect their interests. There is a large gap from early June to the start of the semester in late August. One way to combat that would be letting students know that advisors will be available through email for the rest of the summer. However, advisors will be reaching out the first week of August to make sure students still feel confident with their class choices and direction for fall semester.

During the semester, the students will be meeting with the same academic advisor from the summer. They will have a one-hour session that will take the place of their normal advising session, which is one visit per semester. This advising session will take place 10 days before the registration date for the spring semester to talk about their courses. In this session, they will discuss the classes they are taking and if their previous interests still align with their intended

direction. If that has changed, they will repeat the session they had in the summer to determine new options. If they still intend on the specific direction, they will talk about how to further their interest, such as getting involved in related clubs or obtaining an internship in their desired field. This will give students both academic and practical experiences to determine if they enjoy this pathway.

Challenges

With the nature of starting a pilot program, there are expected challenges to overcome. One foreseeable challenge briefly touched on is that students have a long time from the moment they schedule classes until the first semester. While it is expected that students will change their mind about their choices, the intention of the program is to intersect student's interests with classes. Along with scheduling classes based on student's interest, another limitation could be that students only have a short time to figure out potential interests and then schedule with their advisor. The goal of the program is that students will be able to bring their experiences from the program and schedule classes. However, there might be a few students who need more time think about their choices.

Along with possible challenges, assumptions have been made with this proposed intervention. Should this pilot program succeed, then universities would need to provide the necessary advising resources to deliver such individualized attention to these high need students. Since this program extends into the fall semester as well, it is a challenge to fit one-hour sessions, especially if an advisor has a large caseload. If one or two advisors are heading this program, this could be a potential challenge to manage the expected advisees in the academic year as well as the participants in the program.

Professional Competencies

With developing an advising approach to reaching undecided students, it is important to consult the professional community for academic advisors, or otherwise known as NACADA, to determine the best practices. In 2017, NACADA developed the Academic Advising Core Competency Model to inform their interventions. According to NACADA (2017), “The purpose of the model is to identify the broad range of understanding, knowledge, and skills that support academic advising, to guide professional development, and to promote the contributions of advising to student development, progress, and success” (para.1). Through the competencies three categories emerged: conceptual, information, and relational. The core competencies in the conceptual component describes the ideas and theories advisors must understand to advise students. The informational component competencies provide the substance of academic advising, such as the information advisors must know to guide students at their institution. Finally, relational is the last component, which describes the skills an academic advisor must demonstrate.

All three components are taken into account in the development of the intervention. For the conceptual component, the implementation of the program is based on theories mentioned above to make it successful. Since this intervention is focused on introducing the discovery of exploration, the information component will largely intersect with the program. For instance, information will be outlined on the specifics of what it means to be an exploring student, defining characteristics, and resources available for this population. Finally, in the relational area advisors will be facilitating problem solving, decision making, planning and goal setting skills with the students through reflections and writing prompts. Through implementing all three core competencies, it will ensure the most relevant practices are executed in the intervention. In the

following chapter, the intervention will address these relevant practices and how to determine if they are successful or not.

Chapter Five: Implementation and Evaluation

After identifying the components of the proposed intervention, this chapter will outline the anticipated timeline of the program and address the implementation of funding, marketing, and leadership. It will then determine how to identify if the program will be successful by examining ways to integrate assessment into the practices. Finally, the limitations and ideas to further this intervention will be considered.

Implementation

In addressing the need of supporting undecided students, the Explorers Pilot Program will take place to engage students in the exploration process by introducing identity self-assessments, providing information about potential majors, and establishing a one-on-one experience with an academic advisor. This program is to be implemented with students who are truly undecided about their major. While there is a population of undecided students who have a specific major interest but are waiting to get accepted into the department, this program is intended for those who struggle with career indecision. Those students who are considered as truly undecided would have no major interest or struggle with making decisions between multiple majors. This program will take place two days before the university's first orientation date of the summer. For instance, a public medium-sized university in Pennsylvania has scheduled their first orientation day to be taken place on Thursday, June 10. This pilot program would then be taken place in the span of two days on Tuesday, June 8 and Wednesday, June 9. The benefits of having this program before students are acclimated onto campus allows for incoming first-year students to have early access to classes. Along with the benefit of working with academic advisors, the program will focus on how to explore majors as an undecided student as well as be introduced to others who might share the same concerns.

