

Fall November 2014

## **Liberal Smarts: Using Constructivist Career Development to Restore Power to the Liberal Arts**

Kelly A. Gray  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

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<https://doi.org/10.7275/6043436.0> [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations\\_2/197](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_2/197)

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LIBERAL SMARTS: USING CONSTRUCTIVIST CAREER DEVELOPMENT  
TO RESTORE POWER TO THE LIBERAL ARTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

KELLY A. GRAY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 2014

College of Education

Educational Policy and Leadership

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TO RESTORE POWER TO THE LIBERAL ARTS

A Dissertation Presented

By

KELLY A. GRAY

Approved as to style and content by:

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Benita J. Barnes, Chair

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Elizabeth A. Williams, Member

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Laura J. Briggs, Member

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Christine McCormick, Dean  
College of Education

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to Esme Noelle Gray,  
who is scheduled to join our family  
on November 9, 2014.  
I cannot wait to meet you!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would never have been able to balance work, school, and my personal life without the following people. With all my heart, thank you!

- To my wife and best friend, Colby Fisher Gray. Without you, this would not have been possible. Thank you for your love, support, and encouragement. I will never be able to repay you for all the weekends you took care of everything so I could just write.
- To my parents (Mary Ann and Ken Gray), my sister and her family (Holly, Matt, and Kally), and my brother and his family (Jimmy, Megan, and Miles). I love you all, and I appreciate your never-ending support and encouragement.
- To my dissertation committee: Dr. Benita J. Barnes, Dr. Elizabeth A. Williams, and Dr. Laura J. Briggs. Thank you for being on my team. You have added valuable insight and served as an endless source of motivation and support. I owe you a lifetime of gratitude!
- To the College of Education at UMass Amherst for supporting my dissertation with a \$1,000 research grant that funded my incentive plan, as well as assistance from a professional transcriber.
- To Dr. David Vaillancourt and Dr. Mary Roe Clark for providing your wisdom, support, and constructive feedback.
- To the amazing colleagues and friends that have been part of my journey. I am a better professional and researcher because of the conversations we have had and the countless things I have learned from you. I want to especially thank Nicki Schuessler and Vivian Garay Santiago for remaining friends even though we no longer live in the same city/state/coast. Without a doubt, I am a better person because of both of you.
- To my colleagues and friends in Dean of Students Office, thank you for being excellent co-workers and friends.
- To my Thirsty Mind writing buddies: Cathy Manly and Dr. Dawn Rendell. Thanks for helping me stay on track!
- To Kait Nagi for introducing me to an article on constructivist career development. Not only did that article improve the career course, it completely changed the focus of my dissertation. You are a great professional and an outstanding friend.

- To Elaine Whitlock for being an amazing editor. Your contributions to this dissertation were extremely valuable. Thank you for adding your talents to this project.
- To my participants. Thank you for sharing your stories with me. I admire your courage and your commitment to your interests and passions!

## ABSTRACT

### LIBERAL SMARTS: USING CONSTRUCTIVIST CAREER DEVELOPMENT TO RESTORE POWER TO THE LIBERAL ARTS

SEPTEMBER 2014

KELLY A. GRAY, B.S., QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY

M.Ed., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Ed.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by Associate Professor Benita J. Barnes

Over the past two decades, funding to liberal arts programs has significantly declined (Donoghue, 2010; Mangan, 2003; Nussbaum, 2010; Smith 2011). Donoghue (2010) credits the overall decline to changes in the funding structure within higher education, as reliance on private money increases, professional and specialized majors in the business of “practical” value capture the majority of corporate dollars. Brooks (2009a) encourages liberal arts faculty and staff to spend more time and resources working with incoming and enrolled students to assist them in understanding the practicality of their majors, and subsequently how to market their majors to employers. However, thus far, liberal arts educators have missed the mark in finding a model of career development that works for liberal arts students (Brooks, 2009a; Nell, 2003). This exploratory study examines the use of constructivist career development with students who have chosen liberal arts majors and its ability to demonstrate to students the “practical” value of their education while still respecting the unique skills, interests, and values associated with liberal arts education.

Utilizing a phenomenological approach, the researcher interviewed ten liberal arts majors at a public research university in the Northeast who were also enrolled in a



constructivist career development (CCD) course. The study examined the process CCD from the perspectives of the participants and found that 1) liberal arts majors need/desire opportunities to deconstruct negative external messages about their academic majors in a structured and supportive environment; 2) CCD has the ability to increase career self-efficacy in regards to career decision-making and the completion of career development tasks; 3) as a career development model, CCD respects the values of liberal arts education and empowers students with liberal arts majors to leverage their broad academic skills/knowledge in the “real world”; and 4) the process of CCD urges students to develop and trust their internal voice, ultimately assisting in the development of self-authorship.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

At the very time America may most need the liberal arts traditions of robust inquiry, curricular breadth, and a focus on critical thinking, that genre of education is struggling against a time of waning student interest and unprecedented financial duress. (Blumenstyk, 2010, p. A22)

### Statement of the Problem

The debate between the intrinsic value of liberal education versus the practical value of professional or specialized education is not new. Throughout American history, documents and lectures, such as *The Yale Report* (Yale University, 1828/1989), Harvard's *General Education for a Free Society* (1945) otherwise known as the "Red Book", and Clark Kerr's (1963) *The Uses of the University* have cautioned that the professionalization/specialization of higher education is detrimental to a democratic society (Barker, 2000). Beyond the intrinsic value of the liberal arts, Nussbaum (2010) argues that a broad education is essential if the United States is to foster a society of critical thinkers who look beyond immediate profit to a model of human development that places people over profit.

Over the past two decades, liberal arts programs have seen drastic cuts in funding (Donoghue, 2010; Mangan, 2003; Nussbaum, 2010; Smith, 2011). Additionally, although student enrollment in the liberal arts has remained constant since the 1970s, enrollment in professional and technical education is expanding (Barker, 2000). Donoghue credits the overall decline to changes in the funding structure within higher education; as reliance on private money increases, professional and specialized majors in the business of practical value capture the lion's share of corporate dollars. Consequently, underfunded liberal arts programs struggle to keep pace as well as to market their value to incoming and enrolled

students. Students receive a clear message regarding which majors are presumably more marketable, employable, and therefore, more valuable (Brooks, 2009b; Camenson, 2008). Brooks (2009a) encourages liberal arts faculty and staff to spend more time and resources working with incoming and enrolled students to assist them in understanding the practicality of their majors and subsequently how to market their majors to employers. However, thus far, we have missed the mark in finding a model of career development that works for liberal arts students (Brooks, 2009a; Nell, 2003). In essence, we are failing to help liberal arts students leverage their education in the “real world,” perpetuating the stereotype of the unemployable liberal arts student.

### **Liberal Arts in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Why or Why Not?**

In a recent article, Berrett (2012) quoted Elizabeth Minnich, a senior scholar at the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), “Policy makers are looking for education to help people compete in an increasingly global and complex economy at the same time the purpose of college is being cast in narrower terms” (p. A112). Minnich’s statement was in response to a report issued by the state of Tennessee and a company called College Measures. Jointly, College Measures and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission researched and released a publication that reduces the worth of a college degree down to the starting salaries of graduating students (College Measures, 2012). Once again, this begs the question, what is the purpose of a college degree? Delbanco (2012) attempts to frame a discussion surrounding this essential question. He explores the history of American higher education, the current economic and political challenges, and discusses his vision for the future of higher education.



Delbanco's beliefs are rooted in the liberal arts tradition, but he cautions that we must find better ways to educate and demonstrate to students the practical worth of their degrees. Roche (2010) echoes this idea as he advocates for faculty and staff in the liberal arts to be able to clearly articulate the practical value of a liberal arts degree just as effectively as they communicate the intrinsic value. Highlighting the practical value of a liberal arts education is essential when speaking with students, parents, policymakers, and other stakeholders about what one "gets out of" a liberal arts education.

The traditional model of American higher education was focused on providing students with knowledge and instilling values that would prepare them for active participation in society (Barker, 2000; Ferrall, 2011; Glyer & Weeks, 1998; Roche, 2010). This philosophy of education is rooted in the liberal arts, which for two millennia has focused on developing citizens through broad education focused on critical thinking, oral and written communication, and logic (Roche, 2010). Nussbaum (2010) emphasizes that this education is still relevant and necessary in today's society if we want our future scientists, politicians, and business leaders to focus on people over profit. However, a variety of factors have led to a shifting focus in higher education, one aimed at job training and economic growth. As much as a broad and thorough education is crucial, most people are interested in immediate financial security.

As state funding of higher education has decreased over the past three decades, colleges and universities have supplemented the deficit by raising tuition and fees as well as by increasing the amount of private dollars. This has led to a variety of problems, one of which being the quest for private moneys (Donoghue, 2010; Mangan, 2003; Smith, 2011). According to Donoghue, this has led to public colleges and universities being

“state located,” but no longer, “state funded.” This shift in funding structure begins with the faculty and trickles down to the students. For example, private funding for research and other commercial endeavors has led to a huge disparity in faculty salaries, facilities, and student resources between professional programs and liberal arts programs.

According to one salary study, a full professor in the humanities earns an average of \$108,000 a year compared to a full professor in business who nets an average salary of \$208,000 (Donoghue, 2010). Likewise, Mangan states that the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) found that an average professor in the humanities makes approximately \$75,000 less a year than the average professor in law, business, or applied health fields. Additionally, the AAUP found that some medical school professors earn more than their college president and are therefore the highest paid employees on staff. Often these high salaries in professional programs correspond with research dollars and corporate sponsorships that subsequently pay for faculty salaries and facilities updates. Private funding quickly creates a visible disparity between academic programs as those receiving corporate money and/or research grants receive state of the art classrooms, offices, research space, and student support centers. The ability to bring funding into a university comes with prestige and power that inevitably plays out in a variety of settings. In many cases, this power creates a divide between how society and members of the higher education community value specific majors. Most programs in the liberal arts do not lend themselves to corporate sponsorship because the practical value of these programs is more difficult to measure (Mangan, 2003).

The change in funding structures for public higher education has resulted in a call for increased accountability within all facets of higher education, including the liberal

arts. No longer can liberal arts programs rest on their long history of being the cornerstone of American higher education. Like all programs, the liberal arts must be able to measure outcomes and demonstrate the value of a student's experience. Seifert et al. (2007) called for an increased effort to measure the outcomes associated with the liberal arts, and they went as far as calling the liberal arts experience an "empirical black box"; its true value is unknown. Over the past decade, there has been an increased focus on trying to demonstrate outcomes. For example, the Wabash Study of Liberal Arts Outcomes found that liberal arts students have an inclination toward life-long learning, leadership, intercultural effectiveness, and psychological well-being (Blaich & Wise, 2007). Studies like this one demonstrate the broad benefit of choosing to major in the liberal arts, but stakeholders need to continue to demonstrate its worth to students, parents, and policy makers.

Despite the long tradition of liberal arts education in the United States, an increasing number of students are choosing professional programs. In 1970-1971, business majors comprised about 8% of all students graduating with a bachelor's degree. In 2011 this number rose to 22% (Agresto, 2011). Today, about 41% of graduating college students hold a degree in the liberal arts, with the other 59% of graduates choosing professional majors, for example, in business, communication, journalism, computer and informational sciences, education, engineering, and health professions. It is not surprising that so many students are choosing to major in professional fields. In an era of increased accountability and a declining economy, career-focused education is becoming increasingly trendy (DiMaria, 2010). Consumers of higher education are using a cost-benefit approach when making decisions about attending college or university and

return on investment is the primary factor (Brooks, 2009a). This approach has increased the number of students choosing to obtain a degree in a career-tracked or pre-professional program, as data suggest that, on average, students majoring in career-tracked majors have higher starting salaries (Koc, 2010).

A primary reason for the rise in the cost-benefit approach to choosing a college major is the soaring costs associated with obtaining a college education. Since the 1987-88 academic year, tuition and other academic expenses have increased an average of 7.2% per year at public colleges and universities and 6.3% per year at private schools (Archibald & Feldman, 2011). According to a Michigan Congressman, Representative Hansen Clarke (2012), for the first time in history, student debt has reached the one trillion dollar mark, and the typical student leaves college with an average of \$25,250 in student loans. The high sticker price of a college education has changed the role of parents within the higher education process. It is rare for students to enter college without the financial support of their parents; this phenomenon has placed parents in a consumer role regarding their student's education. Many parents are heavily involved in all educational decisions, including the choice of what to study. In a recent qualitative study, Simmons (2008) found that students perceive their parents to be informed and reliable advisors when it comes to making academic and career decisions. Additionally, students in this study conveyed that their parents wanted them on a defined career path, specifically one that led to financial security. Given that students and parents alike are not inclined to consider the practical value of a liberal arts degree, faculty and staff working with liberal arts students must be able to explain the value of liberal arts majors in accessible and practical terms.

## **Professional Majors Versus the Liberal Arts**

There are some careers that require students to select a professional/specialized major, for example, engineering, accounting, architecture, and nursing (Camenson, 2008). Since the early 1900s, professional education has become increasingly popular and has been expanding to meet the demands of a more diverse college population (Delbanco, 2012; Ferrall, 2011; Roche, 2010; Sheridan, 1998). Some career fields, like the ones previously noted, view college as a professional training ground, requiring their new employees to possess specific training as a result of a college degree. However, most careers do not necessitate the attainment of a specific undergraduate degree upon graduation (Brooks, 2009a, 2009b; CERI, 2011; CERI, 2012; Gehlhaus, 2007-08; Gordon, 2010; Koc, 2010). In fact, 40% of employers assert that they seek talent, regardless of major, when recruiting employees (CERI, 2012).

Despite the versatility of the liberal arts major in the job market, many students who have chosen a major in the liberal arts mistakenly believe their job prospects are limited to careers in teaching, non-profit, and museum work (Camenson, 2008). Brooks (2009a, 2009b) suggests that societal pressure convinces students that major-to-career is a linear path. Take, for example, the question: What do you plan to do with your major? This question assumes that a college major is the key to unlocking access to a dream career. Perhaps this is the case with pre-professional majors, but the intent of a liberal arts degree is not to train students for a particular occupation (Brooks, 2009a, 2009b; Gehlhaus, 2007; Koc, 2010; Roche, 2010). For example, a student majoring in history can find work in a wide array of occupational fields, including museums, non-profit and government work, business, education, law, and finance (Camenson, 2008). The 41% of

U.S. undergraduate students majoring in the liberal arts are developing broad skills in communication, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and problem-solving so they can become life-long learners who are adaptable to working in multiple fields (Koc, 2010). Liberal arts students therefore have a range of job opportunities available to them.

However, these students have difficulty creating their own niche within the job market.

Few Americans would question the intrinsic value that has been long associated with a degree in the liberal arts. After all, most elite colleges (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown, Columbia, William and Mary, Dartmouth, etc.) based their model on the philosophy of liberal education (Ferrall, 2011; Glyer & Weeks, 1998; Roche, 2010). Nonetheless, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, intrinsic value alone will not keep the liberal arts alive (Roche, 2010). Our current economy, coupled with the elevated cost of higher education (Delbanco, 2012), causes many students to believe that studying the liberal arts is a luxury reserved for the wealthiest students—those unconcerned with getting a high enough salary to pay back student loans (Blumenstyk, 2010; Hutton, 2006). To effectively recruit new students into liberal arts majors (as well as retain current enrollees), stakeholders must be able to explain the practical applications correlated with obtaining a liberal arts degree. This practical, or applied, knowledge manifests in two ways. First, liberal arts educators must teach students how to translate their learning into a language that employers will understand (Brooks, 2009a, 2009b; Camenson, 2008; Nell, 2003; Rejecki & Borden, 2010; Roche, 2010). For example, how does learning to be an excellent writer and a critical thinker assist students in the “real world”? Second, educators must work with liberal arts students to identify and obtain opportunities that will supplement their curricular education (Brooks, 2009a) because it takes more than a

college degree to get the attention of employers in today's economy. The completion of internships, campus jobs, volunteer opportunities, study abroad, research assistantships, for example, can transform academic skills into the applied skills that are necessary in a competitive job market (Brooks, 2009a; Camenson, 2008; Gordon, 2010; Nell, 2003). In professional/specialized majors, faculty and staff focus on preparing their students for life after college. The goal of a professional major is to prepare graduates for employment, and this leaves liberal arts students struggling to keep up in a race they already perceive themselves behind.

Compared to students who graduate with professional majors, students who major in the liberal arts are on the lower end of the starting salary scale, but researchers have shown that over time the salary gap disappears (Berrett, 2012; Koc, 2010). Koc suggests that this preliminary salary gap exists because liberal arts majors are not initially as aggressive in the job market as students majoring in pre-professional programs. There are several possible reasons for this trend in salary data. As previously mentioned, students see major-to-career as a linear path, and because of this, students majoring in the liberal arts may perceive fewer internships and job opportunities available to them. Second, liberal arts students are less likely to visit their college's career center and/or pursue networking contacts (Koc, 2010). The reason for this finding is unclear, but it is possibly due to an assumption that career offices foster a business-centered approach and will not have knowledge or access to the types of jobs students majoring in the liberal arts desire. Furthermore, liberal arts students may avoid college career centers simply due to a fear of the unknown. The anxiety associated with life purpose can often be debilitating, resulting in students avoiding career development at all costs (Nell, 2003). Unfortunately, this

avoidance can be detrimental to students because career centers can help refine students' resume's, cover letters, networking skills, and interviewing skills, all of which are crucial if students want to be competitive in the job market. Lastly, students in the liberal arts want to be valued for their unique goals, which studies show are not primarily related to salary (Gehlhaus, 2007; Koc, 2010). Therefore, liberal arts students may be less likely to negotiate starting salaries as well as be more willing to accept low paying positions based on other rewarding aspects of the position.

Brooks (2009a) suggests that academic departments within liberal arts disciplines and career services' staff need to rethink the career development of students majoring in the liberal arts. Liberal arts students are less likely to receive career guidance from faculty within their majors, as these faculty often encourage the best and brightest to go to graduate school in order to enter the academy (Berrett, 2012; Brooks, 2009b; Nell, 2003). This leaves the 53% of liberal arts students who see their bachelor's degree as terminal (Koc, 2010) with limited career guidance and direction. We must acknowledge that career development and career services should not follow a one-size-fits-all approach. Career advice should vary by area of study or interest, addressing the unique needs and challenges of each field. Moreover, students majoring in the liberal arts might benefit from an entirely different overarching method to career guidance. This method should account for liberal arts students' values, approach to learning, and their need to make strong connections between the transferable skills they are learning in their academic majors and their potential careers. Career development for the liberal arts must provide students with an opportunity to deconstruct the negative stereotypes that are prevalent in today's society. The jokes about unemployable scholars and students who



will spend up to \$40,000 a year to guarantee themselves a job as a barista at the neighborhood coffee shop saturate social media and the Internet. These sarcastic remarks and misperceptions often put liberal arts students on the defense, ready to argue the worth of their degree to parents, relatives, and friends (Brooks, 2009b). However, this constant need to defend their educational path can lead to feelings of doubt and insecurity.

One career development method that seems well matched to the needs of liberal arts students is constructivist career development (CCD). Constructivist career development has roots in philosophy, science, psychology, and cultural studies (Peavy, 1995). Its emphasis is on empowering students to create meaning by reflecting on their personal histories, patterns, relationships, and roles within their communities (Palladino Schultheiss, 2005). This self-learning through meaning-making is then applied to how students see themselves in the future and how their personal values correlate with their career goals. Liberal arts students can benefit greatly from this approach to career development for several reasons. First, it is a holistic view of career development that allows students to incorporate values, relationships, interests, and strengths into their career process. A holistic and meaningful approach is important because, traditionally, liberal arts students seek careers in which they can make a difference or engage in a social good. For example, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employment (NACE) Student Survey (2010) liberal arts students are more likely to work in non-profits, for state and federal governments, and in education (Koc, 2010, 2012). Second, the academic roots of constructivist career development coincide with the learning that is happening within many liberal arts disciplines. To be a successful participant in constructivist career development, one must reflect, tell stories, critically

analyze these stories, and rewrite one's life story (Brott, 2001). Clear oral and written communication, dialogue, critical thinking, and analytical skills are all traits associated with a liberal arts education (Roche, 2010). Leveraging these skills in the career development process allows for cohesion and is a demonstration of the real life practicality of the skills associated with the liberal arts.

### **Conceptual Framework: Self-authorship**

Today, there is much debate regarding the purpose of a college education.

