

Destination Exploration

an exploratory program for
undecided students

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O'Brien Center for Student Success



O'Brien Center Mission:

The *O'Brien Center for Student Success* offers a student-centered infrastructure and suite of services driven by the needs and expectations of the Merrimack student and the demands of the 21st century workplace.

Program Proposal

- Designed by a committee of faculty & staff
 - ▣ Launched in 2012

- Address challenges:
 - ▣ Lack of connection to faculty/students
 - ▣ Under-preparation during advising sessions
 - ▣ Struggle to make purposeful decisions relating to career exploration
 - ▣ Repeated major change

Why is support crucial?

- According to research conducted by Pennsylvania State University:
 - 80% are not certain what they want to major in
 - 50% change their major at least once
- According to the US Dept. of Ed
 - 1 in 5 students who started out at a 4 year college, earned their BA from a different college

BYU Study of Undeclared Majors

- 17% of BYU students who start college with a major, graduate in that major
- 85% considered more than one major
- 50% of declared major students were ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ undecided
- 70% would chose more than one major if they could
- 54% were concerned or very concerned about finding adequate employment upon graduation (18% were going to grad school; 28% were not concerned)

Defining Undecided....

Personal Characteristics



Academic Areas



Occupation Areas

Retention Goals - Merrimack College



- Meeting the strategic goals by the year 2021:
 - Improve average four-year retention rate from 78% (fall 2011 Cohort) to 85%
 - Improving six-year graduation rate from 69% (fall 2011 Cohort) to 72%
 - Improving NSSE student engagement benchmarks by 10 points

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This program is designed to provide a support to all undecided students as they navigate the major and career decision making process.

Important Points to Consider

- Deciding a major isn't priority
- Develop skills— to allow students to see their career development progression
- Define goals and create a time line
- Discuss paths beyond major/minor
- Provide valuable knowledge about implications of major change, and offering suggestions for moving forward

Program Components

- 1) Provide additional advising support
- 2) Build a connection to other students
- 3) Foster a sense of belonging to the community
- 4) Participate in co-curricular activities
- 5) Engage students in structured exploratory activities to support decision-making
- 6) Provide a learning community with common courses

Key Players: Career Advisor

- Advises students on:
 - ▣ Career exploration
 - ▣ Decision making
 - ▣ Coping with independence
- Partners with faculty to:
 - ▣ Advise students during registration periods
 - ▣ Guide students toward exploratory classes

Key Player: Faculty Advisors

- Serves as academic advisor
- Consultant during drop/add or withdraw
- Hosts primary advising appointment
- Assists with registration process
- Assists with declaring/changing majors

Key Players: Peer Advisors

- Communicate one on one with the students
- Act as a guide throughout the exploration process from Orientation to Declaration
- Provide students with information on:
 - Advising: using the time wisely
 - Co-Curricular activities: engagement is important
 - Events on Campus: creating the connection

Program Snapshot: Where did we start?

- 87 students entered ~ Undeclared Liberal Arts
 - 49 are first year
 - 36 are second year

- 24 attended Fall Orientation session
- 11 September discussion session
- 12 attended October discussion session

Program Snapshot: Where are we now?

- Total in 2012~2013: 87 students
 - 75% declared by the end of the academic year
- Total in 2013~2014: 300 students
 - As of September 2013:
 - 9 appointments with undecided Career Advisor
 - 30 students have attended at least one on campus events
 - Ambassadors have outreached to students 5x
 - Destination Exploration

Marketing and Outreach

- Student Outreach
 - Postcard & invitation letter (summer), June & Fall Orientations; Emails from Career Advisor & Peer Ambassadors
- Webpage creation
- Print Materials
 - Brochure
- On campus partnerships
 - Attending Center for Academic Enrichment programs
- Continuous faculty education

Retention at Merrimack



- In 2011~2012, approximately 15% of ULA withdrew within 5 months
- In 2012~2013, approximately 9% of undecided students withdrew within 9 months.

What have we changed?

- The program is now offered to all undecided students
- Peer run group activities were not popularly attended
 - Peer ambassadors walking students through campus events offers better support to undecided students
- New Career Advisor designated to undecided students

Goals for this year...

- Promotion of program to students
 - ▣ Marketing materials; ambassador outreach

- Boost student attendance at major related events

- Encourage students to meet with their career advisor to discuss major and career options

Campus Wide...



- Majors/Minors Fair
- Advisor identified on transcript and blackboard
- Pre-Advising Workshops

On your campus...

- Defining Undeclared
 - ▣ Research the numbers – does it make sense?
- Utilizing Resources
 - ▣ Academic Support Services
 - ▣ Other advocates across campus
- Benefits...
 - ▣ Retention & student success
 - ▣ Traffic to your Centers
 - ▣ Partnerships across campus



Ideas...

Questions...

Comments...

References

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