Planning this intervention would require many moving parts, such as recruiting applicants, making partnerships within the university, and filling the roles of peer mentors. To ensure this is a smooth process, it would be recommended to start the planning process as early as the fall semester. With the implementation of this program, advisors would need to be trained in the Strong Interest Inventory assessment (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.) in order to offer the survey to students. It will take two days for advisors to be certified in this assessment, which should be completed by the beginning of the spring semester. The first week of the spring semester, the applications for peer mentors should be advertised on the Career Center's website under job postings. As stated in the previous chapter, the job description should highlight students who were previously undeclared to apply for the position. Interviews will be held the week after spring break to determine the four spots by early April. This will give advisors and peer mentors enough time to finalize details of the program, such as late-night programming and develop funding for the program.

The anticipated schedule of the program, which can be outlined in Appendix C, is broken up into three components: introductory and discovery, panel discussions, and the advising session. The first day of the intervention will consist of the introduction of the program and the discovery of one's interests through building a support cohort, introducing students to what it means to be an undecided student, and a career assessment. Through group exercises such as icebreakers and team bonding activities, students will be able to build a rapport with one another. These activities are intended for students to build a support cohort and have others to rely on throughout the program and potentially in the future. It will then transition into the introduction of the program by explaining the characteristics of the undecided student who is exploring their options in college. One aspect of this exploration process is understanding their own self-

identity. Students will then take the Strong Interest Inventory assessment (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.) to understand how their own interests might align with potential careers.

Students will then finish the day with an activity in which they find campus resources through a scavenger hunt, along with a late-night program determined by the peer mentor.

The next day is focused on the information students learned the day before and putting it to practice. In the morning, students will attend a panel discussion where professionals from different concentrations or pathways, such as Arts and Humanities, Health Sciences, Social Work and Education, Music, Sciences and Mathematics, and Business and Public Management, discuss their journey. This panel will give students the opportunity to be introduced to potential majors or eliminate pathways that they know they do not want to explore. After the panel discussion, students will debrief about the session, reflect about their learning the past day, and prepare for their advising sessions through writing prompts. This will then lead students into their individual advising session with an academic advisor from the program, who will oversee their progress until they declare their major. The advising session will allow students to be reflective on what they learned, address their individual goal of the program, and writing prompts. Students will also schedule classes with their advisor for the fall semester that align with their interests.

While students are not in the advising session, peer mentors will give a personal campus tour, a guide on D2L and the course catalogue, and Q&A with their peer mentor. Before students end the program with an outdoor movie, everyone will come together one last time with the advisors to determine the next steps for the fall semester. These next steps include a follow up conversation the first week of August with their academic advisor to determine if they are still content with their course selections. Students will then meet with the same advisor in the fall

semester 10 days before the spring registration date for a one-hour session. In this session, students will evaluate their fall classes and if their interests still align with their intended direction. If they have changed their mind, the advisor will then go back to the original summer advising session and determine a new direction.

Marketing and Recruitment

As stated, the Explorers Pilot program will be targeting incoming first-year students who are undecided. This is intended to supply resources to the students as early as possible, while also letting students know it is acceptable to be unsure and to explore major options. The objective of the program is to combat the need to pressure undergraduate students to select their major as soon as possible and instead implement an exploratory approach. To gain attraction to the program, a letter of interest (see Appendix A) will be sent to all incoming first year students who are undecided. In this initial letter, the university's advising website will be included so students can find out information about the program and fill out a pre-assessment. Since this program is only accepting 20 students, this pre-assessment will be used as a filtering system of who will be admitted into the program, as well as acting as a baseline for the accepted student. Since the goal is to target truly undeclared students, advisors will look over the applicants and decide who is most applicable for the pilot program. Once students are notified about the acceptance into the summer program, they will then fill out similar information for orientation about any accommodations needed, dietary restrictions, and emergency contact information.