Delbanco (2012) summarized his view of the purpose of higher education by stating:

A college should be a place where young people find help for navigating the territory between adolescence and adulthood. It should provide guidance, but not coercion, for students trying to cross the treacherous terrain on their way toward self-knowledge. (p. 3)

Specifically, true liberal arts education goes beyond simply passing information from teacher to student as it teaches students to be self-learners via rigorous reading, writing, dialogue, and analysis (Roche, 2010). For these reasons, Baxter-Magolda's work on self-authorship provides the ideal conceptual framework to explore the process of constructivist career development, a process in which liberal arts students learn to author their own futures.

Baxter Magolda, (2004, 2009, 2010) based her research on the journey of self-authorship on the work of Robert Kegan (1982, 1994). Kegan originally coined the term self-authorship to describe a shift from external to internal meaning making. When students work toward self-authorship they no longer look to external "authorities" to form their own ideas, beliefs, and values, but rather focus within themselves. Achieving self-authorship means that students become aware that they are responsible for synthesizing

external information and making personal decisions about what to believe independently of their parents, teachers, and friends. Kegan (1994) emphasizes the difference between self-authorship and egocentrism by making it clear that part of self-authorship is restructuring relationships to be more authentic. Therefore, self-authorship is not about being self-focused, but instead trying to create mutually beneficial relationships that are genuine.

Baxter Magolda (2004) presents the “journey to self-authorship” in three phases: External Formulas, Crossroads, and Self-Authorship. In the first phase, external formulas, individuals trust authorities and often mimic the vision of authority figures as they decide what to believe for themselves. External voices overshadow individuals' internal voices, and often individuals do not even realize how influenced they are by authority figures. The second phase, crossroads, is categorized by the “push and pull” created by wanting to follow one's own internal expectation versus still believing that external authorities might have "inside" information that make their opinions more meaningful or more accurate. Baxter Magolda assigns two elements to this phase—listening to internal voice and cultivating internal voice.

The final phase in the journey is self-authorship, and Baxter Magolda (2004) defines this by an individual's ability to trust himself or herself to decide what to believe in order to create his or her vision of success. Internal voice comes to the foreground, as the individual learns to listen to others but makes his or her own decisions. The first element of the self-authorship phase requires an individual to trust his or her internal voice. In this element, the individual realizes that much in life is out of one's control, but he or she can always control his or her reaction to life. In the second element, building an

internal foundation, the individual uses his or her internal voice to make internal commitments and to build a solid personal philosophy that then guides his or her life decisions. Students who engage in constructivist career development are engaging in a focused process of self-authorship. Students learn to examine their career goals and possible life paths in the context of what they personally value. In theory, if educators guide students in a process of constructivist career development early in their college careers, students may be more likely to display signs of self-authorship during college. Chapter 2 will explore the concept of self-authorship in more detail and explore literature that suggests that most college students do not reach the final stage of self-authorship before graduating from college.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore and unpack the process of constructivist career development (CCD) from the perspective of students who have chosen a major in the liberal arts. This study evaluates the use of constructivist career development in a classroom setting. Many supporters of the liberal arts agree that faculty and staff working with liberal arts majors must rethink how they prepare students for life after college (Brooks, 2009a; Camenson, 2008; Gehlhaus, 2007; Hutton, 2006; Koc, 2010; Nell, 2003). However, there is little discussion on how to best go about this process. Brooks (2009a; 2009b) suggests that educators must help students articulate the value of a liberal arts education to others, including future employers, parents, and peers. In doing so, educators are helping students reaffirm their pursuits and assisting them in building

confidence and pride in their studies and transferable skills, which can support them in their transitions out of college into the professional world.

Over the past two decades, CCD has received increased attention in the literature, but there is a lack of quantitative and qualitative research regarding the outcomes associated with this method (McMahon, Watson, Chetty, & Hoelson, 2012). The foundational principles that guide CCD suggest that students who engage in this process will learn how to take ownership for their own life path by learning how to be self-reflective regarding their own values, interests, and skills (Campbell & Unger, 2004b; Grier-Reed & Skaar, 2010). In CCD, the career development expert is simply a guide or facilitator of a process (Brott, 2001; Hoskins, 1995; Miller, 2004; Palladino Schultheiss, 2005; Peavy, 1992) by which the student is empowered to examine his or her life and assign meaning to life events in the way he or she sees fit.

This study investigated students' perceptions of the process of constructivist career development, and the outcomes associated with CCD, through a one-credit CCD course for sophomore students majoring in the liberal arts. The students who participated in the study engaged in a series of three phenomenological interviews. The process of phenomenological interviewing allowed me the opportunity to focus on each participant's history, experience with CCD, and how he or she made meaning from the experience (Seidman, 1991). The data gathered from this study provided thick description about students' experiences and offered insight into how they made meaning throughout the process. Understanding how students viewed the CCD process will assist faculty and staff as they implement new ways of working with liberal arts students, hopefully resulting in students understanding both the intrinsic and practical value associated with

obtaining a degree in the liberal arts. Although this study was exploratory in nature, it offers practical insight into the process of constructivist career development and sets the stage for future research on this topic

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question that guided my study was: What did the participants deem to be the important components of a CCD experience? Since limited research unpacks and explores the process of constructivist career development and there is no literature specifically linking constructivist career development to the needs of liberal arts students, I felt it was important to start with a broad question that would provide insight into the process of CCD.

In examining the process of constructivist career development, several sub-questions helped me stay focused on specific components of the student experience with the sophomore CCD course. First, because of the process of CCD, did students experience a positive shift in career self-efficacy? Self-efficacy is an individual's confidence in his or her ability to successfully complete a task—in this case, career-related tasks, such as resume/cover letter writing, networking, and interviewing, as well as career decision-making. DeWitz, Woolsey, and Walsh (2009) found that self-efficacy beliefs in students are significantly and positively related to purpose of life. Therefore, providing students with experiences that build confidence should assist them in defining life purpose. Lack of purpose can be detrimental to the success of liberal arts students, as studies have demonstrated that the ability for students to see connections between their

current and future goals can be instrumental in the ultimate attainment of their academic and career goals (Bembenutty, 2010).

My second sub-question was: Do liberal arts students perceive that the method of constructivist career development respects their individual values and life goals? One criticism of traditional career development is that it is objective and business-centered, which does not account for the unique needs and values of liberal arts students. This study explores liberal arts students' perceptions of being valued before, during, and after the course. The interviews focus on the student experience in the course and include questions surrounding the other career development opportunities in which they have engaged throughout their college careers.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is no way to predict which moments of a liberal arts education will be directly relevant to the workplace, but it is imperative that students know that such moments occur frequently, and the skills and knowledge they are learning are far from obscure and irrelevant (Brooks, 2009a). CCD empowers students to decide for themselves which components of their education are relevant and, subsequently, teaches students how to market these opportunities to potential employers. Perhaps more importantly, CCD teaches students to recognize gaps in their skills and experiences, encouraging them to develop a plan to fill those gaps. For example, an English major who excels in his or her academic writing has many opportunities, including utilizing his or her written communication skills in the business world. However, without jobs and internships on his or her resume', the student may have a difficult time convincing future

employers to take a chance on an English major. When students learn this early in their college careers, they then have time to develop and implement short-term goals to build their experience base.

Liberal arts majors are not behind in the job market because of their chosen major (Brooks, 2009b; Gehlhaus, 2007; Koc, 2010). Many employers are willing to hire talented students, regardless of their major (CERI, 2012). Some of the top CEOs claim they value the unique perspective that liberal arts students bring to the professional world (Rethinking Success in the Liberal Arts, 2010). However, Brooks (2009a) posits that liberal arts educators do not spend enough time and energy ensuring that their students know how to utilize their newly found knowledge. CCD is a method of career development that values the critical inquiry, dialogue, reflection, and problem-solving skills that have long been associated with the liberal arts. Additionally, students who engage in CCD learn a process of self-reflection and life revision that will guide them well beyond college.

### **Definitions**

This study employs several terms that might not have universal meaning or may have different contextual meaning. Terms utilized throughout this study are defined below.

**Liberal Education:** The American Association of Colleges and Universities defines the following terms on its website: liberal education, liberal arts, liberal arts colleges, *artes liberales*, and general education. Throughout the literature, authors use the aforementioned terms frequently, but there is little consensus about what they actually



mean (Glyer & Weeks, 1998). Using the distinctions provided by the AAC&U, here is a summary of the terms, as I use them in this dissertation.

The AAC&U defines liberal education as:

a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of value, ethics, and civic engagement. Characterized by challenging encounters with important issues, and more a way of studying than a specific course or field of study, a liberal education can be achieved at all types of colleges and universities. (AAC&U, 2012, Liberal Arts, para. 1)

Although most scholars agree that liberal education is about providing students with the knowledge, values, and skills to live in an engaged society (Barker, 2000), others believe a liberal education should encompass specific requirements. For example, Lind (2006) believes that liberal arts education must include four important components, all of which lead to the ultimate goal of educating citizens for public life. First, liberal arts education is non-specialized education; the goal is to educate students to think critically and to become capable of self-learning. Second, it includes a specific set of scholarly disciplines—art, languages, classics, comparative literature, English, and history. Third, it includes training in rhetoric and logic. Finally, the inclusion of the classic languages is crucial. The classic languages included Latin, Greek, and often Hebrew.

Today, colleges and universities rarely implement Lind's strict interpretation of liberal education. Most U.S. colleges and universities do not require the study of the classic languages, although many liberal arts programs have a foreign language requirement that includes more than basic knowledge of a language. Most programs do include some combination of the humanities and courses that focus in rhetoric and logic. Nevertheless, even more important than specific courses, is a focus on foundational skills and a broad education.

**Liberal Arts:** The term liberal arts is a discipline-specific term that refers to those majors that provide mostly broad-based knowledge and develop the core intellectual capacities (AAC&U, 2012). Since the 1970s, the list of these majors has stayed fairly consistent and includes the following: English (Language and Literature), Psychology, Foreign Languages, Social Sciences, Visual and Performing Arts, Liberal and General Studies, Area and Ethnic Studies, Life Sciences, Multi-and Interdisciplinary Studies, Mathematics, Physical Sciences, and Philosophy and Religion (Ferrall, 2011). The participants from this study were mostly from the humanities and arts.

**Liberal Arts Colleges:** The AAC&U says that liberal arts colleges are “a particular institutional type—often small, often residential—that facilitates close interaction between faculty and students, and has a strong focus on liberal arts disciplines” (AAC&U, 2012, Often Confused Terms, para 3). This study does not take place at a liberal arts college, but it is important to include this definition as a comparison point.

**Artes Liberales:** Artes liberales dates back to the time of Socrates and traditionally refers to the seven academic disciplines that were appropriate and necessary for free men to study—grammar, rhetoric, dialect, geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy (Roche, 2010). The first three, known as the trivium, symbolized the importance of mastering language. The final four, known as the quadrivium, were mathematical and encouraged students to understand the physical world. Over time, the traditional definition of the liberal arts has shifted drastically, but the core value of acquiring a broad education that prepares students to live and participate in a democratic society has remained the same.

**General Education:** The AAC&U defines general education as:

the part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students. It provides broad learning in liberal arts and science disciplines, and forms the basis for developing important intellectual, civic, and practical capacities. General education can take many forms, and increasingly includes introductory, advanced, and integrative forms of learning. (AAC&U, 2012, Often Confused Terms, para 5)

The implementation of general education curriculums in higher education were a result of the “Red Book,” the President’s Commission of Higher Education (Barker, 2000), which critiqued the fragmentation of the higher education curriculum. As the number of students specializing (majoring) in certain disciplines increased, so did the need to preserve America’s historical roots in liberal education. However, general education curricula often lack central leadership (Barker, 2000), resulting in students feeling as if general education classes are merely hoops to jump through.

**Professional/Specialized Majors:** Those majors geared toward a specific vocation or profession. Since the 1970s, the core of these has stayed consistent. Although advances in science and technology are continuing to expand this list, which includes Agriculture, Home Economics, Allied Health, Law and Legal Studies, Business and Management, Library and Archival Science, Communications, Marketing, Conservation and Natural Resources, Military Science, Education, Protective Services, Public Administration and Services, Engineering, Health Sciences, and Theology (Ferrall, 2011). Currently, approximately 59% of undergraduates receive a bachelor’s degree in a career-tracked or pre-professional field (Koc, 2010).

**Constructivist Career Development:** Constructivism has roots in philosophy, psychology, science, and culture. It is a theory of knowledge that argues that individuals acquire knowledge via the interactions between their experiences and ideas (Piaget,

1936/1952. CCD “encourages people to construct their own identities and careers through life planning skills, personal meaning making, and the co-creation of knowledge [with career counselors, instructors, and peers]” (Grier-Reed & Skaar, 2010, p. 42). This is a holistic approach to career development, one that acknowledges that individuals do not make career decisions in a vacuum. It encourages students to reflect on what they want, what they have, what they hear, and what constrains them (Campbell & Unger, 2004a). Using this knowledge, students are encouraged to articulate and map their preferred life story, or stories.

**Self-efficacy:** Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual’s beliefs concerning his or her ability to perform tasks that influence the events that affect his or her life. Although the term self-efficacy is often used in the realm of academic learning, the research team of Betz and Hackett postulated that career self-efficacy is a useful lens to examine the completion of career tasks and career decision-making (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Hackett & Betz, 1981). They argue that self-efficacy is a cognitive judgment on the ability to perform tasks and, therefore, best utilized when paired with a specific behavior.

**Self-authorship:** Self-authorship is “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations. It is required to achieve many of the most critical outcomes of higher education—effective reasoning, problem solving, leadership, moral reasoning, and intercultural maturity” (Baxter Magolda, & King, 2004). For college students majoring in the liberal arts, choosing a life path can be more difficult due to the abundance of options. Students must learn how to listen to their internal voice and to filter out negative or inaccurate external influences.

## Summary

This dissertation explores career development from the perspective of liberal arts students. Using Baxter Magolda's (2008) *Journey of Self-Authorship* as a conceptual framework, it unpacks the process of constructivist career development from the perspective of students who completed a one-credit, CCD course during their sophomore year of college. This conceptual perspective contends that students who learn to "self-author" their career goals by learning to take ownership of their process will be more competitive in the "real world." The literature suggests that currently many liberal arts students have lower expectations of their worth in the job market, resulting in liberal arts student being less likely to apply for internships, network, and utilize career services (Koc, 2010). The goal of the study is to see if CCD methods can empower students to take action and seek ways to become marketable to future employers.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed analysis of the literature on constructivism, the field of career education, constructivist career development, and self-authorship. By detailing these bodies of literature, the connections among them will demonstrate the potential benefits to liberal arts students if, and when, these students encounter CCD methods. Chapter 2 will also demonstrate how the theories and methods associated with CCD are a good fit with the educational goals associated with the liberal arts. In Chapter 3, I overview the qualitative methodology used in this dissertation study. Chapter 4 reviews the findings, and Chapter 5 discusses the findings and provides next steps in regards to implications and future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Contrary to common sense there is no unique “real world” that preexists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language; that what we call the world is a product of some mind whose symbolic procedures construct the world. (Bruner, 1986, p. 97)

#### Introduction

In his review of Jean Piaget's life-long work on the psychology of intelligence, von Glasersfeld (1982) summarized constructivism by writing, "There is no way of transferring knowledge—every knower has to build it up for himself. The cognitive organism is first and foremost an organizer who interprets experiences, and by interpretation, shapes it into a structured world" (p. 612). In other words, people construct their own meaning by building their view of the world via organizing information into their own unique frames of reference. Constructivism, when interlaced with career development, encourages students to take ownership of their futures by fostering thoughtful reflection on the past and present to make informed decisions about the future (McMahon & Watson, 2011). Employing a constructivist framework with college students encourages them to think critically about their own ideas, as well as the ideas of others, as they begin to deconstruct the dominant messages they have internalized about their education and build a new life message that will guide their future endeavors. In learning how they build their own knowledge and create their own career paths, students learn to author their own lives.

Liberal arts students, more than career-tracked students, need to create their own meaning for the value they apply to their majors (Brooks 2009a, 2009b). Specifically, liberal arts students need to augment the transferable skills they develop within their

majors (oral and written communication, problem solving, analytical thinking, global thought, etc.) with practical experiences that will enhance their marketability in the employment field (Brooks, 2009b; Koc, 2010). No one professor, advisor, career counselor, mentor, friend, or parent can effectively prescribe a definitive career plan to a liberal arts student, because a liberal arts major can lead to unlimited career opportunities (Brooks, 2009a, 2009b).

The goal of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of two bodies of literature that are central to understanding what liberal arts students deem the most important components of a constructivist career development experience. The first body of literature surrounds constructivist career development. As suggested in the name, CCD is rooted in constructivism and focuses on how students make meaning of their experiences, and in turn, apply their experiences to their own career development. The second body of literature, Baxter Magolda's (2004, 2009, 2010) theory of self-authorship, will serve as the theoretical framework. In my opinion, this theory is the best way to capture the shift in thinking that I hypothesize students will experience by engaging in constructivist career development.

As I will discuss later in this chapter, Baxter Magolda's work has a strong foundation in constructivism; she studied the works of Piaget (1936/1952), Kegan (1982, 1994), and Perry (1970) to develop her theory of self-authorship. All of these researchers focus on how young adults construct knowledge rather than simply focusing on what they know. Therefore, the goal of this study is not to examine how much career knowledge a student accumulates via CCD but, rather, how the experience might change their views of career development and their perceptions of their personal career journey.

## **What is Constructivism?**

Epistemology is a field within philosophy that focuses on the evolution of theory and the nature of knowledge (Staver, 1986). According to Staver, epistemology strives to answer three basic, yet elusive, questions.

1. What is knowledge?
2. How is knowledge acquired?
3. To what extent can knowledge be known?

Constructivism focuses on the second question, how is knowledge acquired, or as Piaget (1937/1954) suggests, constructed. Constructivism is a learning theory, one that posits that humans generate knowledge and make meaning from the interaction between their experiences and ideas (Kegan, 1982; Piaget, 1937/1954). Some of the most salient researchers who have contributed to the body of research on constructivism include Dewey (1910), Gilligan (1978), Kohlberg (1969) and Perry (1970). However, this review will focus on three theorists—Jean Piaget (1947/2010, 1937/1954), Robert Kegan (1980, 1982, 1994), and Lev Vygotsky (1934/1962, 1978) because of their unique contributions to the field of constructivism. Piaget's work, originally written in French and intended for scholars in psychology, biology, and philosophy, can often be difficult to interpret (von Glaserfeld, 1982). Nonetheless, numerous authors and publishing companies have translated his work and made it accessible to a wider audience. Robert Kegan, an American psychologist focused on adult learning and development, expanded on the work of Piaget and serves as a bridge between the work of Piaget and the work of Baxter Magolda (1999). Kegan's (1982, 1994) contribution is important because he focused on process and expanded the concept to adult learning and development. Vygotsky, a Russian scholar, completed much of his research during the Soviet period. For many years, the Russian government banned his work, and it has only been in the last few



decades that other scholars have translated his works and circulated them widely.

Vygotsky (1934/1962, 1978) supplemented the work on constructivism by focusing on social interaction, language, and learning potential.

### **Jean Piaget: The Father of Constructivism**

While Jean Piaget is as a constructivist, the term constructivism did not surface until the 1970s when educators started using Piaget's work to think critically about teaching (Pelech & Pieper, 2010). Regardless, Kegan (1994) has dubbed Jean Piaget the Father of Constructivism and his famous experiments led to a theory of epistemological development that scholars have confirmed, expanded, and enhanced over the last 80 years (Crain, 2005). Dating back to 1947, Piaget hypothesized that humans produce knowledge and meaning from the interaction between their experiences and ideas. Predominantly a child psychologist, Piaget focused on the learning process of children. In his most famous experiment, Piaget (1947/2010) had children fill two identical glasses with the exact same amount of beads. The children correctly stated that each glass held the same amount of beads. However, in the next step of the experiment, in plain sight of the children, Piaget poured the beads from each glass into another set of glasses. He poured one glass of beads into a taller and thinner glass so the bead level was higher than in the original glass and poured the other glass of beads into a shorter and wider glass so the bead level was lower than in the original glass. Piaget again asked the children which glass contained more beads. Depending on the age of the children, the answers varied. The younger and less developed children answered that the taller and thinner glass (with the higher bead level) contained more beads. Piaget then poured the beads back into the

original glasses and these children reverted to their original answer—the glasses hold the same amount of beads (Piaget, 1947/2010).

