

Destination Exploration

an exploratory program for
undecided students

Dr. Heather Maietta, CDFI

Associate Vice-President, Career and Corporate Engagement
Director, O'Brien Center for Student Success

Alexandra Finney

Career Advisor Fellow, O'Brien Center for Student Success
Program Coordinator, Destination Exploration

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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