Funding

In order to kickstart the pilot program, it would take more than the advising center's budget to operate this two-day workshop. One way to alleviate the expenses is to collaborate with other offices on campus. One large expense of the program is the Strong Interest Inventory

assessment (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.) in which aligns students' interests with career options. While the assessment itself is not as costly, the training of the advisors to interpret the test is expensive. In this program it is important for the advisors to be trained in the Strong Interest Inventory assessment. Not only will these five advisors will be working with the students over the two-day workshop but will also be their academic advisor throughout the academic year. Due to this, it is important that the advisors are the ones who directly work with the students who take the Strong Interest Inventory assessment. However, to do this the five advisors must be trained to understand and relay the results. Turning to the Career Center to see if they are willing to mitigate some of the cost or partner with the Academic Advising Office could be one potential way to fund this endeavor. The Career Center and Advising Offices offer similar services to students. Developing a collaborative partnership would be a benefit to both offices and to students.

Along with reaching out to the Career Center, it can also be important to look into co-sponsoring with the university's late-night program or activities board. Most activities councils have a co-sponsorship budget where they set aside money and partner with other offices and organizations at the university. The biggest expense regarding bonding activities of the program would be the outdoor movie. It could be helpful to reach out to the two organizations to see if they would like to partner with the outdoor movie. In order for this partnership to benefit both sides, the movie should be marketed to all students at the university and surrounding community. This also gives the students who participate in the program a way to engage with others outside of their academic year.

While these two potential partners will not cover the entire funding of the budget, which is summarized in Appendix F, alumni, particularly those who were undecided in their

undergraduate years, can be asked to donate money specifically for this program. Engaging alumni who were undecided could help generate funding by appealing to the common struggles of being an undecided student. They might understand what it has been like to be challenged by their major choice and want to help others in this process. In order to reach out to those to who could donate, it would be helpful to contact the Alumni Relations Office to generate a list of those who were undecided during college.

Leadership

While marketing and funding are important to the implementation of the program, the leadership style of those who run the intervention are extremely important to its success. To successfully lead this program, the advisors must be effective and transformative leaders. Along with this, the advisors must use a needs-based approach to determine which style would be most beneficial to the individual student. Combining effective and transformative leadership along with specific advising styles would be the most beneficial leadership approach for this intervention.

Traditionally, when describing leadership, it is defined by specific skills or traits of a person in charge. Northouse (2019) notes that to describe leadership as a trait is much different from describing it as a process. As a process, transformative leadership resides in the interaction between the leader and follower, in which makes leaderships available to everyone (Northouse, 2019). Transformational leadership is also characterized by primarily focusing on change rather than power. This type of leaderships challenges individuals, invites new ways of change, and is recognized when it is accomplished.

As an effective leader, one is maintaining the strategies that are working. It produces the desired results and causes individuals to have a positive reaction. An effective leader must

possess the ability to be self-reflective and know when strategies are no longer successful. While these two leadership styles are different, they both can bring about change. As an academic advisor working with a population of students who are unsure of their decisions, these two leadership styles could be very important to utilize. This intervention is a personal interaction between students and advisors, in which students lead the change and advisors guide them through their discovery. Most of the intervention requires the self-reflection of the students on their own barriers when it comes to their indecision. The advisor must use transformative leadership by leading the intervention as a process in which the students can use themselves to bring about the change they desire. Advisors can do this in the intervention by giving students the opportunity to be self-reflective, such as guiding questions and self-assessments and applying that information to their own career interests. In this instance, advisors are supplying the tools and the students are making the connections.

In order for advisors to be effective in their leadership, they must adapt and change their approaches and tailor it to each student's needs. For instance, there are many styles that an academic advisor can utilize such as prescriptive, developmental, appreciative, and intrusive advising ("Community," n.d.). Prescriptive advising emphasizes the expert knowledge of the advisor and provides the solution to the student ("Community," n.d.). When working with students who are undecided and going through the exploration process using a developmental and appreciative advising approach would be best and is most applicable to the intervention. Similar to transformative leadership, in developmental advising the emphasis is on the partnership between the student and advisor ("Community," n.d.). According to NACADA, in this approach, "Students consult with the academic advisor along their academic journey of discovery" and "encourages students to be the agents of their educational journey"

(“Community,” n.d.). In this scenario, students are at the helm of their own journey while getting the assistance of the academic advisor to help them reach their discovery.