Although this may seem like a simple experiment, Piaget drew important conclusions about the learning process, which serves as the foundation for an entire body of psychological research (Kegan, 1994). Piaget (1947/2010) concluded that children, and even adults, rely on something called intuitive reasoning. In other words, people are only able to use their pre-established knowledge and experience to draw conclusions or apply meaning to what they encounter. In his research, the children could only use known principles to make a determination about the amount of beads in each glass; in this case, the height of the beads in the glass. Most of the children did not have preexisting knowledge of scientific concepts, such as volume, matter, and mass, and therefore could not comprehend that the beads would conform to the shape of the container. However, some of the older students were able to draw on this type of knowledge to come to an accurate conclusion. In this experiment, lack of information led the child to draw a conclusion that was inaccurate, even though the evidence was seemingly right there. What Kegan (1980, 1982) discovered in later research was that the children were victim to their own subjective reality.

While this simple experiment demonstrates how a child with limited knowledge creates his or her own meaning, the brilliance of this experiment applies more broadly. People construct knowledge by interacting with the environment—people, organizational structure, and physical surroundings (Harlow, Cummings, & Aberasturi, 2006). Meaning-making happens all the time as humans organize new information and integrate it with old information. Most often, this happens without any conscious awareness (Kegan,

1980). This process of meaning-making creates subjective realities and a person's experience becomes based on his or her perception of the information he or she has, as well as how that information interacts with existing knowledge.

Piaget (1947/2010, 1937/1954) believed that a human being only constructs new knowledge when the individual encounters something that does not fit into an internal pre-existing schema. Piaget contributes to learning theory, particularly constructivist learning theory, by providing a detailed process of meaning-making. When a human being has a physical or mental encounter with a new object, image, idea, or piece of information, he or she explores this new encounter using schemas that already exist. Schemas are building blocks of ideas in the human mind (Kegan, 1982). If the encounter fits into a pre-established schema, then the human mind can easily add the new information and further develop existing knowledge. Piaget called the process of adding new knowledge to an existing schema, assimilation. However, new information does not always correspond with existing knowledge, and one must find a way to either create a new schema or alter an existing one. This can cause disequilibrium as a person strives to make meaning out of something that may contradict previous knowledge. Piaget called the process of altering or constructing new schemas, accommodation.

Through assimilation and accommodation the human mind is constantly processing units of information and constructing schemas to organize information into knowledge. This explanation of meaning-making has the potential to make a complex process seem very simple. Therefore, it is important to put it into context by starting at the beginning of human development.

Newborns perceive everything as an extension of themselves. For example, they may see a rattle, but as soon as it is out of sight, it no longer exists. Infants do not make a distinction between themselves and the outside world. Their parents, cribs, blankets, diapers, and toys are all just a part of them, and there is absolutely no difference between the inner world and the external world. Piaget (1936/1952) called this first stage of cognitive development the sensory motor stage.

When toddlers are finally able to remember people and objects that are not in plain sight, they move to the second stage. Stage two, object permanence, is the first stage of thinking and marks the moment when a child can first hold onto an idea. This is significant because this is the first time that there is acknowledgment of an outside world. Even when a child cannot see, touch, smell, or taste an object, the child understands that it still exists, and the child has memory of it. The third stage, pre-operational, usually spans ages 2 to 7. At this point, children are able to work with their representation of the world. They can communicate needs and manipulate objects to their advantage or disadvantage. However, two important concepts hinder children in this stage—egocentrism and conservation. Egocentrism is a focus on oneself, often at the expense of others. Children at this stage often believe that others think like they do, and they find it near impossible to distinguish between their perspective and the perspective of someone else. Children in this stage cannot hold onto two concepts at once and do not understand that objects maintain constant properties. For example, they might know that bricks are heavier than pillows, but when you ask what is heavier, a pound of bricks or a pound pillows, they will still answer bricks. They are unable to apply the concept of measured

weight to what they already know, which is that bricks are heavy and pillows are not heavy (Piaget, 1936/1952).

The final two stages demonstrate a shift toward more complex thinking. Between the ages of 7 and 11, children enter the concrete operational stage. At this point, they are able to apply simple logic, but it is limited to their own life experiences. They are able to start putting together pieces of known information to make decisions or educated guesses. However, hypothetical thinking is difficult because they lack the personal experiences to put themselves into different situations. Once a child reaches the formal operational thought stage (around age 15), he or she transitions into adult thinking. At this point an individual's thinking is more rational, idealistic, and abstract. The child can utilize hypothetical deductive reasoning, which is demonstrated when individuals can make educated guesses about what one does not know based on what one does know of the world. However, this growth in thinking is coupled with adolescent egocentrism, or the belief that everyone else is focused on you. This is why teenagers are often very insecure; they believe others care deeply about what they think and do. Additionally, individuals at this stage believe they are invincible. They believe that bad things will not happen to them, and this makes them more prone to take physical risks. Egocentrism and an invincible mentality are a dangerous combination in many teenagers, and this combination sometimes results in unhealthy and dangerous decision-making (Piaget, 1950).

Piaget's (1936/1952, 1937/1954, 1947/2010) work examining the construction for knowledge in children and adolescents is the core of the field of constructivism. How people make meaning out of their reality affects how they create their own worldview. It

is important to note that constructivism, in this capacity, was not intended to be a teaching method but, rather, a process of learning that encourages individuals to develop their own identities through personal meaning-making. Psychology literature often regards Jean Piaget as the founder of constructivism, and his impact on the field is undisputed. Kegan (1982) illuminated the brilliance and simplicity of Piaget's work by claiming, "He brought together in one man a passion for philosophy (the constructive theme) and biology (the developmental), and thus the psychology it leads to is a natural child of this distinguished marriage" (p. 26).

### **Robert Kegan: Toward Self-authorship**

Einstein and Infeld (1938) said, "Creating a new theory is not like destroying a barn and creating a skyscraper in its place. It is rather like climbing a mountain, gaining new and wider views and discovering unexpected connections" (p. 159). Kegan's (1982, 1994) theory of adult cognitive development is exactly this, a wider view of the works of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Perry. Kegan had high regard for each of these researchers, particularly for Piaget. However, he also felt that Piaget's model lacked attention to emotion and the process in which one develops (Kegan, 1982). Kegan's model, which he first introduced in 1982 and then revised in 1994, attempts to elaborate on the complexities of how an individual develops in the way he or she thinks.

One of the underling concepts of Kegan's (1982, 1994) model is this notion of the subject/object relationship. The subject/object relationship is about perception and control. When someone is subject to something, he or she perceives that it is out of his or her control; they are "subject" to the situation or the circumstances. For example,

students less sophisticated in their thinking may believe they are “subject” to the poor teaching of an instructor. In this case, the students might believe that poor teaching will result in a poor grade; these students deem they are “subject” to the method of teaching. On the other hand, when an individual believes something to be “object,” he or she perceives it as something that he or she can control. Take again the example of a teacher with poor teaching skills. More sophisticated students will believe that poor teaching is an “object” within their control; these students will find ways to problem solve by seeking tutoring, doing supplemental reading, or even trying to connect with a professor during his or her office hours. Therefore, the latter students are making teaching “object,” while the less sophisticated students believe they were “subject” to it. The subject/object balance is about locus of control, and those who perceive more control are often more empowered to make change. As seen in Kegan’s (1982, 1994) work, the subject/object balance is what propels individuals through development.

Kegan (1982, 1994) presented his model in five orders of the mind—the impulsive mind, the instrumental mind, the socialized mind, the self-authoring mind, and the self-transforming mind. The key to moving from one stage to the next is transforming what an individual believes he or she is subject to and making it object. When this occurs, it is the “subject/object” reversal (Kegan, 1994). As students learn to take ownership for their experiences, their relationships, and their education, they are learning how to break free of their views of being subject to life and learning how to make situations, experiences, and emotions object.

Order one is associated with infants 18 months and younger (Kegan, 1994), but lasts throughout the toddler years. As we know from Piaget, infants believe the external

world is an extension of them, but as they move into their toddler years, they begin to recognize the external world. They are still subject to just about everything, with the exception of their own reflexes. Most importantly, children in this stage are subject to their own impulses and perceptions. Kegan (1982) uses the example of a child who believes the moon is following him or her. From the child's perception, no matter where he or she goes the moon is in the same place.

In the second order, which lasts from about age 6 through adolescence, children begin to make their impulses and perceptions object, but they are primarily subject to their needs, interests, and desires (Kegan, 1994). For example, a 6-year-old child may be able to curb the impulse to bite his sister, but he may be subject to the belief that his sister is just as interested in all the same television shows he is. At this stage, it is inconceivable that other people might not share the same wants, and therefore it can be very difficult to understand why someone might want to play a different game or eat something different for dinner.

In the third order of consciousness, Kegan (1994) discusses how needs, interests, and desires move from subject to object. This stage begins around post-adolescence and at this point, an individual understands that his or her needs are different from the needs of others. However, in post-adolescence, humans are primarily subject to interpersonal relationships and mutuality. In this stage, relationships drive actions.

Stages four and five are higher order stages, and the ability to reach these stages varies. The fourth stage, called self-authoring, is reached when an individual becomes focused on himself or herself. This self-focus is primarily beneficial as young adults/adults are subject to their own identity and own ideologies (Kegan, 1994). In these



stages, by focusing on one's own life, the individual makes external voices "object." In other words, the individual does not feel "subject" to other views and, instead, is able to control his or her response to external views and pressures. Often this stage is situational. In one aspect of a person's life, he or she may be able to be true to his or her identity, while in another situation, he or she may be "subject" to pressure from the outside world (Kegan, 1994). For example, a college student might be able to filter out his or her parents' disapproval regarding his friends or a significant other, but he might be subject to the pressure to choose a major that his parents would approve of.

Very few adults ever reach the fifth stage, known as self-transforming (Kegan, 1994). When an adult reaches this stage, instead of viewing others as people with separate and different inner systems, he or she can look across inner systems and find similarities. Due to this ability to find connections, adults in this stage are less likely to see the world in dichotomies, for example, liberal versus conservative, good versus bad, or right versus wrong. Leaders who achieve this fifth and final stage are more likely to unite people based on the common foundations of a community (Kegan, 1994).

McAuliffe (1993) unpacked Kegan's (1982) theory and extracted three stages of the subject/object balance that are most relevant to the work of career counselors: interpersonal balance, the institutional self, and the interindividual balance. Fifty-three percent of young adults fall into the interpersonal balance category (Neukrug & McAuliffe 1993). From this perspective, individuals view the world according to their relationships, which corresponds with Kegan's socialized mind: when an individual is subject to her relationships, she relies heavily on career advice from parents, peers, advisors, and professors. It is important for career counselors to be aware of this dynamic

as there is a need to help the student/client separate internal interests and values from the external pressures placed on him or her by others. Additionally, these students may easily conform to the ideas and suggestions of a career counselor, and therefore, career counselors need to be sensitive to this power dynamic. The institutional self, coincides with Kegan's fourth order, self-authorship. In this phase, the student is self-focused and subscribes to the saying, "You can't please everyone, so you've got to please yourself" (McAuliffe, 1993, p. 24). This is a stage of empowerment, but the negative aspect relates to an unwillingness to incorporate new information or be open to new ideas. Career counselors must reinforce their client's empowered perspective while coaching him or her on how to best consider new information, ideas, and perspectives. Once a student finds that balance, he or she has reached the final stage, which is interindividual balance. The ability to balance the needs of the self, with the willingness to evaluate and possibly incorporate new ideas is a major asset in today's workforce. Individuals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will hold multiple jobs throughout their lifetime; therefore, they will constantly have to evaluate new opportunities and adapt themselves to new environments. Individuals who can maintain their core selves while adapting to new situations will be the ideal professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (McAuliffe, 1993; Savickas, 2012).

### **Lev Vygotsky: Social Constructivism**

Lev Vygotsky (1934/1962, 1978) added to the knowledge on constructivism by asserting that social interaction is a crucial part of knowledge construction. The crux of Vygotsky's work is a theory he calls the zone of proximal development (ZPD). ZPD is the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent

problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In other words, ZPD is looking beyond what a child already knows and instead focuses on a child’s capacity to learn. To test this theory, Vygotsky followed children who began at the same development level and tested their ZPD. He did this by determining what a child could learn with assistance. Vygotsky, viewed those functional areas that children had not quite mastered, but showed promise when working with an adult as falling into the zone.

The practical application of ZPD emphasizes that teachers and other students can enhance knowledge construction when they have knowledge to offer regarding the material. Vygotsky (1978) calls the process of assisted learning the scaffolding that can support a student as he or she learns and develops. To demonstrate this point, Powell and Kalina (2009) use the example of a child learning to count. If the child is learning to count alone, he or she may miss a number and never know it. However, if the child is learning to count with a parent, teacher, or older sibling, the child benefits from a supportive learning structure. If the child misses a number, the teacher can hold up a finger as a reminder so the child can take a step back and rethink the mistake. This process ultimately leads to growth and development in knowledge construction.

Another key concept that has derived from the work of Vygotsky (1934/1962) is the role of language in meaning construction. First, children learn by the knowledge passed to them from adults. Words and language are powerful learning tools and individuals construct meaning-making by utilizing language. Second, speech (both communicated with others and inner-speech) leads to thought. Vygotsky believed that

telling stories to others and to ourselves ultimately assists in organizing and constructing knowledge. This concept of “storytelling” is a key concept within the field of CCD.

### **Summary**

All three of these researchers and scholars add to the theory of constructivism, which is central to this dissertation. Piaget (1947, 1954) revealed the process of meaning-making and contributed the concepts of assimilation and accommodation. Through assimilation and accommodation, individuals either add to or reconstruct pre-existing schemas to create knowledge and meaning. Kegan (1982, 1994) centered his developmental model on the object/subject balance. Whether or not an individual holds something as object or as subject is the key to progression within Kegan’s knowledge construction model. Finally, Vygotsky (1934/1962, 1978) contributed the importance of social interaction and the use of language. According to Vygotsky (1978), knowledgeable teachers and peers enhance the meaning-making process. The combination of all of these ideas is the key component of constructivism, and researchers in CCD and self-authorship rely on this knowledge base.

### **Constructivism in Career Development and Career Counseling**

Peavy (1995) summarized the important components of constructivist thought and emphasized six major components as they relate to career development. First, there is not one right way to view the world because multiple realities exist. However, some ways may be better, and students/clients examining their individual career path(s) should consider their own assumptions, values, and beliefs as they contemplate options and

make choices about their professional futures. Second, humans are self-organizing entities, and they are considerably more complex than just a set of traits and behaviors. Humans organize their experiences via stories, and these “life” stories are under constant revision. Third, people construct their self-concept through interpretations of their actions and decisions. As they think about the world around them and their place within their world, they perceive a unique and individual reality from which they make decisions. Fourth, the self is polyphonic, meaning it includes several voices. Career/work is only one voice, and that voice coexists with health, wellness, spirituality, and intimacy, for example. Past approaches to career development did not include these other voices, and career development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must make space for personal development in conjunction with career development. Fifth, people are meaning-makers. They reflect on their daily experiences and create meaning by telling stories to themselves and others. People create reality through the telling of these stories. Sixth, critical reflection is the key to becoming an empowered person. Peavy (1995) emphasizes the importance of personal freedom and the needs for individuals to know they are responsible for their own thinking and actions. Empowerment is crucial if liberal arts students are to forge their own career paths in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Grier-Reed, Skaar, & Cinkel-Ziebell, 2009).

Peavy (1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1996), Hoskins (1995), and Brott (2001) were some of the first career counselors to stress the importance of utilizing the constructivist approach within the context of career development. Their work not only demonstrates a need but also discusses best practice and methods of implementation. Additional research by Grier-Reed, Skaar, and Conkel-Ziebell (2009), Grier-Reed, Skaar, and Parsons (2009), Grier-Reed and Skaar (2010), and Grier-Reed and Ganuza (2011) discuss outcomes and

produce a quantitative foundation of empirical evidence for future researchers. McMahon et al.'s (2012) qualitative case study demonstrates the CCD approach and how students interact with it. However, this is still a new method, and it has not been widely adopted on college and university campuses. What follows is a review of the literature related to CCD. It begins by situating this approach within the larger context of career development and concludes with a critique of the pertinent literature that focuses on CCD in a classroom setting and studies that focus on CCD from the perspective of the student.

### **Constructivist Career Development (CCD)**

#### **A Brief History of Career Psychology**

Zunker (2006) defines career psychology as working with students as they prepare for life after college. Authors and campus practitioners use the following terms to describe their services: career guidance, vocational guidance, career education, career development, and career counseling. College and university career offices often use distinctive terms for similar services, but these words imply significant differences and are symbolic of varying philosophical approaches (Zunker, 2006). Savickas (2011a) discusses the importance of distinguishing among three of the methods of career psychology: 1) vocational (career) guidance, 2) career education/development, and 3) career counseling. Practitioners often use these concepts interchangeably, when according to Savickas, these terms are distinctly different and demonstrate the progress within the field of career psychology. The history of career psychology is correlated with the ever-changing social, economic, and political shifts that have occurred in the U.S. workforce (Savickas, 2008). Due to the changing needs of employers and employees,

vocational guidance, career education, and career counseling have dramatically changed from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Savickas, 2011a). In 2007, Hartung categorized these shifts into three major divisions. These divisions are the original career guidance movement, followed by a conceptualization of career development or career education, and now the most recent movement toward the constructivist approach.

Vocational guidance (or career guidance) is associated with the conception of the career development field in the early 1900s and describes classic career matching techniques. The emphasis of this type of career guidance was to match the traits of employees to the factors associated with a particular career, otherwise known as the trait and factor approach. As cited in Brooks (2009b), Parsons developed the trait and factor approach as the U.S. shifted from an agricultural society to an industrial society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century because there was a high need to fill new positions. Early career theorists developed inventories to match employees to the appropriate work environment, and this brand of trait-factor (person-environment) career theory has dominated career development for a century (Brott, 2001). According to Savickas (2011a), Holland's 1997 congruence theory of vocational choice is most frequently used in career counseling or career service centers. Savickas (2012) summarized this paradigm in early career development to include an enhancement of self-knowledge, an increase in occupational information, and the ability to match self to occupation.

Although trait and factor was considered an innovative approach throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is very limiting in two major ways. First, White men dominated the workforce in the early 1900s and career assessments were developed with that demographic as the focal point (Brott, 2001; Palladino Schultheiss, 2005). Therefore, the

inventories do not take into account differing cultures and life roles. Secondly, researchers and practitioners have criticized this trait and factor approach for being too objective in isolating career from the rest of a student's life (Brott, 2001; Campbell & Unger 2004a; Miller, 2004; Peavy 1995). The objectivist career assessments associated with early career guidance place the client or student into the role of an actor, imagining himself or herself involved in different scenarios and using test scores to align with groups of people with similar personalities, skills, and/or values (Savickas, 2012). These assessments strived to measure the individuals in relation to certain careers to predict career outcomes (McMahon & Patton, 2006; McMahon & Watson, 2011; Savickas, 2011b). Although there is merit to this approach, it implies that individuals are passive in the process, and the counselor serves as the expert in control of the process. This dynamic allows career to be foretold by the counselor rather than be constructed by the student (Grier-Reed & Conkel-Ziebell, 2009).

The second movement, career education (or career development), aims to put the client into the role of change agent. The client is encouraged to think about the developmental task-at-hand and his or her readiness to engage in new life stages (Savickas, 2011a). Super's (1957, 1990) theory of vocational development is an example of career education. As clients learn about career stages and how they can develop their attitudes, beliefs, and competencies to meet the needs of an organization, they become agents of their own development. This type of career development is correlated with the rise of corporate America. From the 1950s until the 1980s, many employees believed (and hoped) that they would stay with one organization for most of their careers. The goal was to grow and develop within one organization; for the most part, this was a realistic



goal. Therefore, the focus was on self-development within the context of specific career tasks/skills, that is, leadership, organization, group dynamics, and supervision. However, job placement and initial career decision-making still relied heavily on the trait and factor approach. Regardless of the expanded definition of career development, positivist career testing still dominated many college and university career service centers. Savickas (2012) summarized the career education movement as including the ability to assess an individual's developmental status, the ability to orient an individual to her own development tasks and to help individuals develop the attitudes and competencies to master tasks.

The third shift, constructivist career development (or counseling), has grown increasingly popular over the last 20 years (Hartung, 2007). In the mid-1990s, the complexity of the workforce demonstrated a need for lifetime learning in career development, and new theories were introduced that took into account the cyclical nature of career development (Pryor & Bright, 2011) and the need for individuals to revisit stages of their development later in life. Additionally, there was an acknowledgement that career counseling and personal/life counseling cannot be completely separated (Savickas, 1996). This subjective approach, recognizing that people change and develop throughout their career journey, led to a need for new approaches that provided opportunities for self-directed development. Finally, career counseling utilizes personal reflection, story construction, and the quest for meaning via life themes to assist clients in the construction of their career narrative (McMahon & Patton, 2006). In constructivist career counseling, the client is the author of his or her own development and the practitioner is present as a facilitator and collaborator. Savickas (2012) summarized this final movement as the

ability to construct career through small stories, the ability to deconstruct these stories and reconstruct them into a life portrait/career narrative, and the ability to co-construct a plan of action so an individual can move forward efficiently and effectively toward the next phase of his or her career journey.