Along with the developmental style, applying appreciative advising is important because it draws positive connections between students and the educational journey (“Community,” n.d.). It highlights using open-ended questions to engage students. In the intervention, these two approaches are used most by allowing students to come to their own realization about their self through a career assessment. This is then followed up with appreciative advising in the one-on-one session by asking open-ended questions. In the session, advisors want students to make the connection of their learning through the past day and apply that to their journey of discovery by selecting classes that support their interests.

Assessment

Assessment and evaluation will also play a large role in tracking the growth of the participants, identify challenges of students, as well as determining the success of the program. Assessments will cover two components in which it will assess the student's learning and the overall success of the intervention. In order to do this, assessments will range from a pre-assessment, goal setting, open-ended prompts, a survey completed by participants, observational notes from academic advisors, and quantitative data. Through applying this mixed method of assessments, it will determine the best way to proceed with the pilot program.

In terms of the students' progress, evaluations will be crucial for tracking their growth. The first form of assessment students will undergo will be the pre-assessment to get accepted into the program. As mentioned, this assessment will act as a baseline for students' growth and success. This type of assessment will allow advisors to gauge where students are at in the beginning of their undergraduate journey. This type of assessment is important because students

will be able to reflect on why they might be undecided, what interests they might have, and consider their strengths or challenges. For the purposes of this program, this assessment will be the starting point of tracking their individual growth.

For student's own success measures, they will be forming a goal in which they believe could be achieved by the end of the two day program. Since the research shows that students who are undecided struggle with self-efficacy, this short-term goal is intended to promote student's confidence in their beginning experiences as an undecided student. Setting smaller achievable tasks will boost their personal accomplishments (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014). There will also be an opportunity for students to be self-reflective in their learning by giving them a free-write session before their advising appointment. In this self-reflection, students will reveal what they have learned about themselves during the program, how their learning relates to career interests, and if they have any concerns. Advisors will also be tracking the students' progress through individual advising sessions. During the advising session, academic advisors will address their pre-assessment, personal goal, and their reflections. Students will then be able to voice their concerns, evaluate their interests, and determine how they might align with potential classes or majors. Two learning outcomes will be addressed in this session. It will be determined if students were able to identify interests based off the Strong Interest Inventory assessment (The Myers-Brigg Company, n.d.). Also, students will be asked to distinguish careers from those they would like to explore from those they would like to eliminate based off the panel discussions. This advising appointment will be semi-structured with a guide that advisors will follow to address these learning outcomes, which can be viewed in Appendix D. Advisors will then follow up at the end of summer to see if students are still on track with their interests and how that relates to their fall semester classes.

Through determining the success of the pilot program, the overall fall semester GPA of students who participated in the program will be compared to overall fall semester GPA of undecided students who did not participate in the program. This quantitative data will allow others to see if the components of the program are increasing the GPA of those involved compared to those who did not receive the support. Students will also be given a survey at the end of the fall semester focused on what they have learned. The survey, which can be viewed in Appendix G, will gauge how students interact with their advisor, whether or not they felt there is trust to disclose information, and ways to use the information they learned moving forward. This survey will also address the learning outcomes of the program by evaluating if students can identify peers to rely on, discuss the advantages of being undecided, and name resources they could in the fall semester.

While the driving factor to whether this pilot program continues might be determined by the one quantitative data point, it is also important to look at all the assessments collected to judge its success. From the pre- and post-assessment, to the advising observational notes, and the survey filled out by students, the whole collection of data could be viewed determine if the program is successful.

Limitations and Looking Ahead

As outlined in the history of the undecided student in Chapter Three, this population consists of not only first-year students but second year students as well. In this pilot program, the intervention does not address the needs of undecided students in their second year of college. A case could be made for an interventional program focusing on first and second year students because they could be a challenging population to work with due to their timeline of being an undeclared student. As it is known, most advisors want students to declare their major by their

third year in college. There is potential for this intervention to be expanded to undergraduates other than incoming first year students and those considered as upper-class students.

Moving forward, this intervention could be transformed into an in-depth program that could be carried out for all undeclared students seeking the resources for their journey of career discovery. It could also make the case that this population of students require a large amount of help but might receive limited academic assistance. According to the 2011 NACADA National Survey, the median case load of advisees to a full-time academic advisor is 296 students to 1 advisor (Robbins, 2013). This means that one advisor has the responsibility to oversee an average of 296 students in an academic semester but depending on the university could see up to 600 students (Robbins, 2013). While some students can benefit from prescriptive advising, such as telling students what classes to take or going over requirements, the undeclared population does not. Most undecided students benefit from a developmental approach that requires the individual time that an advisor might not have. An argument can be made that there is a need for a lower caseload for academic advisors who work with an undecided population.

The objective and overall goal of this program is to eliminate the negative stigma of not knowing one's career decision. While this systemic problem cannot be solved with one intervention, it can start with having a program with an emphasis on exploring options in college. This, in return could open the doors of providing more resources and attention to this population. It can bring awareness to the language used universally from switching the term 'undecided' to 'exploratory'. This takes out the negative undertone of not knowing one's career aspirations and replacing it with something positive, such as using college as a guide to determine and explore their interests. In a perfect advising model, it can call for more advising professionals to provide such individualized attention and meet their high needs.

Choosing a major is a significant decision in a student's academic career. Making this choice at 17 or 18, for a tradition student who have very little life experiences, can be daunting. In my own experience, students feel a sense of urgency to identify their academic major as soon as possible to then only change their direction later on in their undergraduate journey causing a period of crisis. With the national conversation about higher education centering on its worth and cost, it is important to help students make this very important decision carefully and thoughtfully. For those who do not have a clear passion or direction, we owe them the chance to explore the vast options available as early as possible so they can make the best of their experiences in college

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Appendix A Program Interest Letter

**RIDGE
UNIVERSITY**

Exploratory Studies



Dear students and guardians,

Welcome to the Hawk family! Through the acceptance into Ridge University as an undecided major, we would like to extend an opportunity for you to participate in the Explorers Pilot Program this summer. This program will take place in conjunction with Orientation and is designed to support those who are exploring their career options. Through the Exploratory Studies Department, students will have the opportunity to participate in workshops, hear from panel members, and sit down with an advisor to design their fall schedule.

You will find more about the Explorers Pilot Program and how to sign up through our department's website at [\(designing website\)](#). We look forward to seeing you on our campus this upcoming summer.

Sincerely,

Nicole Phillips
Academic Advisor

R•U

NP@RIDGEUNIVERSITY.COM
+1 215 690-3812

1000 30TH AVE.
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19106
RIDGEUNIVERSITY.COM

Appendix B Pre-Assessment

Google Form Questions : Pre-Assessment

Name:

University email:

University ID #:

1. Are you undeclared?
2. Why did you decided to go into college as undecided?
Select all that apply:
 - I have many interests
 - I am not sure how my interests connect to a major
 - I did not get into my intended program
 - I felt like if I did apply to a specific major, I would not get in
 - I experience a hard time making a decision
 - I am not ready to make a commitment
 - I do not know enough about the majors offered at the university
 - Other: explain
3. What are two majors you might like to explore?
4. What are two reasons you would like to participate in this program?
5. What do you hope to gain by attending?

Appendix C

Explorer's Pilot Program Schedule

DAY 1			
TIME	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	LEARNING OUTCOME
9:00-9:30 AM	<i>Welcome Breakfast</i>		
9:30-10:00 AM			
10:00-10:30 AM	Component 1.1: Team Bonding	Students will participate in introductory games such as the Three P's, The Beach Ball, and an agenda questionnaire. Students will also individually write down a goal for them to complete by the end of the program.	By engaging in team bonding activities, students will be able to identify one to two peers to rely on next semester.
10:30-11:00 AM			
11:00-11:30 AM			
11:30-12:00 PM			
12:00-12:30 PM	<i>Lunch</i>		
12:30-1:00 PM	Component 1.2: Program Introduction	Through a presentation, advisors will address the who, what, when, and why characteristics of an exploratory student.	Through this presentation, students will be able to describe three advantages of being an exploratory student.
1:00-1:30 PM			
1:30-2:00 PM			
2:00-2:30 PM	<i>Break</i>		
2:30-3:00 PM	Component 1.3 Self-Assessment	Advisors will lead a session in interpreting results from the Strong Interest Inventory, which was completed prior to the program. The discussions will be based on the students results as well as suggested careers.	By completing the Strong Interest Inventory assessment, students will be able to apply their results to a potential career interest.
3:00-3:30 PM			
3:30-4:00 PM			
4:00-4:30 PM	<i>Break</i>		