### **Constructivist Career Development Techniques**

CCD is a philosophy that includes numerous approaches. McMahon et al. (2012) have recommended numerous techniques to engage students/clients in CCD: Active engagement (Amundson, 2006), narrative approach (Cochran, 1997; Maree, 2007), storytelling approach (Brott, 2001; McMahon et al., 2012), sociodynamic approach (Peavy, 1997; Spangar, 2006), chaos theory (Brooks, 2009b; Pryor & Bright, 2011), and life designing (Savickas, 2012; Savickas et al., 2009). All of these techniques are important in understanding how one can facilitate a CCD approach. Practitioners often mix and match these techniques, and all of these techniques have common constructivist themes that run through them: meaning-making, use of language, a holistic approach, and a partnership between the client/student and the educator/counselor. The following is a summary of the main techniques in CCD and the literature that supports the theory behind these techniques. These techniques and methods include; Active Engagement, Narrative (Storytelling) Approach, SocioDynamic Approach, Chaos Theory, and Life Design.

#### **Active Engagement**

As with all constructivist approaches, Amundson (2006) places personal meaning-making at the center of his work with active engagement. Active engagement is a process

by which the client/student is encouraged to think critically about the career counseling relationship. Career counseling is meshed with personal counseling, and there is a strong emphasis on creativity, storytelling, questioning techniques, action strategies, and relationship building (Amundson, 2006).

Before beginning a process of active engagement, Amundson and Poehnell (2003) suggest using a concentric career wheel to define the goals of the process and to clarify misconceptions. Many students believe that they can visit a career counselor, take a test, and be magically given an answer to alleviate all their career anxieties (Amundson, 2006). The career wheel is a framework that fosters conversation about work/life experiences, learning experiences, significant others, personal style, values, interests, skills, and possible career opportunities. All of the points on the wheel can lead to decisions regarding future career options, but the visual display helps students see the multiple, complex, and intertwining factors that go into this process. Another important misconception is the student's desire to move forward and make quick decisions about the future without regard to the past. Amundson (2006) illustrates the importance of examining the past by providing the metaphor of the "backswing." In golf, to gain momentum and control when you swing your club, you must swing it back before you swing it forward. The same is true for career development (Amundson, 2006). The career counselor's use of qualitative and quantitative career assessments, like card sorts, drawing exercises, metaphors, and story creation, assist the student in understanding the past so he or she can move forward with clarity and purpose. The combination of the activities a counselor uses with his or her client should be specific to that client and be selected to bring out the unique needs of that client.

The final and crucial step of Amundson's (2006) active engagement is the transition from exploring the past to making decisions about the future. Like a good backswing, this should be done with efficiency and focus or else one can get lost in the past and never move forward. The forward phase of active engagement can include an array of visual, verbal, and physical activities designed to layout future options and to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of choosing each option. Once an option is chosen, the student constructs a plan, which includes a back-up plan, as to how he or she will proceed with his or her career plan. Moving forward means realizing that the path of life is not linear and that unforeseen circumstance can alter the best laid plans (Brooks, 2009b).

Amundson's (2006) active engagement is one way to think about and implement CCD. It is a technique that is attentive to process: setting clear expectations, exploring the past, using the past to make decisions about the future, creating a plan, and developing a back-up plan. Within the process, counselors and educators can use many of these activities. All aspects of the active engagement process are important, resulting in momentum, efficiency, and direction.

### **Narrative (and Storytelling) Approach**

Cochran (2011) suggests that the purpose of the narrative approach is twofold. First, the client is encouraged to create his or her life story, with a focus on creating a future story that is positive, optimistic, and realistic. Second, the process of narrative career counseling leads to empowering the client, or strengthening the main character, by having him or her become the agent of change in the story. This combination leads to an

experience that is meaningful and specific to the client and provides space for the client to explore the past in order to write the future.

At the core of the narrative approach is a commitment to a holistic exploration of a client's life (Cochran, 1997). Cochran uses the term "storied ecology" to refer to the telling of one's story by incorporating the complex systems of career and life. Rather than separate a person's life into categories, narrative counseling allows the client to decide what aspects of his or her life are essential to the creation of a personal career story (Chen, 2011). This freedom to decide what is important may be a positive factor in working with diverse clients who may bring varying cultural aspects to the career development process that were traditionally ignored in positivist approaches to career development.

Chen (2011) describes three key aspects of Cochran's narrative approach that are essential to the creation of meaning.

First, a narrative follows a temporal organization that combines the beginning, middle, and the end of a whole. Secondly, the narrative demonstrates a synthetic structure that combines the expansion of elements and spheres of the elements into a whole. Thirdly, each plot and episode conveys a point to the formation of a storyline, indicating that the point is a meaning unit rather than a meaningless expression. (p. 27)

Following this process in its entirety is crucial. The narrative approach is not simply about telling a story, but rather it involves identifying connecting themes and patterns. Counselors should reinforce positive patterns and break down negative patterns when working with their clients to create future chapters of the story.

Suggested strengths of the narrative approach include personal empowerment, the ability to derive meaning from experience, cultural sensitivity, and understanding career planning as a lifelong process (McMahon et al., 2012). These strengths are appropriately

linked to the theory that guides this work. However, to date, there is limited qualitative and quantitative data that demonstrates these benefits.

Strikingly similar to the narrative approach is the storytelling approach, which encourages students to make meaning from their personal experiences by telling stories. The counselor acts as a guide, asking questions to draw out the past so students can reflect on past experiences that have influenced their career goals. The ultimate objective is to help students create their future stories, stories that are hopeful and optimistic about future possibilities. Brott promotes the use of the storied approach by suggesting that the use of language is imperative to the process of creating personal meaning (2001, 2004, & 2005). In the storied approach, facilitation and active listening provide a framework for the counselor and student to be partners in the process of revealing, unpacking, and re-authoring the story of one's life in order to create meaning.

### **SocioDynamic Approach**

Career psychologist, Vance Peavy (1997), laid the groundwork for the SocioDynamic approach. He was passionate about the constructivist approach to career development, and contributed a number of publications reinforcing the importance of seeing human beings as social organisms that are ever-changing and looking for life balance (1992, 1993b, 1995, 1996, 1997). According to Peavy (1997), life at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was becoming increasingly complicated. As such, the gap between work and life was becoming narrower (Spangar, 2006). The SocioDynamic approach considers this complexity by acknowledging the culture and giving voice to the phenomenon of instable and ever-changing job markets. He brought culture into the career counseling

process by dipping into the work of Vygotsky (1978) and giving voice to mental/psychological tools (e.g., language, stories, and diagrams) and technical/cultural tools (e.g., computers). All of these tools are important aspects of the career counseling process, and counselors and educators can use them as methods of encouraging reflection.

The SocioDynamic Approach is a holistic life-planning approach to career counseling (Spangar, 2006). A person's career cannot, and should not, be separated from overall life goals and/or aspirations of happiness. To fragment life into divisions is unnatural and inhibits individuals from looking for meaning across all aspects of their lives. Counselors practicing the SocioDynamic approach cannot just learn certain methods of reflection and dialogue; they must adopt the entire philosophy. This philosophy leads to a process of co-construction, one in which the counselor and the client each bring resources to the process (Peavy, 2004). Additionally, this process suggests that counselors employ a strategy called "dialogical listening," which stresses the importance of listening to what the client is saying in a genuine, respectful, and patient manner (Peavy, 1997). It is this type of listening that Peavy believed would lead to the kind of counseling that produced transformative learning.

In addition to co-constructing an equitable relationship between counselor and client, another important aspect of the SocioDynamic Approach is the concept of "life-space." Life space is defined as four regions of an individual's world that are crucial for life-planning: relationships and intimacy, work and learning, health and body, and spirituality (Spangar, 2006). These "regions" of one's life are all interconnected and

affect a person holistically. The holistic approach is crucial to the SocioDynamic method of CCD.

### **Chaos Theory**

Humans have always been fascinated with the balance between change and stability (Pryor & Bright, 2011). While individuals often fear change, simultaneously they are easily bored by the day-to-day experiences of life. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, stability in work and careers is diminishing rapidly. Although job stability was never a certainty, in the previous generation of workers, it was more likely than not that an individual would have some consistency in his or her employment. Brooks (2009a, 2009b) stresses that the job market in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is exactly the opposite and change defines today's employment market. Therefore, a linear approach to career development is outdated, ineffective, and misrepresents the realities of the job market to students. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is defined by ever-changing technology, the intense speed of communication, globalization, an increased reliance on contractual work, the reshaping of organizations, and a need for lifelong learning to keep pace with all of the change that surrounds us (Pryor & Bright, 2011). Change defines this next method of CCD, chaos theory.

To address the instability of the workforce (and the instability of life in general) some researchers have suggested chaos theory to address the 21<sup>st</sup> century's career development needs (Brooks 2009b; Pryor & Bright, 2011). Chaos theory is synonymous with the "Butterfly Effect." In the butterfly scenario, something as small and seemingly inconsequential as a butterfly flapping its wings has the potential to create significant change on the other side of the world. For the purpose of this literature review, it is not



essential to understand the scientific intricacies behind chaos theory (for more information on chaos theory see Lorenz, 1993). However, understanding how chaos theory relates to career development is critical.

Two components of chaos theory are relevant to career development: self-organization and change. Self-organization refers to the “propensity of phenomena to form increasingly complex patterns” (Pryor & Bright, 2011, p. 28). As we examine the universe, self-organization has been apparent throughout evolution. It is natural to organize new information into structures that make sense to us and the organization of this information is subjective to an individual’s frame of reference. The second component, change, or the adaption of systems to try to maintain stability (Pryor & Bright, 2011) is forever evident. Therefore, individuals need to expect the unexpected and realize their life paths are never linear.

“Individuals developing their careers and experiencing life transitions are complex systems acting within a matrix of other complex systems such as particular employment organizations, community groups, the labor market, the nations and global economies, and so on” (Pryor & Bright, 2011, p. 31). Practicing chaos theory in the arena of CCD means that counselors and clients strive to understand these complex systems. It means realizing that some systems are chaotic: non-linear, unpredictable, and vulnerable to change (Pryor & Bright, 2011). To address all of these systems, counselors using the chaos theory of careers use both positivist career testing and constructivist techniques, like narrative and storytelling. The combination of these methods helps students/clients understand themselves and the systems, at least during a particular moment in time.

## **Life Design**

Savickas et al. (2009) state, “Career problems are only a piece of much broader concerns about how to live a life in a postmodern world shaped by a global economy and supported by information technology” (p. 241). For this reason, life design was introduced by Savickas et al. and reviewed by Savickas (2012) to address this complicated world through construction, deconstruction, reconstruction, co-construction, and action. This method is similar to the development of a novel with focus on themes, plot, and character arc (Savickas, 2012).

The construction phase of the life design process begins with a student/client describing the current challenges he or she is facing and by articulating the goals that he or she has for the future (Savickas, 2012). By sharing stories about the past and discussing a possible future narrative, the counselor begins to understand how the student views himself or herself. The client’s task is not to tell one long story, but rather multiple short stories that represent points in time. In the next phase of the story, deconstruction, the counselor guides the student with a series of questions meant to identify dominant themes. These themes might reflect self-limiting ideas, confining barriers, ideological biases, and stories of oppression and power (Savickas, 2012). Illuminating these themes allows the counselor to reveal current truths and assist the client in constructing new knowledge of himself or herself.

Reconstruction allows the counselor to take all the small stories and “weave them into one tapestry to craft a unified sense of individuality” (Savickas, 2012, p. 16) for the client. In this phase, the client can now see himself or herself as a character in a story; allowing for an outside view of what was and what can possibly be. The reconstructed

story should include a plot and a theme (Savickas, 2012). The story tells “what” happened, the plot tells “why” it happened, and the theme demonstrates a unifying idea that brings everything together. The theme can also show how the character changes over time, where the client was, and where he or she plans to go.

Co-construction and action are about empowerment (Savickas, 2012). This final phase of the life design process allows the client/student to edit the story created by the counselor. The editing process allows the student to take over his or her story and hopefully leads him or her to action. All constructivist career counseling examines the past to create new meaning, but this is pointless if the client does not use this knowledge to make future decisions. Life design strives to teach students about the past so they use their new knowledge to make choices about the future.

### **What Does the Research on Constructivist Career Development Tell Us?**

Over the past two decades, the literature on CCD/counseling has grown. As we have seen in the previous sections, authors and practitioners have a lot to offer and thus far, the literature on theory and techniques is extremely helpful in creating CCD interventions; however, there is a paucity of both qualitative and quantitative research on use of CCD. What follows is a review of the small number of relevant research studies that have been conducted.

The first four articles reviewed in this section are derived from the same CCD course taught at a large Midwestern university. The first author on each article is Tabitha Grier-Reed, an Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota in the College of Education and Human Development. Grier-Reed and her colleagues developed a CCD

course, “Orientation to Self and Career,” (Grier-Reed, & Conkel-Ziebell, 2009). They divided their course into three modules: 1) exploring the past and present, 2) constructing the future, and 3) planning, action, and integration. The theory of the course relies heavily on the work of Super’s (1990) self-concept and the work of Savickas’s (1993) subjective career via meaning-making. The course utilizes CCD tools, such as narrative, action, and construction to help students forge a future career path by honoring and reflecting on their past experiences.

Grier-Reed, Skaar, and Conkel-Ziebell (2009) published one of the first outcomes studies on CCD/counseling, the first study to concentrate on CCD in an academic course format. Their study focused on the following research question: Can CCD courses empower at risk/culturally diverse students by increasing career self-efficacy and reducing dysfunctional career thoughts? In Fall 2005, researchers distributed pre/post tests utilizing questions from the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale Short-Form (CDSE-SF) and the Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI) to students across the six sections of their course.

Seventy-five students agreed to participate in the study. Within that group, 45% were students of color. At the end of the study, only 66 students completed both the pre/post test and were part of the final data analysis. These students were all part of an incoming program for under-prepared students at a large Midwestern University and their ACT scores ranged from 1 to 109, which were significantly lower than other students at this university. Using a two-by-two crossed MANOVA (utilizing Wilks’ Lambda statistic and follow-up univariate analysis of variance), results from this study indicated a significant increase in career decision self-efficacy by all groups in the study—men,

women, students of color, and White students. All groups significantly decreased in their dysfunctional career thoughts. This was a major finding because it is the first study to indicate that CCD might have a positive effect on students and their career decisions and confidence.

A major limitation of the study was the lack of a control group. Since participating students were low-achieving freshmen, it is not surprising that participating in academic and social aspects of college for a semester would help build confidence. It is impossible to pinpoint this course as the source of growth for these students. All of the students of color (African American, Asian, Latino, and multiracial) were collapsed into one group. This assumes a unified experience when in actuality there are distinct cultural differences among these various groups. No differences were found between men and women or between White students and students of color.

Grier-Reed, Skaar, and Parson (2009) addressed one of the limitations of the previous study by adding a control group. In Spring 2007, the researchers conducted pre/post tests in the five sections of the CCD course and created a comparison group. The treatment group consisted of 82 volunteer students from the CCD courses (mean age 20.25, 55% female, and 46% students of color). Students in this group were mostly first-years, but 30% were sophomores, and 11% were in their third or fourth year. The control group consisted of 95 students recruited from a group of 282 students taking introductory psychology and sociology courses. The control group had comparable demographics (mean age 19.93, 52% female, and 49% students of color). Sixty percent were freshmen, 25% sophomores, and 8% were in their third or fourth year.

In this study, the three dependent variables were career indecision (CDS Indecision Scale), career certainty (CDS Certainty Scale), and career decision self-efficacy (CDSE-SF). The independent variables were treatment group versus control, gender, and race/ethnicity. Similar to the previous study, all students of color were collapsed into one category. The authors stated that this was necessary to conduct their statistical analysis but noted in the limitations section that this resulted in an inability to determine any differences between the sub-groups.

Results showed that career indecision significantly decreased for all students in the CCD course but not for those in the control group (-3.82 versus 1.02). However, students in the CCD course started with lower pre-test scores, which revealed that students who selected into the course were more uncertain to begin with. A similar trend is true for career certainty and career decision self-efficacy. Students in the CCD course felt less empowered and less certain than their peers in the control group at the start of the semester, but their scores increased throughout the semester, allowing them to catch-up to their peers. Finally, scores seemed to remain consistent across demographic groups, indicating that CCD works equally well for males, females, White students, and students of color. Similar to the Grier-Reed, Skaar, and Conkel-Ziebell's (2009) study, students of color were collapsed into one category so we cannot account for differences among race/ethnicities.

Grier-Reed and Skaar (2010) examined 147 students who were enrolled in the CCD course. Of these students, 100 students agreed to participate, and 82 students completed both the pre-test and the post-test. The measurement instrument consisted of

questions generated from the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale and the Career Decision Scale.

In this study, findings demonstrated that students felt more empowered by the end of the course, but there was no change in their career indecision. Findings were similar across gender and race. Although it might seem contradictory for students to feel more empowered but still undecided about their future, in actuality, this finding fits nicely in the CCD framework. The philosophy that drives CCD suggests that students need to feel empowered to make many choices regarding their future careers, not just one. Grier-Reed and Skaar (2010) summarize this thought by concluding the following:

In a time when students are (a) being prepared for jobs that may not exist yet and (b) faced with unforeseen choices and newly emerging career paths, the career-decision making process is not always stable, predictable, or easy, and interventions that can empower students despite uncertainty are needed. (p. 52)

Limitations of this study include a small sample size ( $n=82$ ), no control group, and all students of color were collapsed into one category. Grier-Reed and Skaar (2010) suggest that future studies include a control group of students who are engaged in positivist approaches to career development. In addition, they believe that future studies should include variables related to self-knowledge and identity since they believe those variables are linked to career decision self-efficacy.

Grier-Reed and Ganuza (2011) expanded the outcomes research tied to the CCD course to focus specifically on Asian and African American students. The participants included a total of 81 students (36 African American students and 45 Asian American students). They noted that the Asian American group was diverse, including students with ethnic backgrounds from China, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. Students in this study ranged in age from 18 to 28, with a mean age of 19.65 (SD 1.59). They ranged in class-

year: 52% freshmen, 31% sophomore, 7% junior and senior, and 10% did not indicate class year. Sixty-three percent of the participants were female, and 37% were male.

This study considered career decision self-efficacy with a focus on self-appraisal, occupational information, goal-selection, planning, and problem solving. Using the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale – Short Form (SDSE-SF), the researchers were able to examine specific components of career decision self-efficacy, which is more specific than the previous studies. To analyze results, they first used MANOVA to examine overall differences in the pre/post test. They then employed ANOVA to examine the subscales. African American and Asian students in the CCD course showed overall gains (pre-test  $M=83.54$ ,  $SD=12.81$ ; post-test  $M=93.31$ ,  $SD=12.70$ ) and gains in each of the subscales. The largest gains were in goal selection and planning.

The first limitation of this study was a lack of effect size due to the small sample size. The second limitation was the lack of control group. Therefore, it is hard to attribute the growth to this class versus numerous other campus opportunities. Finally, all the students in this study selected this course. Previous studies involving this course demonstrated that students who enter the course already have lower pre-test scores than the average student.

McMahon et al. (2012) add to the CCD research by conducting a qualitative case study focused on the narrative approach, in particular, storytelling. Their literature review features the narrative approach as well as the systems theories framework (STF). Their emphasis is on the versatility of STF and the narrative approach since students/clients direct the process and can explore their unique cultures and backgrounds via their career counseling experience. However, they note that many career counselors are drawn to this



type of counseling because of the intrinsic value associated with CCD despite the limited research in the field. This lack of research limits what researchers and practitioners know about best practices in CCD as well as its relationship to attributed learning outcomes.

McMahon et al. (2012) attempt to address this using an exploratory case study involving one student. Their methods are vague; they reference using a sampling process to access participants, but they do not inform the reader how the final participant was selected. However, they were detailed in their procedure and data analysis. Students at their career center in South Africa opted into a narrative approach test program by agreeing to participate in seven 45-minute counseling sessions. These sessions were audio recorded and then transcribed. To analyze their data, they first conducted a thorough literature review on the process terms under investigation—reflection, connectedness, meaning making, learning, and agency. They created a coding system based on the key elements from the literature and via a two-step coding process, researchers looked for evidence of these key terms.

The findings of this small study indicate that the process terms are recursively interrelated. This reflects the holistic nature of the process in that all of the elements enhance each other as the student works toward understanding, reflection, and eventually action. This study also demonstrates the importance of the counselor/educator as a facilitator rather than as an expert. The facilitator must create space for the student to create detailed stories, reflect on those stories, and then create new stories. In this case study, the student initially had a hard time telling stories with “rich and thick” description. The career counselor served a crucial role by asking clarifying questions and by creating a safe space for the student to reflect. Finally, the researchers believe that this

study is evidence that narrative counseling has the ability to break free of the Euro-American confines.

### **A Critique of Constructivist Career Counseling**

Reid (2006) addresses some of the challenges of CCD. Specifically, it is difficult to implement such an abstract concept in real settings with real clients/students. In reviewing techniques, such as narrative, storytelling, action theory, life design, the sociodynamic approach, and chaos theory for careers, it is obvious that these approaches take significant time. To be successful, counselors/educators need to have enough time to explore the past and use that knowledge to help students plan for the future. Many of the techniques discussed in the literature are used in a one-on-one setting. Counseling centers on many college and university campuses may find it extremely difficult to use their resources to have such intense interactions with students, especially at colleges and universities with higher student enrollments.

Overall, there is a lack of research focused on utilizing CCD in a college or university setting. Grier-Reed and colleagues have set the stage by sharing their initial success implementing CCD in a classroom setting, but they have also left questions unanswered. Their use of CCD in a classroom setting has a significant advantage—serving multiple students at one time. Their approach is worth continued exploration and this dissertation will add to the body of literature that they have created. Additionally, McMahon et al. (2012) believe that more research needs to be concentrated on the process of CCD and the perceptions of clients/students who are undergoing the process.

Using self-authorship as a theoretical framework, this dissertation unpacks student experience in a CCD classroom setting.

## **Self-authorship**

### **Background**

Baxter Magolda's (1999, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010) model on the journey toward self-authorship forms the conceptual framework that guides this study. Her model stems from over 20 years of research regarding the epistemological development of college students. Her early work examined Perry's (1970) model of intellectual development and sought to develop a valid assessment tool that would assist researchers and practitioners in measuring student progression through Perry's nine positions, which ranged from dualistic thinking to multiplicity to relativism to securing commitments (Baxter Magolda, 1987; Baxter Magolda & Porterfield, 1985). Later, Baxter Magolda questioned the accuracy of models, such as Perry's, that were derived based on studying a population of White males and left out other student groups, particularly women. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1986) tried to rectify Perry's deficit by examining women separately and developing intellectual growth models specifically for women, but Baxter Magolda saw a need to examine both men and women in the same study to highlight both their potential similarities and differences.

Baxter Magolda began her first longitudinal study on self-authorship in 1986 by interviewing both men and women as they began their first year at a Midwestern, public, four-year, institution. She started with 101 students (51 women and 50 men) and planned to interview all the students on an annual basis until they graduated college. However,

many of the students in her study continued with their yearly interviews until they were in their mid-30s. The first five years of interviews resulted in what has been dubbed "ways of knowing" or Baxter Magolda's (1992, 2001) Epistemological Reflection Model. The latter half of her study resulted in her work on self-authorship (1999, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010). The two theories are similar in that they follow the progression of students as they develop more complex ways of knowledge construction. However, self-authorship has a specific focus on the process of becoming a secure and confident adult with a strong internal frame of reference for navigating decision-making, relationships, and life in general. The journey toward self-authorship has specific implications for CCD work with college students.

### **Journey Toward Self-authorship**

The journey toward self-authorship has three phases (Baxter Magolda, 2004, 2009). In the first phase, external formulas, individuals seek approval and advice from authority figures. Students in this phase are likely to take life cues from parents, teachers, and other trusted adults. They believe that knowledge can be received from authority figures and they have a difficult time understanding when someone cannot provide the "right" answer. Often they make decisions based on what they think others will find acceptable. According to Baxter Magolda (2009), 80% of the college students in her study still relied heavily on external authorities to determine what to believe.

Individuals enter the crossroads when they are starting to develop their own voice, but they still rely heavily on others for affirmation. To move through this second phase, individuals need to listen to their internal voice, and in turn, cultivate it. The process of

listening to one's own voice takes time and a great deal of self-reflection. Participants in the study did this by identifying what makes them happy, examining their own beliefs, finding parts of themselves that are important, and establishing distinctions between inner feeling and external expectations (Baxter Magolda, 2009). By focusing on values, establishing priorities, putting to rest old beliefs, and constructing an identity from within, students began to cultivate their voices.

Self-authorship is the final phase and includes three key components: trusting your internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Trusting your internal voice refers to individuals' ability to realize that much of life is beyond their control, but their reactions are within their realm of influence (Baxter Magolda, 2009). This helps people choose effective responses to challenges so they are not subject to the challenges that arise. Building an internal foundation is accomplished by building a framework or a life philosophy that allows one to follow her or his internal voice. Securing internal commitments involves utilizing one's own internal foundation to live by one's internal commitments on a daily basis. Individuals able to do this are less afraid of change and more open to life's possibilities because they are confident they can handle whatever comes their way (Baxter Magolda, 2009)

Individuals need self-authorship to achieve some of the most critical outcomes of higher education: effective reasoning, problem-solving, leadership, moral reasoning, and intercultural maturity (Creamer, Baxter Magolda, & Yue, 2010). Unfortunately, the traditional teaching methods that govern most college and university campuses do not encourage the development of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999). "Self-authorship

evolves when the challenge to become self-authoring is present and is accompanied by sufficient support to help the individual make the shift to internal meaning making” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269). Therefore, educators must create opportunities in which meaning can be constructed. As we learned by reviewing the works of Piaget, Kegan, and Vygotsky, people do not discover knowledge; they construct it.

Pelch and Pieper (2010) believe that space for knowledge construction must be created in the classroom, and they offer their suggestions for creating learning environments that encourage meaning-making, and by extension, self-authorship. First, learning occurs by remembering that people create knowledge by building from their previously constructed schemes. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers (facilitators) know about the previous knowledge of their students. Students are not empty vessels looking for a teacher to fill them with knowledge, rather they are knowledgeable beings looking to grow and develop from their existing experiences. Second, knowledge construction is an autonomous and subjective process, and each individual needs to be considered when creating opportunities for learning. These opportunities involve allowing the student to actively engage with new material so they can restructure their existing knowledge to either assimilate or accommodate new information. Third, cognitive growth is stimulated when people are confronted with problems—practical, contextual, or personal.

Educators can apply these same principles of constructivism and self-authorship to career development. Employers expect that colleges and universities are preparing students to work within a fast-paced and global environment. The post-graduates in Baxter Magolda’s (2001) study were required to engage in a variety of activities at work,

such as the ability to negotiate competing interests, manage interpersonal conflicts, form decisions based on best practices, and analyze complex information. To effectively do this, individuals needed a strong internal belief system to form mature relationships with colleagues and to allow their values to guide their work (Baxter Magolda, 2008). In today's economy, employees may change careers up to 10 times. Being self-authored allows an individual to utilize his or her core values and beliefs when making career decisions.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed two bodies of literature, constructivist career development and self-authorship. Both CCD and self-authorship have roots in constructivism. Students who are exposed to CCD, whether in a counseling situation or in a classroom environment, have the opportunity to explore their past to make decisions about their future. As students examine and reflect on their own life patterns and themes, they begin to see the dominant influences in their lives. These influences can be positive or negative and internal or external. Through this process, students learn about the external messages they hear and have the opportunity to decide for themselves if they want to adopt these messages. For example, liberal arts students often hear a linear message focused on major-to-career. They are told that their majors are not "marketable" and lead to very narrow career options. However, there is a counter message: major-to-career is a non-linear path. CCD opportunities provide an occasion to critically reflect on old messages and consider new ones.

In theory, as students reflect on their past and present and use this knowledge to make decisions about their futures, they are on the journey toward self-authorship. Presently, there is no research that links these two bodies of literature. Constructivist career development, although rising in popularity, is lacking research of any type. This dissertation will add to the limited research on CCD by exploring the process of constructivist career development from the perspective of 10 students who enrolled in a one-credit CCD course. Self-authorship serves as the conceptual framework, guiding the process of how students make meaning from their experience in a CCD course for sophomore students majoring in the liberal arts.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Narrative inquiry reconfigures the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee that is characteristic of traditional research. You as the researcher give authority to the storyteller whom you acknowledge as the one who knows and tells. (Kramp, 2004, p. 111)

#### Introduction

This dissertation is an exploratory study designed to answer one overarching research question and two sub-questions. The overarching question is: What do the participants in a one-credit constructivist career development (CCD) class deem the beneficial components of constructivist career development? The two sub-questions are: (1) Did the students in this course perceive a shift in career self-efficacy, with regard to career decision-making and the completion of career tasks? (2) Did the students feel that constructivist career development respected their individual interests, skills, values, and career goals? These are important questions with practical applications in higher education, especially within liberal arts colleges and majors, as well as in career services units. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is limited information on constructive career development and no multi-participant qualitative studies that aim to capture the experiences of the participants from their unique lenses.

In qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to be flexible and willing to adapt his or her research plan as the data reveal new paths that he or she could not anticipate at the onset of the study (Creswell, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Stake, 2010). However, a structured plan for data collection and analysis is crucial to the success of any research project, even if that plan allows for flexibility as the study evolves. A

detailed plan provides the researcher a roadmap to follow while minimizing researcher bias and increasing validity (Creswell, 2009). This chapter was my map as I collected data and went through the process of analyzing the data.

I have organized this chapter based on the four elements that Crotty (1998) asserts are essential in designing a research study: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. In addition, I have added sections that I deemed important for the reader to understand my project and my lens as an internal researcher. These sections included the background of the CCD course, my frame of reference, ethical considerations, and research limitations.

### **Background: The Development of the CCD Course**

In Fall 2010, as a professional staff member in the College of Humanities and Arts at a large, public, research university, I conducted four Exiting Senior Focus Groups with graduating seniors (n=28). It was my first semester in a new position and my goal was to understand the student experience within the College to support students via academic and social programming. I extracted several themes from the data, but as an outsider to the liberal arts experience, I was surprised to see the internalized negative stereotypes that liberal arts students harbored about their academic majors and their ability to succeed in professional settings post-college. As one student in those focus groups stated, “I love being an English major, but reading Chaucer isn’t going to get me a job, at least not necessarily.” Another student noted, “Everyone tells you that you can do anything with a liberal arts degree, but nobody explains what the options are. I mean I have no idea how to even translate my skills into a language employers will understand.”

Finally, a foreign language major discussed the perceived value the University placed on liberal arts majors by explaining,

All you have to do is look around campus to see that no one thinks we are ever going to be rich donors. Just look at the buildings that science and business majors have classes in. I literally have classes in buildings that are falling down. My professors have office furniture from 30 years ago, and everywhere you look, science majors are getting a brand new building.

Although the latter student did not demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the funding structure at a public university, his perception was powerful. These students and many of the other students in the focus groups had internalized a lack of confidence in their ability to succeed, at least in a financial sense. Based on the inequity of resources, they believed that University administrators placed less value on their majors in comparison to STEM and business majors.

My response to the focus group findings caused me to begin the process of designing a career course for students in the College. I piloted the course in Spring 2011 as a one-credit career course for sophomore students in the College. The course targeted sophomores because many seniors in the focus groups had realized much too late the importance of internships, networking, and other resume´ enhancing experiences. I hypothesized that sophomores would have enough time to actually implement the knowledge gained in the career course by adding opportunities to their resume´s before graduation.

I designed the course as a seven-week, two-hour-a-week, one-credit, graded course. After some brainstorming with a group of faculty and staff in the College´s Advising Center, I titled it *On the Road to Success: Enhancing the Professional You*. In planning the course, I made decisions regarding the readings, assignments, and lesson

plans based on best practices in the literature, conversations with staff in our Career Services Center, and from the findings of the previously mentioned Exiting Senior Focus Groups. In that first semester, I evaluated the course by distributing Critical Incident Questionnaires (Brookfield, 1995) during each class session and by implementing a pre/post-test that I designed. I distributed critical incident questionnaires at the end of each class that included the following questions:

1. At what point were you most engaged in today's class?
2. At what point were you least engaged in today's class?
3. What additional information would you have liked to cover in today's class?

Students answered the questionnaires anonymously, and I reviewed them before finalizing the lesson plan for the subsequent week. I used the summary of these mini-evaluations to revamp the course for Fall 2011.

During the summer of 2011, a colleague introduced me to the concept of constructivist career development (CCD) via an article written by Grier-Reed and Skaar (2010). Although I was not previously familiar with CCD, it had a striking resemblance to the course I had designed and implemented. I made another round of revisions based on what I learned from reading books and articles on CCD to arrive at the syllabus that we were using at the time of data collection. I selected a new text for the class that better aligned with CCD. The new text was titled, *You Majored in What? Mapping Your Path From Chaos to Career*, by Katherine Brooks (2009b). The following is a summary of the seven weeks of the course, plus a list of all major course assignments. The full course syllabus is included as Appendix A.

Table 1. Weekly CDD Course Summary

<b>Week</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Major Assignments</b>
<b>1</b>	Class Introduction and Knowing What You Want	<i>First Essay Due</i>
<b>2</b>	Knowing What You Have and Knowing What You Hear	Complete FOCUS Inventory via Career Services and Submit a Bulleted List of Key Findings
<b>3</b>	Knowing What Constrains You and Goal Setting	<i>Second Essay Due by Email After the 3<sup>rd</sup> Class</i>
<b>4</b>	Cover Letter and Resume's	Draft of Cover Letters and Resume's Due by Email Before the Next Class
<b>5</b>	Networking	Elevator Speech
<b>6</b>	Interviewing	Summary of Information Interview
<b>7</b>	So You Have the Job, Now What?	Final Job Application Due – Cover Letter, Resume', and References (Please include any supplemental information that the job description requires)
<b>Post Class</b>	Schedule Mock Interview Before Final Exam Week	<i>Final Essay Due Finals Week, After Completing the Mock Interview</i>

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

As stated in the introduction, the goal of this dissertation was to unpack the phenomenon of CCD from the perspective of sophomore students majoring in the liberal arts. The overarching research question that guided this study was: What did the participants deem to be the important components of a CCD experience? In addition, there were two sub-questions, which addressed more specific research goals:

1. Do students engaged in constructivist career development perceive a shift in personal career self-efficacy (career confidence) in relation to career decision-making and the completion of career tasks?

2. Do students majoring in the liberal arts perceive that the process of constructivist career development respects (or even empowers) their individual interests, skills, values, and career goals?

To answer my research questions, I made an intentional decision to listen to the voices of the participants by using narrative inquiry as a guide to my data collection and analysis. Similar to CCD, narrative inquiry strives to bring the stories of the participants to the forefront. According to Kramp (2004), a researcher should consider narrative inquiry when he or she wishes to understand a phenomenon or an experience. Narrative inquiry can be both holistic and categorical (Josselson, 2011). Throughout this chapter, I demonstrate my commitment to understanding the narrative of each participant while presenting my findings in organized categories by utilizing coding strategies to understand concepts across each participant's narrative.

### **Epistemology**

Constructivism is the foundation of both CCD and self-authorship. I reviewed the relationship between CCD and self-authorship in Chapter 2 by highlighting their direct links to the works of Piaget (1954), Kegan (1980, 1982, 1994), Gilligan (1978), and Vygotsky (1934/1962, 1978). Constructivism guided the way I approached this dissertation by focusing my data collection and analysis on the way my participants constructed meaning from their experience in the CCD course. Stake (2010) asserts that,

In qualitative research, many of us take on a constructivist view that there is no true meaning of an event; there is only the event as experienced or interpreted by people. People will interpret the event differently, and often multiple interpretations provide depth of understanding that the most authoritative or popular interpretation does not (p. 66)

In life, there are multiple realities. Not only did each of the participants in my study view CCD differently, but also as a researcher, I interpreted their stories from my own unique

lens. The constructivist view tries to understand how the participants create their meanings regarding the experience. This is the primary reason I gravitated toward narrative inquiry as I designed my study. My use of phenomenological interviewing and structured course essays allowed me to understand each participant's story in the way that he or she wanted to share that experience. I asked broad questions and asked students to share past experiences with career decision-making, along with their present experiences. As I review my research process throughout this chapter, it will become clear that the participants' stories were always at the center of my study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Baxter Magolda's (2001, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010) Theory of Self-Authorship was the conceptual framework that guided my data collection and analysis. Baxter Magolda defines self-authorship as an individual's journey from an external frame of reference to an internal one. Boes, Baxter Magolda, and Buckley (2010) assert that "self-authorship emerges when external influence moves from subject to object" (p. 19). The process of moving toward self-authorship allows the individual to focus on his or her internal voice, and begin to trust his or her voice. When this transpires, the individual can build an internal foundation of beliefs, identity, and relationships (Boes et al., 2010). As students move toward self-authorship, they are less subject to external authorities.

In CCD, students examine their past and present to create meaning and write their future narrative. During this process, a student learns to recognize external influences (both positive and negative) and he or she begins to separate those voices from his or her own internal voice. In this study, I asked students questions that focused on the process of

developing and trusting one's own voice, and I analyzed how students made decisions about academic majors and careers over time. Particularly, I looked for key words and phrases that demonstrated what students hold subject versus object (Berger, 2010) at different points in time.

### **Methodology: Qualitative Inquiry**

Qualitative research relies heavily on human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010). Rossman and Rallis (2003) highlight two important features that distinguish qualitative research from quantitative research. First, the study is conducted through the researcher, and second, the goal is to learn something about the social world. Stake (2010) elaborates on the first point by stating, "Research is not a machine to grind out facts. The main machine in all research is a human researcher" (p. 36). Qualitative research is interpretive, and the methodology reinforces the constructivist epistemology of my dissertation. Rather than seeking the objective facts, this study made space for the subjective views of the participants. Specifically, it allowed the participants to construct their own meaning about their involvement in the CCD course. Qualitative research has three potential purposes: to describe, to compare and contrast, and/or to forecast best practices (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Considering the limited research on CCD, the main goal of this research was to describe the process of CCD from the perspective of the participants.

Creswell (2009) described phenomenological research as a strategy of inquiry that focuses on a particular phenomenon as described by the participants. Within the process, it is important for the researcher to minimize his or her experience and to focus solely on



the experience of the participants (Nieswiadomy, 1993). Moustakes (1994) suggested that researchers could best accomplish this by working with a small number of participants over an extended period. In this study, I explored participant perceptions of their experience in a CCD course during the Spring 2013 semester. As a researcher, I strived to reduce my personal bias by focusing on the meaning the participants were constructing. The method section specifically outlines how I conducted my research.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The population consisted of the 26 students who had enrolled in *On the Road to Success: Enhancing the Professional You* in Spring 2013. All the students had a primary major in the College of Humanities and Arts, and they all met the sophomore qualification by either being in their second year on campus or by achieving sophomore status via earned credits (between 30 and 59 credits completed). In Spring 2013, there were three sections of the course offered; I taught one section of 9 students and campus colleagues taught the other two sections. All instructors followed a prescribed syllabus, but per the constructivist framework of the course, instructors had flexibility to respond to the needs of their students by altering lesson plans, meeting one-on-one with students, adding homework exercises, and substituting or adding readings. However, the core assignments and course readings were consistent among the sections, which included the main course book (Brooks, 2009b), three essays, resume' and cover letter writing, the elevator speech, and the post-course mock-interview.

## **Recruitment**

My goal was to recruit 12 students from the Spring 2013 cohort to participate in this study, a little less than half the eligible population to achieve saturation (Weiss, 1994). Eleven students agreed to participate, but one student had to drop the course/study resulting in 10 participants (See Appendix B for participant summaries). Despite falling short of my goal with two fewer participants, I did reach saturation for my specific research questions. Toward the end of my study, the student responses were becoming repetitive, with no new and relevant information emerging.

To make initial contact with participants, I sent an email (Appendix C) to the University email accounts of the 26 eligible students. The first email resulted in only 3 responses; therefore, I enlisted the help of a former student to draft another email. Her advice was to keep the text of the email simple and to focus on the rewards. She felt that students would not read a long email, and she advised that I could always send additional information about the study to interested students once I had captured their attention. Based on her suggestions, my second invitation email (Appendix D) resulted in 8 additional participants. I was satisfied with the response but was still concerned that I might lose students throughout the duration of the study. I had constructed a two-part incentive plan, and it was important for students to remain interested in the process. At the first interview, all participants received a gift box, which consisted of school supplies (pens, highlighters, notebooks/folders with the University logo, index cards, and post-it notes, and healthy snacks). In the second interview, I asked students to choose the gift card they wanted to receive in the final interview. Participants had a choice of a \$20 gift card from Target, the University Store, or a local pizza place. Minus one student who had

to drop the course due to a schedule conflict, all the others participants completed the study.