4:30-5:00 PM	Bonding Activity	Students will be placed into four groups and participate in a campus scavenger hunt.	Students can identify two resources available on campus in which they would consider using in the fall semester.
5:00-5:30 PM			
5:30-6:00 PM	<i>Dinner</i>		
6:00-6:30 PM			
6:30-7:00 PM	<i>Break</i>		
7:00-7:30 PM			
7:30-8:00 PM	Late-Night Programming	Peer Mentors will end the night with a late night program.	
8:00-8:30 PM			
8:30-9:00 PM			
9:00-9:30 PM			
9:30-10:00 PM			

DAY 2				
TIME	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	LEARNING OUTCOME	Alternative Events
9:00-9:30 AM	<i>Breakfast</i>			
9:30-10:00 AM				
10:00-10:30 AM	Component 2: Panel Discussions	Students will attend a panel discussion through Alumni Relations with members from different	By attending the panel discussion, students will be able to distinguish potential careers from	
10:30-11:00 AM				

11:00-11:30 AM		professions. The discussion will last 1 hour leaving a half hour for questions and networking. Students will return to the classroom to debrief	those they would like to exclude.	
11:30-12:00 PM				
12:00-12:30 PM	<i>Lunch</i>			
12:30-1:00 PM				
1:00-1:30 PM	<i>Break : Students will complete a free-write with reflective prompts</i>			
1:30-2:00 PM	Component		Students will schedule two classes that align with their interests based off their Strong Interest Inventory assessment and participation in panel discussions.	Group B - Campus Tour Group C - D2L/Course Catalogue Workshop Group D - Peer Mentor Q&A
2:00-2:30 PM	3.1: Advising Sessions Group A	One-on-one advising sessions		
2:30-3:00 PM	Component		Students will schedule two classes that align with their interests based off their Strong Interest Inventory assessment and participation in panel discussions.	Group A - Peer Mentor Q&A Group C - Campus Tour Group D - D2L/Course Catalogue Workshop
3:00-3:30 PM	3.2: Advising Sessions Group B	One-on-one advising sessions		
3:30-4:00 PM	Component		Students will schedule two classes that align with their interests based off their Strong Interest Inventory assessment and participation in panel discussions.	Group A - D2L/Course Catalogue Workshop Group B - Peer Mentor Q&A Group D - Campus Tour
4:00-4:30 PM	3.3: Advising Sessions Group C	One-on-one advising sessions		
4:30-5:00 PM	Component		Students will schedule two classes that align with their interests based off their Strong Interest Inventory assessment and participation in panel discussions.	Group A - Campus Tour Group B - D2L/Course Catalogue Workshop Group C - Peer Mentor Q&A
5:00-5:30 PM	3.4: Advising Sessions Group D	One-on-one advising sessions		
5:30-6:00 PM	<i>Break</i>			

6:00-6:30 PM	<i>Dinner</i>	
6:30-7:00 PM		
7:00-7:30 PM	Wrapping Up / Next Steps	Students will come together one last time with advisors to discuss expectations for fall semester and answer any questions
7:30-8:00 PM		
8:00-8:30 PM	Outdoor or Indoor Movie	Students will enjoy a fun activity such an outdoor or indoor movie depending on the weather
8:30-9:00 PM		
9:00-9:30 PM		
9:30-10:00 PM		

Appendix D Advising Sheet

Explorer's Pilot Program Advising Sheet
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Student Name: _____ 1st Major Preference _____
 Student ID #: _____ 2nd Major Preference _____
 College of Enrollment: _____

Activity Notes

PERSONAL GOAL:	REFLECTION QUESTIONS:	PANEL DICUSSIONS:

Strong Interest Inventory Results
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Courses

Transfer credits – AP/IB/Dual Enrollment	
Fall Semester: MATH - _____ ENGL - _____ CHEM/BIO? _____ _____ _____	INTERESTS/NOTES:

Notes:

Appendix E Advising Session Questions

Explorer's Program Questions (asked in the one-on-one advising session)

1. What was your personal goal? Why did you choose this particular goal?
2. What is one takeaway you have learned about yourself since participating in the program?
3. What did you think about the panel discussions? What did you learn? Were you able to find any career paths interesting or be able to eliminate any?
4. Did you find the Strong Interest Inventory assessment helpful? What are your key takeaways from your results?
5. If you could list out your career interest and rank them what would that look like?
6. Do you have any concerns about picking classes?