### **Demographics**

The final participant pool consisted of 10 enrolled students across the three sections of the Spring 2013 CCD course. Six of the participants were male, and 4 of the participants were female. The 11<sup>th</sup> participant, who had to drop the course (and consequently the study) due to a scheduling conflict, was female. This resulted in more male students than expected, a 3:2 ratio. Eight of the 10 participants were White. The two students of color identified as Asian and Black. One student, Michael, identified as non-traditional age (24 years old) and another student, Harrison, had taken two semesters off from college due to academic difficulties. At the start of the course, all primary majors were in the College of Humanities and Arts: 4 English, 1 Linguistics, 1 Art, 1 Philosophy, 1 History, 1 Cultural Studies Studies, and 1 Architecture and Design. The average cumulative GPA at the start of Spring 2013 was 3.2, with the GPA range being 2.1 and 3.9. Eight participants were sophomores by credit status, but 3 of these students (Gemma, Marcus, and Zian) were in their first year at the University, having achieved sophomore status through the transferring of Advanced Placement (AP) credits. Two students (Nicole and Shelby) were in their second year at the University, but had already achieved junior status. For a small sample, I was satisfied with the diversity within the group, and it mirrored the larger population of students who enrolled in the course that semester. See Table 2 for additional information regarding the final participants and Appendix B for short summaries of each participant.

Table 2. Participant Demographics

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>Current Major</b>	<b>Class Year</b>	<b>Instructor</b>
Gemma	Female	White	Linguistics	Freshman with Sophomore Credits	Other
Harrison	Male	White	English w/ Education Minor	Sophomore Credits/ Time Away from Campus	Other
Hunter	Male	White	English & Political Science	Sophomore	Author
Luke	Male	White	Studio Arts	Sophomore	Author
Marcus	Male	White	Philosophy/ English	Freshman with Sophomore Credits	Author
Michael	Male	White	English	Sophomore Credits/ Time Away From Campus	Other
Nicole	Female	White	English w/ Information Technology Minor	Sophomore with Junior Credits	Other
Shelby	Female	White	History & Political Science	Sophomore with Junior Credits	Author
Tiana	Female	Black	Cultural Studies	Freshman with Sophomore Credits	Other
Zian	Male	Asian	Architecture & Design	Freshman / Sophomore Credits	Other

### **Data Collection**

Data triangulation adds trustworthiness to a qualitative study by combining data collection methods (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Creswell outlined four types of qualitative data collection: observation, interviews, documents, and audio/visual

materials. In this study, I used a combination of phenomenological interviews and document analysis (the three course essays) to examine the CCD class from two different data points. Using two data points allowed me to conduct cross-data trustworthiness checks, limiting the study's vulnerability to error.

### **Phenomenological Interviews**

Phenomenological interviewing focuses on having participants reconstruct their experiences through a series of three interviews (Seidman, 2006). The first interview focused on history (Appendix F). In this interview, I focused on the participants' past by trying to learn as much as possible in relation to career development. To establish history, I asked about childhood dream careers and interests, external influences, the process of choosing a college and major, current career goals, and their college experience. The second interview focused on the details of the CCD course experience (Appendix G). Instead of focusing on their opinions, I asked about details of their experience and tried to reconstruct the experience from the participant point of view. I encouraged students to be honest and was very clear that this was not an evaluation of my work but, rather, a process to gain insight into their experiences with career development. The third interview was about reflection (Appendix H). The goal was to encourage the students to assign meaning to their experience and have them discuss how the experience might influence their future. These questions focused on future goals, challenges, decisions, and their confidence level moving forward. I allowed space for the participants to imagine themselves in the role of the expert. These questions included advice they would give to a liberal arts student starting his or her career exploration.

Seidman (2006) makes specific recommendations regarding the length and timing for phenomenological interviews. He suggests that researchers should conduct the interviews one week apart to ensure time for reflection between interviews. He recommends that each interview last approximately 90 minutes. Although my plan deviated from Seidman's best practices, I implemented the essence of what he suggests. The first interview occurred before the start of the course, the second interview occurred between week three and week five of the course, and the final interview occurred after the final assignment was completed. Due to the seven-week course, I thought it best to interview students before, during, and after the course. I scheduled each interview of 60 minutes instead of 90 minutes because I was concerned that too long an interview time block would deter participation because of class conflicts and other obligations. However, this still allowed for ample reflection time, and since the course was on-going, the participants had not yet forgotten the experience.

I conducted the interviews using three, semi-structured, interview guides (Appendix F, G, and H). The semi-structured design allowed for consistency between interviews but left me enough freedom to learn from the students and to ask follow-up questions when a participant's response took an unexpected but relevant twist. During the first interview, I reiterated the purpose of the study and reviewed the consent form (Appendix E). I required each student to sign the informed consent before beginning the data collection process. I digitally recorded each interview and deleted the recording after the transcription of each interview. I transcribed the majority of the interviews myself, but did hire a professional transcriber to assist with the process since there were 30 interviews. We transcribed each recording verbatim, with the exception of using

pseudonyms in place of names and altering identifying information, such as places and departments.

### **Class Essays**

Students were required to write three reflective essays throughout the career course. The week-one essay focused on past career decision-making as well as motivations for enrolling in the career course. The course syllabus provided students with the following prompt,

In the first two paragraphs, please explain why you enrolled in this course and what you hope to learn this semester. In the final two to three paragraphs, please reflect on your childhood dream job. Why was this your dream job? Is this a career you are still pursuing. Why or why not? If it is not part of your current career goals, please explain what your current goals are and how you made the decision to pursue these goals.

Students passed in this assignment during the first class session before they attended class but most likely after they had completed the first week's reading assignment. The second essay was due by email after week three of the course and was a summary of what they had experienced in the course to date. Based on the work of Unger and Campbell (2004), the first three weeks of the course addressed the following topics,

- Knowing what you want
- Knowing what you have
- Knowing what you hear
- Knowing what constrains you.

The readings, assignments, and in-class activities required students to explore who they were, past and present, and encouraged them to utilize their self-knowledge as they progressed into the second-half of the course. The second essay prompt was,

Over the past weeks, you have reflected on possible career paths, your assets (internal and external), the societal messages about who you are and your chosen major, as well as obstacles you must overcome on your path to success. Please submit a two to three page reflection paper addressing what you have learned in this class. How will you leverage your self-knowledge as you move into the second half of this course, in which you will be asked to choose a potential internship, write a cover letter and resume, practice your networking skills, present your elevator speech, and participate in a mock interview?

The second essay focused the experience students were having in the CCD course. I intended it to be a detailed essay, in which the students shared a self-summary of the first three weeks in the course.

The third essay was due during final exam week, after the students have submitted their career portfolio and participated in mock interviews. The final assignment is as follows

The foundation of this course is based on helping students get to know themselves better so they can relate their self-knowledge to their career goals. Please submit a final 2 to 3 page, typed, reflection paper addressing what you have learned about yourself, your major, and your support networks. Will this self-knowledge be helpful to you on your career/life journey. Why or why not? What do you think it means to forge your own career path? At the end of your reflection paper, please include a bulleted timeline of your career development goals from now until graduation.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is an on-going process that starts the moment a researcher begins to collect data (Creswell, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). “Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up, by organizing data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). Rossman and Rallis (2003) assert that the key to good qualitative analysis is thick description regarding physical locations, time, place, actions, events, words, and people.



Phenomenological studies typically focus on uncovering “themes of meaning” from the unique lens of the participants. There are different strategies of analyzing phenomenological data: meaning condensation, meaning categorization, narrative structuring, and meaning interpretation (Rallis & Rossman, 2003).

### **Narrative Structuring**

For both the interviews and the essays, I chose to analyze the data using narrative structuring because of its similarity to the process of CCD. In narrative structuring, the researcher organizes data in a way that follows the natural progress of the individual’s story (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). In both the essays and the interviews, I asked participants to reflect on their past, discuss their current experience with CCD, discuss their constructed meaning, and apply it to the future. This process allowed participants the opportunity to recall past interests and goals, which they may have forgotten, and examine their progression of decision-making.

People create meaning by organizing their lives into stories. In narrative structuring, the researcher must first consider the whole story.

### **Analytical Memos**

The first step of my data analysis was to write analytical memos throughout the data collection process. Rossman and Rallis (2003) recommend the use of analytic memos on an on-going basis to assist the researcher as he or she reflects on “emerging insights, potential themes, and theoretical notions” (p. 291). Analytic memos do not require a specific structure but assist the researcher in capturing (and expanding on) his or

her thinking at a specific point in time. I wrote analytic memos at several points throughout the process of data collection, and these memos assisted me in developing my initial codes for analysis. The following is a list of memos that I wrote throughout the process:

Memo 1: After reading all of the first essays

Memo 2: After conducting the first round of interviews

Memo 3: After reading all of the second essays

Memo 4: After conducting the second round of interviews

Memo 5: After reading all of the third essays

Memo 6: After the third round of interviews

I wrote exploratory memos to capture my ideas and thoughts during certain milestones in the data collection process. I wrote some of the memos essay style and other memos were a mix of bullet points and paragraphs. Regardless of the style, I looked back on these memos to ensure that I did not overlook important ideas and thoughts while coding and categorizing the data. Some of the concepts I captured in the memo writing process were participant gravitation toward chaos theory, the role of parents in career decision-making, signs of self-authorship, barriers to success, negative stereotypes regarding liberal arts majors, and the appreciation of having structured space to reflect. These concepts served as my initial framework for analyzing my data.

### **Participant Narratives**

To begin the process of data analysis, I examined each participant's essays and interview transcripts to acquire a holistic view of each individual. I started with history

(essay one and interview one), then proceeded to the CCD course experience (essay two and interview two), and ended with meaning-making (essay three and interview three). As I went through the initial data on each participant, I started organizing data into participant narratives. I wrote a three- to four-page narrative for each participant so I could have a firm understanding of each individual's story before I started to analyze cross-participant content. The beginning of each narrative focused on aspects of the participant's past that were relevant to career decision-making and were helpful in understanding the initial views he or she brought to the career course. This consisted of pre-college career goals, their process of choosing a college/academic major, significant external influences, and their opinions regarding their chosen major. The middle of each narrative unpacked their experience in the CCD course—what they liked and did not like about the course and their successes and challenges as they engaged in the process of CCD. Finally, most narratives concluded with the goals participants had set for themselves as they left the CCD course and independently continued their career development journey. For several participants this included seeking internships and leadership positions and study abroad opportunities.

### **Cross-participant Analysis**

In narrative research, in addition to understanding the whole narrative of each participant, it is important to be attentive to the themes and patterns that cut across participants (Josselson, 2011). Initially, I planned to look at each of the six layers (three essays and three interviews) of data collection separately, but soon I realized that to be true to the constructivist roots of my research, it was best to keep data organized by

history, the CCD course experience, and future meaning-making. Within each of these three groups, I continued to organize data into an Excel spreadsheet by categories and themes. I added columns for participant name and data collection method so I could organize the data in various ways

### **My Frame of Reference**

Qualitative research is a form of interpretative inquiry; the researcher cannot separate his or her background from the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2009). As with all research, it is extremely important that the researcher work to minimize bias, and in qualitative research it is equally important to acknowledge that some bias will always exist. As the literature on constructivism has stressed, individuals construct new meaning from their own preexisting schemas. As a researcher, my lens was subjective, and I needed to understand my own lens.

As a White female and a first-generation college student, I did face some external pressure in college to select a major that would lead to a profitable career. I began my college career with a declared major in biology, and after a tough bout with chemistry, I decided to alter my academic goals to strive toward a Bachelor of Science in Health Administration. My favorite courses in college were history and sociology, but like many students, the external pressures of financial success caused me to major in something more practical. Regardless, I do not regret my choice of major. As chapters 1 and 2 stress, major-to-career is not a linear path, and I am a living example of the non-linear career path. My business background, coupled with my graduate work in education, has helped me to think about my work using multiple lenses.

I must acknowledge my role as the creator of the CCD course at this University and as an instructor in one of the sections of the course. I am committed to this course, and I believe that utilizing the CCD framework is the best way to teach it. However, my opinion is limited to my observations and the smaller evaluations I have administered. This study is necessary to understand the experience of the students.

Finally, over the past four years, I have been working with students in the humanities and arts. Many of these students have chosen an academic path against the advice of parents, family members, mentors, and friends. I admire these students for demonstrating a commitment to their interests and values, but I have also seen through my professional role at the University how societal messages slowly chip away at their confidence regarding their decision. Recently, I was looking at a Facebook page that is popular with students at this University. Two separate posts (Memes) ridiculed liberal arts students. One suggested that liberal arts students had easy tests, depicted by a picture of a childhood puzzle as a liberal art student's final exam. The other suggested that liberal arts students had the best quality of life on-campus due to their lack of demanding coursework.

As a researcher, it is important that I keep these beliefs and potential biases in the forefront of my mind. It is also important that I be transparent with my readers. This is my subjective lens, the one from which I have been reading, writing, and reflecting. In many ways, my lens is an asset. "Qualitative researchers reject the notion that bias can be eliminated" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 51), therefore I needed to embrace my lens and acknowledge its presence within the study. I know I approached this study with bias, but I believe that I have been transparent about my subjective lens and that I planned a

rigorous research design that was committed to uncovering the meanings of my participants.

### **Limitations**

The findings of this study serve as a guide to those practitioners who wish to engage in constructivist career development with their students. The detailed descriptions of the process of CCD, as portrayed by the participants, provide an in-depth look at the process of CCD and how students made meaning from their experiences in the course. The findings provide preliminary evidence that CCD is an optimal process for the career development of liberal arts students (non-career majors). However, it is important to address the limitations of this study, specifically its focus on one public research university in the Northeast. This was a small qualitative study, and although I believe the findings are transferable and useful to those who intend to build CCD opportunities on their campuses, it is important that practitioners also conduct their own self-assessments and evaluations. Not all liberal arts experiences are created equal, and it is imperative to remember that majoring in the liberal arts at a large public university, with a focus on research, may be different from the liberal arts experience at a small private school in which the philosophy of liberal education are ingrained in the mission and culture. Crucial differences in the student populations, such as socio-economic status and cultural capital, may factor into the unique demographics of students at small private colleges.

A second limitation involved the narrow population from which I was able to recruit participants. With only 26 students enrolled in CCD courses in the Spring of 2013, I ultimately invited every participant to partake in the study with the hopes of recruiting

12 members. Eleven students agreed to participate; however, one student had to drop the course due to a scheduling conflict, therefore, this study was limited to 10 participants. Regardless, the insight from the 10 participants provided rich and detailed data that explained their perceptions before, during, and after the CCD course.

Another challenge was my dual role with the course. In addition to researching this topic, I was the course designer and one of the three instructors who taught in Spring 2013. As discussed in Chapter 3, like all humans, I entered this study with my own biases. Although I took intentional steps to minimize my own biases as well as to be transparent about my biases, it is important to be clear that my role as a researcher could not entirely be separated from my role as a facilitator of the CCD course. Of the 10 participants, 4 of the students were in my section of the course. Originally, I planned to only interview students in the other sections, but I was unable to recruit enough participants from the other two sections. Due to my personal investment in the course and my role as the instructor of one section, participants may have been more likely to provide answers that they felt demonstrated growth and academic understanding.

Other concerns that emerged related to data analysis. In my original proposal, I planned to have the participants engage in a member check process, to ensure I had captured their thoughts accurately and so that I did not miss key points. However, after an advantageous discussion with my dissertation committee, we came to the conclusion that my dual role as teacher and researcher would result in a member check process that may lead to unintended consequences. As a researcher, I might be less likely to share my true insights with students, especially if those insights demonstrated that a particular student was less self-authored or confident than his or her peers. A goal of this course was to

build confidence, and I did not want to reduce a student's confidence via my study.

However, students did receive feedback via the course that addressed many of the career development areas of growth that surfaced throughout the study.

Finally, it is important to note that the process of phenomenological interviewing is constructivist in nature. Therefore, the participants were engaging in a separate process of individual storytelling and meaning-making that could have enhanced the career development process and aided in the development of self-authorship. Although, I believe that phenomenological interviewing was the best method for this study, an additional quantitative pre-/post-test administered to all students across the three sections of the course (potentially over multiple semesters) would add important information and lead to a more robust examination of the process of CCD in this context.

Despite potential limitations, I believe the findings presented in this study provide important insights for understanding the benefits of engaging liberal arts students in a constructivist career development process as well as set the foundation for future research. Practitioners can use these findings to develop CCD opportunities on their own campuses and researchers can utilize these findings as a foundation for future research. The paucity of research on constructivist career development necessitated an in-depth examination of the process. This is the first study that connects CCD as a possible career development intervention specifically for liberal arts students, and it make a valuable contribution to the literature.



## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

Today my generation is so consumed with finding work, we often don't stop to think about the fact that the job may not match our values, morals, or hold any interest for us, other than the making money part. The most important advice I have taken away from this class is to realistically shoot for the moon, especially if you have the passion and ambition to do so. (Shelby, Essay)

#### Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the process of constructivist career development (CCD) through the eyes of the students who enrolled in a one-credit CCD course spring semester 2013. Ten students, across three sections of the course, agreed to participate in the study (See Appendix B for Participant Summaries and Table 2 for Participant Demographics). Each participant completed three, one-hour interviews and agreed to allow me access to their three CCD course essays; the interviews and the essays followed a phenomenological progression. Based on the work of Seidman (2006), I categorized the data collection into three sections: establishing history, the experience (i.e., the CCD course), and creating individual meaning. As stated elsewhere, constructivist career development lends itself to phenomenological interviewing because both rely on the participants' ability to reflect on their histories and recount their experiences in order to create individual meaning regarding their futures (McMahon & Watson, 2011; Seidman, 2006).

In the first section, I focus on unpacking the participants' career development histories by examining how the participants' internalized external messages and responded to external influences. Establishing this foundation was essential to the process of CCD and the process of phenomenological interviewing. The findings from

this section validated two assumptions I entered the study with: 1) participants experience negative reactions to their liberal arts majors, 2) participants are heavily influenced by external voices in regards to their career goals.

In the second section, I focus on the participants' experiences within the CCD course. The findings in this section answer the overarching research question, which asks what did the participants deem to be the important components of a CCD experience? Essay two and interview two focused on all aspects of the course, as well as any concurrent career-focused opportunities and conversations that occurred outside of class. This section provides important context for understanding how the participants engaged with the various aspects of the CCD course, as well as which components of the course were the most enjoyable and beneficial.

Finally, in the third section, I focus on how the participants created meaning regarding their career development, based on their experiences in the CCD course. This section answers the two sub-questions: (1) Did students who engaged in constructivist career development perceive a shift in personal career self-efficacy in regards to career decision-making and the completion of certain career tasks? (2) Did students majoring in the liberal arts perceive that the process of constructivist career development respects (or even empowers) their individual career goals and values? These sub-questions were designed to produce specific insight into potential outcomes that may be associated with CCD opportunities. The findings in this section show preliminary evidence that CCD opportunities may lead to the development of skills needed to help students journey toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2008, 2009).

Exploratory studies can provide valuable insight into a process and help the researcher understand what is happening within a particular context. The goal of exploratory research is not to arrive at final conclusions, but instead to develop hypotheses as to what may be transpiring as a result of the circumstance (Creswell, 2009). Examining the use of CCD as a career development method for liberal arts majors is a timely and necessary research activity with both scholarly and practical applications. Delbanco (2012), Nussbaum (2010), and Roche (2010) argue that the traditions of the liberal arts are essential if we want to educate students to be global citizens who are committed to community, social equality, and the environment. Liberal arts majors are taught to be life-long learners by developing broad skills in communication, critical thinking, global awareness, problem solving, and teamwork (Koc, 2010). The aforementioned skills allow college graduates to be adaptable to multiple career fields, which is necessary in a society in which the employment market is rapidly adapting to new technology and a globalization. Despite the value of a liberal arts education, some scholars and educators (Brooks, 2009a, 2009b; Camenson, 2008; Nell, 2003; Rejecki & Borden, 2010; Roche, 2010) believe that colleges and universities are failing to help students understand the practical value of liberal arts education in the job market. Therefore, students are flocking to majors in business and the STEM fields (Agresto, 2011), and there has been little growth in the underfunded humanities and arts (Donoghue, 2010). The findings presented in this chapter suggest that constructivist career development not only honors the traditional academic roots of the liberal arts but also teaches students the practical value of their education. This practical knowledge

empowers students and assists them in becoming self-advocates as they pursue career opportunities.

### **Establishing History**

Establishing history is an important component of constructivist career development (Brott, 2001) as well as a crucial aspect of phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 2006). All the participants entered the career course with life experiences that were honored in the CCD course. Savickas (2012) posits that it is necessary for students to reflect on the past by sharing short stories about their previous experiences to gain the self-knowledge needed to help them create meaning regarding their futures. In the first course essay and the first interview, participants were asked to share stories about childhood dream careers and how those dreams evolved into their current career goals. In addition, they were asked to reflect on significant past external influences and how those external influences impacted their decision to declare a liberal arts major. Having participants reflect on the past assisted them in understanding their personal journey and decisions and allowed them the opportunity to assign meaning to significant moments. This section will introduce the participants by sharing how they perceived “others” viewed their decision to declare a “non-career” major and review how these participants internalized external messages.

### **Negative Perceptions of the Liberal Arts**

Despite the lack of scholarly or empirical evidence in the published literature, previous research that I conducted (Gray, 2010) suggests that liberal arts students are

adversely impacted by the negative perceptions others have about majoring in the liberal arts. Similarly, participants in this study articulated their awareness of negative perceptions others hold about selecting a liberal arts major as well as the affect those perceptions had on them. These negative opinions from external authorities caused anxiety and decreased career confidence, causing students to question their ability to succeed in the employment market.

All of the participants were aware of the sarcastic remarks and negative feelings others conveyed about liberal arts majors. The sarcastic remarks fell into one of two overall categories—liberal arts majors are unemployable and liberal arts coursework is easy and/or unfocused. Overall, adults in the participants' lives were more concerned about the lack of job prospects, while peers were more demeaning when discussing the coursework, or the lack thereof, that is required of liberal arts students.

### **The Liberal Arts Degree: A Ticket to Unemployment**

When asked to talk about the responses they receive when they tell others what they are majoring in, all 10 participants focused more on the negative reactions and opinions they hear than positive reactions. The negative perceptions derived from a variety of sources. Some students, like Marcus, were troubled by negative perceptions of their major(s) by both strangers and family/friends. Unfortunately, the negative perceptions about liberal arts majors and their lack of career prospects led some of the participants to feel devalued, and often when they talked about their majors, they utilized self-deprecating humor. For example, when Marcus talked about adding a second major to supplement his declared major in philosophy, he teased,

Yeah, my mom just over winter break said maybe you should do communications instead because it is more marketable. I actually chose English [his second major] because it is more marketable than philosophy. Of course, now I have two pointless majors (laughing). You know, to everyone else, English is useless too, but to me, philosophy is the most useless one.

Although Marcus' mom was skeptical of his choice in majors, she also wanted him to make his own decisions and encouraged him to pursue his interests.

Marcus interacted with a gentleman while on vacation, and although he will never see this man again, he found the encounter unnerving.

I was in the Virgin Islands and I was talking to this engineer; I think he was like sixty or something. And he was like, "What are you going to do with degrees in that [English and Philosophy]?" and I said, "Teach one of the two." And he just like, you know, he was just quiet after that. (Interview)

This was not the only time Marcus discussed this type of awkward exchange. "When I told my uncle [about my major] the conversation just stopped. It's just awkward, I felt like, yup, awesome, you don't care" (Interview).

Hunter discussed a similar dynamic when talking with extended family about his English major. When his extended family asked about his college experience, he felt they were not as excited as he was about his choice of major or his passions. "I don't think it bothers me, but they are just short and awkward conversations. You know, people don't show a lot of excitement so you are just left hanging with, yup, I'm majoring in English" (Interview). Hunter compared his conversations with aunts and uncles to those of his cousin who is a business major. Hunter felt his family rewarded his cousin with excitement and follow-up questions, both of which were lacking during his holiday conversations with family. Marcus and Hunter both found the silence and lack of enthusiasm troubling, perhaps even more concerning than direct negative comments.

They interpreted the silence from adults as a passive aggressive way of expressing the lack of value these adults credited to Marcus' and Hunter's college experience.

Tiana summarized some of the sarcastic remarks and stereotypes that she had encountered when telling others about her major in cultural studies.

You know, like, there is that Starbucks Barista joke or they ask, "Do they teach you to say do you want fries with that?" Um, you know, those are some of the perceptions out there. You know the theme is you won't be able to find a job after college. But beyond that, the idea that we are here for interests, but we have no goals. People think we are lost and clueless. (Interview)

The unemployment jokes were annoying to Tiana, but what really bothered her was the viewpoint that she lacked direction. She was especially bothered by the reactions from her peers, as she felt they did not view her as a serious college student. This perception was hurtful since Tiana cared a lot about her academics and her goal to work in the U.S. State Department.

Harrison experienced a negative comment about his "unemployable major" while visiting with a high school friend, as well as his friend's grandmother.

I was at my friend's grandmother's house. She is this old, Italian lady. She's very sweet and I hadn't seen her in awhile. She knew I had taken a semester off and she was asking me, "Hey Harrison, you going back to school?" And I was like "yeah." And she was like, "What are you studying?" And I said, "English with a concentration in creative writing." She said, "Harrison, You need to think about the money, you won't make any money!" (Interview)

Harrison laughed about this encounter but also felt the need to counter her concerns by explaining he had a secure career plan. Overall, he felt that people worry he will not be able to support himself and his future family with an English degree.

After his first year of college, Luke struggled with his decision to switch majors. When he changed his major from landscape architecture and design to studio art, he essentially left a linear career path for what his family perceived as a questionable career

path. Since he had loved art from childhood, he personally felt empowered by his decision, but he felt the weight of others' negative views about his "risky" choice. During his first interview he shared,

My conversations about where my major will take me usually takes two paths. Some people want to talk to me about the possibility of a double major. I get that question all the time, "What major could you add to make this into more of a plan?" The other is just the simple disbelief that would risk being homeless to pursue art. (Interview)

During our talks, Luke expressed that he did not oppose a second major; on the contrary, he was strongly considering either declaring a second major or pursuing a certificate in arts management. However, he wanted to explore options and independently make decisions on what he should study. He wanted people, especially his parents, to value his choice of major. Majoring in art made him happy, and he loved focusing on his talent. He knew he would have to strengthen his resume' with internships and other leadership opportunities, but he wanted people to have faith in his abilities pursue career development opportunities.

Some students received negative messages about liberal arts majors and employment opportunities from teachers, both on the high school and on the collegiate level. For example, Gemma shared a story from when she went home over winter break. She was visiting a former high school teacher and experienced direct negativity regarding her potential major change from linguistics to social thought and political economy.

I was talking to her [former high school teacher] over break and I told her I was thinking about changing my major to social thought and political economy and she was like, "Hahahaha. (Gemma imitated a sarcastic laugh) Have fun getting a job. You'll never get a job with that major." (Interview)



It was obvious that this conversation not only angered Gemma but hurt her as well. As we continued the conversation, she continued to talk about how this teacher believed Gemma would be “stuck” in a teaching job.

Yeah and that just really upset me. I was upset because I think that being a teacher is a very respectable position, and I would have, I mean I would be happy if things worked out that way. Like, the fact that it is her career and it seems like my choices are similar to hers... so why is she looking down on me? (Interview).

I believe this conversation bothered Gemma because she viewed this teacher as a mentor. Gemma was a high-achieving student in high school, and she was not accustomed to teachers disagreeing and/or mocking her decisions.

At the University, negative outlooks regarding job prospects were prevalent. Nicole, who was an English major, discussed reoccurring jokes from English professors and teaching assistants. “I think teachers joke about it a lot. You know...jokes about being an English major and not being able to get a job” (Interview). Hunter was aware of the comments and jokes from teachers, and this was part of the reason he was considering a change in major.

Oh yeah and I think that is why I am starting to shy away from the English major. Even one of my English professors last semester said, “Oh you guys are English majors, get ready to be teachers because that is all there is for you guys right now” (Hunter, Interview).

At the time of this study, Marcus was seriously contemplating several conversations he had with philosophy professors and was in the process of rearranging his career goals. Although it seemed like these professors were merely painting a realistic picture, it appeared Marcus might not have received a well-rounded perspective.

I got some help about philosophy. Just kind of the reinforcement that philosophy is the most difficult discipline to get into in the world. So I’ve kind of been—the advice that I’ve gotten from philosophy professors has consistently been that it’s

near impossible. Not in a discouraging way, just like a “you need to know what you’re getting into here.” (Interview)

Marcus not only was considering dropping philosophy as a major, but he seemed positive he did not have the skills to become a philosophy professor, which was his primary goal upon entering college. Although the professors he was interacting with had not directly told him to abandon his dream, I wonder if any of them offered a counter-narrative to the grim future they presented for philosophy majors or suggested ways he could attain his goals if he was determined to pursue philosophy. Having knowledge about job prospects can be powerful, but based on the encounters of Marcus, Hunter, Gemma, and Nicole, teachers and professors are reinforcing the stereotype that major to career is a linear path. This is dangerous, especially for professors who chose careers in the humanities and arts. If students are shying away from majors because of a perceived lack of marketability, interest in the humanities and arts will continue to decline. Not all liberal arts majors can be teachers, professors, and authors; the majority of these students will seek work outside of the linear path, and they need to know that their degrees are valuable to potential employers in a variety of fields.

### **Easy Coursework and Lack of Skills**

Other participants discussed overall stereotypes they have encountered, specifically when talking to their fellow college students. They noted endless negative perceptions directed at them from family, peers, and society in general. These stereotypes included head in the clouds/navel gazer, lack of direction and goals, wealthy with the luxury to “explore” in college, destined for minimum wage jobs, easy coursework,

lacking “real” credentials, no technical skills, an inability to comprehend math, and searching for the easy road to graduation.

Michael, an English major, expanded on the notion that liberal arts majors are easy, and he passionately talked about the rivalry between liberal art majors and other college majors.

There is an overwhelming impression that liberal arts majors are less inclined to work hard. You know its, “Oh you were an English major. I did science. I really worked for my degree.” And it’s like, “You know what, buddy? You try writing five essays a week, for three weeks in a row.” Or whatever else, like, reading 1,000 pages over the course of this week. But you know nobody really challenges that assumption so it’s perpetuated.

Often the participants felt that others believed that they were looking for the easy road or that they lacked “real” skills. For example, Gemma expressed frustration with her assumed lack of technical abilities,

People make assumptions that you don’t understand certain concepts. That you won’t be able to work with Excel because you don’t know enough about technology or math, and you clearly don’t know how to do math because if you knew how to do math you would choose to do an accounting major because clearly you would make more money with an accounting major. So, if you’re good at math why would you just throw away that skill? But it’s not throwing away that skill, like it’s just not utilizing it as my only skill. (Interview)

Gemma and many of the other participants had made conscious decisions to major in a subject they enjoyed. They knew this might lead to less earning power in the future, but for most of the participants, salary was not a primary factor when they decided on an academic major.

Hunter felt his peers had a narrow view of his English major and did not truly understand the depth of his experience as a liberal arts major.

From students, I’ve definitely gotten the “Oh you’re an English major, I’m Chemistry” (said in an uppity voice). You know, people think you are English and all you do is read books and stuff. And I guess that is true in some ways, but of

course there is more to it, I'm doing a lot more than just reading. But I think non-English majors think you are just trying to breeze through college. And adults the same thing, they always want to know what you are doing and seem to think reading can't get you places in life. (Interview)

Hunter was a participant who was questioning his decision to major in English. The negative messages made him wonder if he was making the right choice. "I'm teetering with my major right now. I think I really need to see what I can accomplish with it, can I gain some good career skills with an English major?" Hunter was hoping the CCD course would provide him with some direction.

Even Nicole and Shelby, the participants with the most focused post-college goals, faced negative stereotypes from peers who assumed they had no career direction. Nicole, who had a solid career plan, said "People believe that we have our heads in the clouds, that we just want to read books and we aren't all there. We have no direction" (Interview). This was a common theme among the participants; they felt their college peers believed that students who chose liberal arts majors were dreamers and thinkers and not capable of undertaking practical work. In her second interview, Nicole elaborated on how her peers viewed her.

I've had conversations with people in engineering in which they make it clear that they think my classes are easy. They say things like, "You have no idea how hard our classes are. You have no idea how hard our work is. All you guys [humanities majors] do is read. You are in fake college right now." And you know, I get it, they are taking hard classes, and that might be hard for me. But they probably can't write a good essay or read and analyze a book like we can. It is just different perspectives and different skills.

Shelby expressed a similar idea but discussed how the current economy played a role in this dynamic. "Most people criticize liberal arts majors as being too outspoken and lacking real credentials. Biologists or chemical engineers are assumed to have "real" credentials. Liberal arts majors are often deemed too risky for the American economy"

(Essay). These negative statements had a damaging affect on how students viewed the worth of their academic majors.

### **Summary of Negative Perceptions**

Overall, the negative perceptions and stereotypes directed at liberal arts majors did have a substantial impact on the participants in this study. All of them were able to share stories and provide examples of someone who devalued their goals. These negative encounters caused some of the participants to question their decisions and to consider alternative plans. This is an important theme to ponder, as it provides reinforcement for the need to convey to liberal arts students positive messaging and accurate information regarding their majors and career prospects.

### **External Influence: The Role of Authority Figures and Media**

Having mentors and authority figures who can offer opinions and insight can be extremely helpful in the career development process. In the initial interview, I asked questions about external role models and outside influences. Participants identified their primary outside influences as parents, teachers, and media. Considering the substantial research available on the positive influence of peers in the college setting (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), it was surprising that the participants rarely talked about peers. Although peers sometimes provided negative commentary, the participants did not seem to have prolonged conversations with peers regarding their career goals.

Every human is susceptible to the opinions of others, including the opinions of parents, siblings, teachers, and peers; however, students must take the time to unpack

these external influences and ensure that they are not overshadowing their internal voices. Baxter Magolda (2004 & 2009) unpacks the process of Self-Authorship, as students move from relying heavily on external influences in making decisions toward the ability to trust their internal voices. At the start of the CCD course, students seemed to be at the beginning stages of self-authorship, looking for adults to provide the “right” answers to career questions (Baxter Magolda, 2009).

### **Parents**

All of the participants spoke about their parents when asked about external influences. Most of the students trusted the opinions of their parents, and all of them were seeking their approval, although some more so than others. Many of the participants did express that their parents were supportive of their majors, even if their parents had some concerns about their ability to find a suitable career.

Nicole and Hunter were both encouraged by their parents to seek a well-rounded education. Nicole described her father as a banking executive who strongly valued oral and written communication. He was supportive of Nicole’s choice to declare English as a major. She often talked about him when asked why she decided to major in English.

It usually goes with me citing my Dad. He says being an English major is very useful and he is in the position to hire and fire people and he's an economist. He agrees that an English degree is valuable, and I 100% trust him on that.  
(Interview)

Hunter’s dad had stressed the importance of having excellent writing skills. Hunter believed his dad was a positive influence, and his dad would support him in any choice of major. When I asked him about his biggest positive influence, he answered,

I would say my Dad, but you know he hasn't really pushed me or influenced me towards a certain major. He's always been more like, "Do what you want to do." He's very open-ended like that. He likes me being an English major. He's always expressed the importance of being a good writer. He's always like, "Be a good writer, be a good writer." He always said it was important because it helps you with a lot of things. So he's always been supportive and he liked that I pursued English as a major.

Both Nicole and Hunter's fathers reinforced their choice to declare English as a major, and this support was essential in them recognizing the practical value, such as writing, verbal communication, and critical thinking.

Michael and Harrison were also English majors. They both felt that their parents were supportive of attaining a college degree, regardless of the specific major. These two participants spent time away from college, taking several semesters off after experiencing some academic struggles. Michael was an older student, and his parents were not as involved in his day-to-day decision-making. They trusted Michael to make his own decisions, but they strongly believed he needed to finish college. Michael described the support he received from his family by saying,

My parents are supportive, but in a crack the whip sort of way. You know they are both educators and they know that obtaining my degree is critically important. And uh, a lot of my extended family is very supportive of me finishing school. I wouldn't say my parents are exactly less invested, but I would say they care less about my day-to-day living or decisions. (Interview)

Similarly, Harrison did not feel pressured to select a particular major, but he felt immense pressure to finish school. His father was very concerned when Harrison chose to take a semester off. He described a complicated view of the support he receives from his father.

I've always been close with my father. I don't know, he's inhibiting and liberating all at the same time. I don't know - I have a very interesting relationship with my father. We get along, but sometimes he is - well he was born in Greece and he was raised there. And he is very traditional and overly strict. Sometimes his methods - I mean he means well. But he does inspire me with his work ethic. I

mean he's been working ridiculous hours to support me, and the rest of our family. And that is definitely inspirational. (Interview)

Harrison discussed his intricate relationship with his father throughout all three interviews. Ultimately, he wanted to emulate his father's work ethic and commitment to family, but Harrison was unsure he was capable of that type work ethic.

Participants' parents' number one goal for their students was to finish school.

Their parents were supportive of their choices as long as they completed a degree. Nicole described this by stating,

I think they [my parents] would be supportive of whatever I did, as long as I stayed in college. And I do think they are proud that I am graduating early. Because my parents both went to college and graduate school, so I was expected to go to college. I think they see I have a real plan in place. If I was here and slacking off, maybe it would be a different story, but I'm not. (Interview)

Gemma's mom had a similar philosophy to Nicole's parents, but Gemma found her father's mixed messages to be confusing, and she never knew if he was being genuine or just articulating random thoughts. Her mother believed that your graduate work determined your career path, whereas the focus of an undergraduate degree was to build skills. Gemma described the messages she received from her parents in her first interview.

He's [her dad] really weird. Like one day, he'll tell me to go into the Army. And I'm like, "Come on Dad, you know me. That will never happen." But he says it anyways because he likes the idea of it. Then he'll bring up some other idea that he's into. So for me, I never know when he's just throwing out random ideas or he is actually being serious. Cause he just does that, throws out random stuff to me. My mom just wants me to do what I want to do. She's got a bachelor's degree in genetics and then moved to America [she's from England] and now is a school librarian. She says that you can do whatever, because it is your master's degree that counts anyway. She just wants me to be happy.

Overall, Gemma appreciated the support of her parents, and she felt empowered to study whatever she found most interesting. At the beginning of the class, Gemma was a



linguistics major, but she was considering a change of major to social thought and political economy.

Some of the participants' parents expressed concern about their chosen major(s). Luke and Zian both entered college with career-tracked majors. However, both these students eventually changed majors to pursue their interests. Luke made this change before enrolling in the career class; he started college as a landscape and design major and switched to studio art. His parents wanted him to be happy, but they were concerned about his job prospects.

My mom and dad are definitely more worried now that I am an art major. They are also less worried because they know I wasn't thrilled with college last year. Even when I first came to this University, I just wasn't happy...I didn't like my major. (Interview)

Luke enrolled in the career class to assist him in finding ways to make his studio arts major more marketable, which he hoped will help ease his parents' concern.

Zian entered the career class as an architecture major but was already contemplating a change in major when he started the career class. Of all the participants, Zian's parents had the most influence over his decisions, which Zian expressed was typical in Chinese families. For example, Zian recalled guidance from his parents early on, "I wished to be a doctor because my parents told me that a doctor always gains a high salary in contrast to other careers. But I also liked to be a doctor because a doctor could cure people." (Interview). At the time of the study, his mother was still encouraging him to consider a career in medicine, but Zian was more interested in exploring his artistic side. He knew his parents would not approve of him being an art major, so he chose to major in architecture. He explained this decision in one of his interviews.

I now major in architecture and design because art attracts my interest the most, at least for now. My parents think I should find a career that is good for living, so I find that the cooperation of architecture and art is the best fit to me that I may possibly find a favorable position in a company that has a good salary. Besides, I am fond of buildings.

However, Zian quickly learned that architecture was not as interesting as he imagined. He was already planning to change his major to a dual major in linguistics and psychology but was feeling apprehensive because he knew his family would not approve.

Some of the participants discussed the pressure either to follow the example of their parents or to avoid their parents' career path at all costs. Tiana, a Cultural Studies major, talked about her mom's hope that she would go into nursing, but her mom eventually disregarded this prospect.

For a bit, my mom really wanted me to go into nursing, and I was like, "I don't know. I pretty much failed science three years in a row. Probably not a good choice!" I was like, "Mom, that ship has sailed!" She's a nurse, and she thought I had the qualities to be a good nurse. And she would always be like, "Do you know who else just got a job as a nurse?" And I would be like, "Mom, stop!" She is always saying nursing is a continuing growing field, and you are always needed, and it won't go away in the future, things like that. (Interview)

Marcus received some indirect pressure to think about a career in business.

Both of my parents are business-oriented and they are both professionals. And both of my brothers are going in that direction. And my extended family is not in the liberal arts area. Yeah, so my parents don't complain though, surprisingly. Cause they do know I am passionate about it. I think they hope I'll find a way to do something with it, something in business. (Interview)

Marcus' parents encouraged him to follow his own dreams regardless of their focus on business. As Marcus considered a double major in philosophy and English, he hoped to settle any concerns his parents may still have by identifying a career path and securing internships.