Potential Guiding Questions as cited by J. Cuseo (n.d).

Personal Background

1. Why did you decided to attend college? Why did you choose this university?
2. What jobs or volunteer opportunities have you had in the past?
3. Do you plan on working in the fall semester?
4. Has anyone in your family attended college?
5. How confident do you feel right now about being here and be able to succeed here?
6. What are you most concerned about right now/the fall semester?
7. What priorities will you have in the fall semester?

Future Plans

1. Are you planning on continuing your education after graduating from college?
2. Intended major or career? What led to this choice?

Personal Abilities

1. What comes naturally to you? Or what would you consider to be your skills?
2. What would you excel at if you put all your effort into it?
3. What type of decision maker are you? How would you implement your decision?
4. What is the best way you learn? Describe your best learning experience versus your worst learning experience?

Personal Interests / Personal Values

1. What do you do for fun or in your free time?
2. Do any academic subjects interest you?
3. What sort of things are able to hold your interest?
4. What would you consider to be a successful job/life?
5. What are you looking for in a job?

Other questions

1. How do you feel about having an academic advisor? Good, negative, neutral
2. Is there anything about yourself that you would like to share that helps me get to know you better that we haven't discussed so far?

Appendix F Program Budget

Type of Expense	Expense Item	Justification	Cost	Total
Personnel	Peer Educators	Assisting with the undergraduate students and operation throughout the 2 days	4 students at \$15 hour for 12 hrs per day	\$1,440
	Panel Members	Discussing their role in their field	Volunteer basis	\$0
	Exploratory Advisors	Running and organizing the whole operation	Already apart of the departments budget	\$0
Operating Expenses	Food/Refreshment	Breakfast, lunch, snacks, and dinner for students and lunch needed for panel members over the 2 day span	2 small breakfast at \$9 per person, 2 lunches at \$12 per person and 1 dinner (pizza) at 17 per pie and snacks for 20 students	\$1,750
	Informational guides/worksheets	Visual information about the program	Staples 8.5" x 11 pack of paper for 2 packs	\$13.58
	Strong Interest Inventory Assessment	Assessment students will take to learn about their career interests	5 Advisors being trained to administer the test at \$1000 per person; \$27 per test for 20 students	\$5,540.00
	Notebooks and Pens	Allowing students to take notes about their learning throughout the program	20 notebooks at \$8 each; 2 packs a pens at \$14 each	\$188.00

	Space	Large enough space to host a workshop setting and panel discussion	Renting the Universities space for free	\$0
	Dorm rooms for stay	Students having a place to stay for the 2 day retreat	Based off of WCU Campus/Conferences Housing rates per day at \$25.86 for a double on North Campus; 10 rooms, 1 single at \$33.75 if needed	\$517.20
	Late Night Programming	Any materials needed for programming at night to give students time to bond and connect with the university	Outdoor movie and any other materials	\$2,000.00
	Gifts for Panel members	To show appreciation for volunteering	\$30 gift per panel member for around 15 people	\$450
Marketing and Recruitment	Print materials: postage, letters, stamps	Acceptance letters into the program and any materials needed for a successful program	\$.55 for 1 postage; \$11 book of 20 stamps x 2; 50 count cardstock paper at \$3.99; 25 pack envelopes at \$3.29 for 20 students	\$43.03

Total :	\$11,942
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Appendix G

End of Program Survey

Google Form Questions: End of Program Survey (submissions will be anonymous)

1. What was one key takeaway from participating in this program?
2. Can you identify one or two peers from the program that would be able to rely on in the fall semester? (learning outcome)
3. Describe three advantages of being an exploring undecided student. (learning outcome)
4. Name two campus resources you plan on using in the fall semester. (learning outcome)
5. (On a Likert scale), how comfortable did you feel disclosing information to your advisor?
6. (On a Likert scale), how helpful did you find the advising session?
7. (On a Likert scale), how confident do you feel about your class choices?
8. What have you learned about yourself from the two-day workshop?
9. How might you apply what you learned in the upcoming academic year?
10. Do you have any questions/comments/concerns that yet to be addressed?