Two of the participants, Hunter and Shelby, were strongly discouraged from following in their parents' footsteps. Hunter's father was an architect, and Hunter had considered architecture as a career.

I use to be very interested in architecture. When I was kid, I used to go to work with him [my dad] and I thought it was cool. I've always been interested but, toward the end, when I was really thinking about - he had just gotten laid off, and he was like, "No, don't be an architect. There is no money in it." No jobs for architects, so he did dissuade me from seriously considering that. Just cause he was out of work and bitter. (Interview)

Similarly, Shelby's mother steered her in a direction that was different from her own career in nursing.

My mom is a nurse, and I always thought about being a nurse, but she has always pushed me in another direction. She didn't want me to do it. Actually, she has always wanted to be a lawyer. So she has always pushed me toward law. She always, I don't know, we never really talked about it, but she always wanted me to do something more. She always strove to do the best that she could, and then my parents got divorced, and she became a single mom with two kids - working as much as she could so we could have everything we wanted. So the dream to be a lawyer just fizzled for her, and she figured what she couldn't have, her kids could have. (Interview)

Shelby was committed to the dream of attending law school. It seemed as though this message originated with her mother but was reinforced with books and television shows such as Nancy Drew, *JAG*, and *Law and Order*. Shelby also seemed to have a real interest in the field of law, and she did not express any negativity regarding the prospect of attending law school.

### **Teachers**

Hunter, Luke, and Harrison all had schoolteachers who were a strong source of influence. These participants chose their current majors based on positive experiences with high school teachers. These teachers inspired passion for the subject material and

were a vital source of inspiration regarding the selection of a college major. For example, Harrison who was an English major and was considering a career in education shared the following.

I had this English teacher junior year. He was actually my favorite teacher ever. And I have been meaning to email him, just to see how he is doing. Because by the end of the year, we were, like, friends. He writes poetry, and he showed me some of his poetry. And he was just cool. Like we read *Catch-22* in that class. And we were the only class that read that book and I would never have been able to understand what the author was saying, but he helped me understand. He really solidified my love for literature and analysis. (Interview)

Harrison later discussed his desire to teach and his hope to positively influence students similar to the way his English teacher influenced him.

Art had always been a part of Luke's life. He enrolled in art classes as a child, and his grandmother was an artist. Even his father, who was in business, expressed his creative side via carpentry projects. Luke's passion for art continued, and in high school, he enjoyed classes that allowed him to express his creativity. He did not have one particular teacher who he claimed inspired him, but he stated multiple times that his art teachers encouraged his talent and fed his passion. In his first interview he said, "My favorite teachers were always my art teachers. They were more fun I guess. And even my music teachers, I remember really liking them." Luke tried to alter his dream by declaring a major in landscape architecture and design. He thought it would be based enough in the arts to feed his passion but lucrative enough to support his future living expenses. However, he quickly learned that landscape architecture and design was not the right choice for him.

In a weird way, it seemed kind of like giving up. I guess I am really happy to just be able to express myself now. You know I want to be thinking about the things that I want to think about. Not the things I have to think about, in order to have a career. And now the classes I take are broader. I get to work creatively. In

landscape architecture we had some of the design projects, but I didn't really enjoy how confined everything was. (Interview)

By the time Luke enrolled in the career course, he was a studio art major, and his classes allowed him to express the same creativity that was encouraged in his secondary school classes.

Hunter gathered his career inspiration from a variety of sources. He was currently considering multiple career paths, and he seemed to drift toward any plan that appeared to be a fun adventure. When he was considering his choice of major, he wanted a major that was versatile. He selected English because of an English teacher in high school that encouraged him to find his voice. In Hunter's first interview, he explained his decision to choose English as his primary major.

I had a really good high school English teacher. And right now, English is still my primary major. I'm a double major, English and Political Science. And so, I still have that interest in English, I think I got that from my teacher, Ms. Hartman. She did a lot of great exercises with us. Ummm, one was just, you'd write an Op. Ed. piece every week. And that was the first time I had ever done anything like that. Just write your opinion on something. So simple, but it inspired me. I started to realize I had my own voice in my writing and I could just grow from there. It was endless opportunity to keep going forward.

During the career course, Hunter had English as a primary major but also declared a second major in political science. Although he was still considering multiple career paths, they all seemed to center around communication.

Shelby and Hunter both found professors at the University that were positive sources of external influence. These professors encouraged critical thinking and advised students to become involved on-campus. Shelby had connected with numerous faculty members, including securing a position as a Research Assistant with a political science professor. This position taught her valuable skills in critical analysis and teamwork. She

valued time with the faculty member and had broadened her career possibilities within the field of law. Additionally, she valued classroom experiences that fostered thinking and critical analysis. She spoke about a professor that encouraged self-authorship in his classroom.

I also have another professor right now and he really encourages us to think, he's always playing the devil's advocate in class and basically tells us, "You don't need to know what I think, I want to know what you think." And that's all that matters in that class and I like having someone to challenge me.

In another class, she "confronted" a professor during office hours for grading harshly but not providing clear guidelines and suggestions for improvement. She told him that it was not about the grade but her ability to learn and improve her writing and critical thinking in his class. Their discussion was positive, and she learned that the professor was better giving feedback verbally.

Marcus seized opportunities to seek out advice and guidance from his professors. As discussed earlier, he had spoken with philosophy professors who painted a grim and realistic picture of the job prospects for aspiring philosophy professors. Now that he was broadening his career vision, he was seeking the advice of several mentors and resources. He described some of the advice he received during his first interview.

My European history teacher told me to definitely take leadership positions on-campus. So I've applied to be a Resident Assistant (RA) and a Peer Mentor (PM). I applied to be a member of the Honors program. I applied to be a Summer Orientation Leader. And I've just talked with a lot of RAs in my building, not just the ones on my floor, but the ones throughout the building. And I do go to professors' office hours, just to chat and get their perspective.

By the end of the study, University staff had selected Marcus as a Summer Orientation Leader and a Resident Assistant. He was hoping these would be good skill-building and

networking opportunities. Additionally, he saw these as “butterfly opportunities<sup>1</sup>,” or random opportunities that may lead to something productive down the road.

## **Media**

Almost every participant mentioned media (books, news, talk shows, online blogging, movies, television shows, etc.) as sources of inspiration. This is not surprising since we live in a society inundated with media. However, Michael, Hunter, and Shelby made choices based on the external influence of media, and these decisions are worth exploring. For example, in the beginning of the section, I discussed Michael’s childhood dream of being a meteorologist based on the nightly news ritual that occurred in his home. As a young adult, Michael still felt a connection to the news, as well as other pieces of literature. In his first interview, he described what influenced him as he made decisions about his future, particularly his new dream of becoming a broadcast journalist.

I excessively read the news online. Which is interesting. I usually don’t like watching news videos online. I’d rather just read the article. As for writing, I really like Hemingway. And of course he’s a famous journalist/writer. I do remember reading *For Whom the Bell Tolls* a couple years ago and really liking that, which was again, an interesting mix of, you know, a tourist in another nation fighting for his belief. So I guess that would be inspirational. Um, I love, like, *60 Minutes*, that sort of thing.

As described earlier, Michael was an older student and did not rely on his parents when making decisions about his future. He seemed more focused on his life experiences, especially travel, and his connection to news and other sources of media.

Hunter loved the combination of politics and storytelling, and throughout the career course, he began to see this as a theme in his life. Similar to Michael, news and

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<sup>1</sup> An aspect of chaos theory that I discuss in the next section.

talk shows were a clear influence. When asked about external influences that effected his career decisions, he explained,

I guess this is a person, but not really. *The Daily Show* with John Stewart. I guess that is a person, but it's more the media or an institution. I just love the way he satirizes FOX News. I really connect with that a lot. Not only do I think a lot of it is funny. I also think it is very true. I enjoy comedy. I have always been a big fan of stand-up comedians so I think that show combines two of my loves - politics and humor. (Interview)

When Hunter enrolled in the career course, he had multiple interests, but he lacked focus and had yet to develop even a broad sense of how he could weave his interests into possible careers.

Finally, Shelby frequently discussed media as a source of influence and inspiration. Earlier, I recounted her love for Nancy Drew books and the television shows *Gilmore Girls*, *Law and Order*, and *JAG*, which all inspired her to pursue a career in law. In her first interview, Shelby talked about how media still affected her life, both positively and negatively.

I enjoy Stephen Colbert and John Stewart. I like their political commentary and humor. But I guess what I find more infuriating about the media is the representation of women and it's so not right. There's a great film called *Misrepresentation* and my sorority hosts a yearly showing of it. And it's upsetting to see how women are portrayed. For someone like me, who wants to go somewhere and be someone, seeing women treated like that is awful. It's such a negative message and it's frustrating.

As a political science and history major, Shelby wanted to use these academic lenses to make a difference in society, although she was unclear as to how to incorporate these ideas into her career goals.



## **Lack of Peers**

In investigating the external influences that affect choice of college major and career goals, the participants constantly considered the opinions and advice of others. Mainly, the 10 participants in this study talked about parents, extended family, high school teachers, professors, and media. Surprisingly absent was the influence of friends. Students in this study rarely mentioned their peers, unless they were talking about negative stereotypes regarding liberal arts majors. Nine of the participants told me that they rarely or never had deep discussions with other students about career plans. For example, Zian explained, “We never discuss careers. My friends are focused on what they have right now, school and going out together” (Interview). Gemma did not like discussing career plans with friends because she felt it could get competitive, and it caused unnecessary stress. She felt her friends did not have similar interests or philosophies about the purpose of college.

Many of my friends went into the sciences. Just having people around you all the time that are stressed out about their plan just stresses you out about your plan. And I’m not high strung so I avoid these conversations (Interview).

Tiana was the only participant who mentioned frequent conversations with friends about life goals and career plans. Perhaps this was because she lived in a residential learning community focused on global interactions, with a concentration on languages. She described evenings with friends during which they ate pizza and discussed life plans.

A lot of other people on my floor are really nerdy and stuff so we spend our Friday nights planning out our next four years. And, like, we talk about classes we want to take, internships and how to get them, study abroad, and possible jobs after college. (Interview).

### **Summary of External Influences**

The participants in the study discussed a wide range of external influences. Identifying external influences was a goal of the course, as it is an essential component of constructivist career development. When individuals recognize and discuss outside pressures, they engage in the process of evaluating the influence of those pressures in their lives. Some external influences discussed by participants provided inspiration and reinforcement, while others distracted them from their interests, skills, and values. Overall, CCD assists in establishing a foundation of self-knowledge by exploring the participants' pasts, negative and positive stereotypes, and external influences that served as crucial understandings from which to build practical career tools.

### **Considering Negative Messages and External Voices**

As discussed in Chapter 2, Baxter Magolda developed her theory of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2001, 2008, 2009; Baxter Magolda, Creamer, & Meszaros, 2010) based on yearly interviews with students who started her study while in college. Baxter Magolda interviewed these students into their mid-30s and determined that there is a progression in cognitive development as individuals cultivate a more complex way of knowledge construction. As an individual moves from a focus on external authority to a secure reliance on their internal knowledge, that individual achieves what Baxter Magolda (2008, 2009) refers to as self-authorship. In Chapter 2, self-authorship was discussed in detail, but here is a brief synopsis of the three phases of self-authorship:

Phase 1, External Formulas: Individuals seek external approval and rely on external authorities for knowledge and truth.

Phase 2, Crossroads: Individuals are starting to develop an internal voice but still rely heavily on external authorities for confirmation.

Phase 3, Self-Authorship: Individuals trust their internal voice and realize that much of life is beyond their control. This requires the development of three key components: trusting their internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments.

Self-authorship is the conceptual framework of my dissertation and the lens that was at the forefront of my research plan and data analysis. While the goal of my dissertation was not to quantitatively measure self-authorship, I do want to convey that the participants' focus on external voices is critical in examining the career stories of students who engage in constructive career development. As expected, pre-CCD course, the participants relied heavily on external voices that suggested they were susceptible to the negative messages they encountered from family, teachers, and media. Facilitators can use this knowledge to assist students in recognizing outside influences and encouraging them to develop their internal voices.

### **The CCD Course Experience**

This section focuses on the 10 participants' experiences in the CCD course. The overarching research question broadly asked, "What do students deem as the beneficial components of constructivist career development?" In the second interview and essay, I asked the participants questions related to their career development experience both in and out of the CCD class. Since the CCD course is still new, the detailed perceptions of the participants add valuable insight into the effectiveness of constructive career development when utilized with students majoring in the liberal arts. This section helps the reader better understand particular moments in time in the participants' lives.

Throughout the semester, students in the CCD course engaged in skill-building exercises and made decisions about their short and long-term plans. They were able to provide insight into how they viewed the college experience with regard to career development and career planning.

Overall, the participants seemed to appreciate the opportunity to engage in a small class focused on their career development goals. They discussed a wide-range of topics, and the major themes that emerged in this area were: course enrollment, space for self-reflection, a tool for active learning, peer connections, and developing practical career skills. The findings in the section help researchers and practitioners understand CCD courses from the viewpoint of the participants and shed light on the aspects of CCD that students gravitate toward.

### **We have to do it Anyway, Why not get Credit?**

The participants expressed a variety of reasons for enrolling in the one-credit CCD course. A couple of the participants were simply looking to enroll in an additional credit to complete their course schedules, but the majority of participants were genuinely interested in the topic. For some students, it was a “no brainer.” Why not get credit for tasks you have to do anyway? For others, the process of career development seemed mysterious. They understood their majors were not career-tracked and, because of this, they wanted to seek ways to become more marketable to future employers.

After taking a semester off from college, Harrison decided this course might assist him in focusing on his college and career goals. He had both internal and external motivations for enrolling.

I liked the way it [the course] was sold in the email I saw. You know, “you have to do it anyway, why not get a credit?” So that made sense to me. I know I’ll never do it on my own and this is important stuff. Maybe I’ll learn something new and I know it will make my mom and dad happy. Make them proud, to see I signed up for something that can help me, and, you know, I’ll need a resume’.

(Interview)

Harrison wanted a fresh start, and he viewed this class as a way to structure important career development. As noted earlier, Harrison struggled with self-motivation, and he recognized that this class would force him to engage in the career development process.

The desire to develop and hone practical career skills drove Michael, Zian, and Luke to enroll in the course. Michael, who spent several years in a full-time job, wanted to continue updating his resume’ and prepare for potential internship opportunities. He explained his objectives in his first essay.

Ultimately, I’m hoping the coursework will motivate me to update my resume’ and align my skill sets with a summer internship in line with my career goals. With a strong resume’ and my drive there shouldn’t be any reason I won’t find a suitable summer project.

Zian wanted to learn how to write a resumé, find a suitable internship, and gain a better understanding of what American employers seek.

The reason I am enrolled in this course is to make a nice-looking resume’, so I could apply for substantial internships and jobs that require a good resume’. I hope to learn how to be a worker who knows what most companies want.

During his interviews, Zian often discussed cultural differences between China and the United States. He was aware that he would need to learn how to “brag” about his skills because it was required with American companies.

Luke had recently changed his major to studio art. Although he was happy with his decision, he was aware that he would need to work hard to market himself to potential employers. In his second interview, he explained why he enrolled in the career course.

Specifically for resumé and cover letters. And I know that an artist's resumé can be different from other resúmes. Also, careers in the arts can be handled differently. I want to be in a class where I can have conversations that get me thinking about the future. I don't know. I really want to be able to verbalize my thoughts and ideas about stuff. It helps me learn. So it's cool to be here.

Although the class did not delve into the specifics of an artist's resumé, Luke was able to take the knowledge he gained from the course and infuse it with the advice his art professors conveyed.

Shelby and Gemma were far more concerned with learning the "right" way to impress future employers. They both wanted to engage in a process of career development, and this was the first opportunity that they had encountered. Specifically, Gemma was concerned about securing employment after college.

Like most college students, I am worried that I will not get a job. That is the perpetual concern that follows me around and creeps up on me every time I enroll in classes or even have a conversation about my life at the University. I am hoping that this class will help alleviate this concern and perhaps reassure me that I am in the right place by better preparing me for the current labor market. (Essay).

As a student fixated on law school, Shelby was not as concerned about job prospects. However, she felt her career skills were lacking, and she knew that impressing future employers would be essential. In an essay, she explained,

I find myself applying to all sorts of programs, internships, and even jobs. I was never taught how to write a resume', develop a strong cover letter, or network effectively. Most of the time, I feel like I am flying blind when it comes to representing myself successfully to employers, scholarships, and programs.

She reiterated this sentiment in an interview by expressing,

I think it's [resúmes, cover letters, networking, and interviewing] common sense stuff, but it is never really taught. Most people don't know how to network very well and I guess I network, but not to the extent that I wish. They also don't teach you much about resume's anywhere and that is my biggest thing right now. The world does not prepare you for this so I want to have all my bases covered.

Shelby was an extremely motivated student with very specific goals. She was aware that she needed to work on her career skills to succeed, and she viewed this course as a way to become proficient in this area.

Finally, although Tiana was the only student to express this sentiment, I felt it was important to include her reason for enrolling in the course.

One thing I liked about the description of this class is that it is not just simply reading and regurgitating information to get a grade. In this class we will get actual feedback, feedback that will help us improve based on the work we turn in. I think the mock interview will be most beneficial to me, as I tend to crumble under the stress of interviews. (Essay)

These participants attend a large University and as first-year and sophomore students, often sit in large lecture classes. The opportunity to be in a small classroom and receive personalized feedback was enticing to Tiana.

Overall, students enrolled in this course looking for advice and guidance. They understood the importance of gaining career skills, but they were seeking structured guidance to ensure they were receiving the correct information. Additionally, students enjoyed having an organized schedule (i.e., the course syllabus) for completing career tasks. They were aware they needed to make time for resumé/cover letter writing, networking, and exploring internships, but they wanted an opportunity that would force them to bring career development to the forefront of their priorities.

### **A Structured Space for Reflection**

Self-reflection was a key component of the CCD course and students practiced self-reflection in a variety of ways: course essays, completing exercises in the course book (Brooks, 2009b), in-class activities, and class discussions. These structured

activities encouraged students to think about their past experiences as well as their current interests, skills and values, to help them make educated decisions about their futures. Based on the information shared in interviews and essays, the participants valued the opportunity to reflect about their lives and how their life experiences related to career development.

The first four weeks of the course consisted predominantly of reflection opportunities, and participants utilized the self-knowledge gained via these assignments and class discussions in the second half of the class when they created cover letters, resumés, presented their “elevator speeches,” and participated in mock interviews. The following is a summary of how the participants viewed these reflection opportunities as well as insight into which readings and exercises they believed were most helpful.

Throughout the course, students participated in several in-class activities with the purpose of identifying personal values, interests, skills, and passions. One such activity was the Island Map Activity<sup>2</sup>. Over the semesters, I saw students incorporate a variety of people, places, and things on the islands: family, friends, big (and small) houses, parks, mountains, hiking trails, movie theaters, museums, restaurants, bars, boats, colleges, schools, amusements parks, water slides, small cities, coffee shops, wild life, aquariums, and the like. During the exercise, some students created extravagant lifestyles on their islands, while others chose to lead simple or moderate lives. How the participants chose to create their maps told me a lot of their interests and values.

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<sup>2</sup> Student completed the Island Map Activity in the first week of class. The instructor provided students a blank Island Map and told them they had just enough money to create an island that they could happily live on. Students had 15 minutes to create their island by either drawing or writing. The instructor then asked them to share their island with classmates.



Harrison perfectly summarized the purpose of the exercise in his second interview, “I liked the activity we did in class, the one where we put what we liked on an island. It gives you a sense of what you want in life. You actually have to pick what you want on that island so I thought that was cool.” Based on the Island Map activity, Zian learned that he valued family and nature, and it helped him realize some of his future priorities, “I liked the Island Map. That was my favorite. I realized that I like family; it is more important than a lot of things in my life. And I really like landscape and nature and that will determine where I live” (Interview). Participants rarely concentrated their island on specific job/career goals. Instead, on the island, they focused on what would make them happy. The corresponding class discussion helped them determine if their current career goals aligned with their “Island Dreams,” which was a crucial aspect to their career development. For example, Shelby shared, “I definitely liked the Island Map. It helped me think about things that I have done and the things that I want to do in life. And those things are all important when you are trying to plan out your life” (Interview). Shelby recognized that her career would significantly affect her lifestyle. This activity motivated many of the participants to reflect on their current jobs goals and if their goals were compatible with their desired lifestyles.

In addition to the Island Map, one of the CCD course sections completed the True Colors<sup>3</sup> exercise, and the participants in that section expressed satisfaction with the activity. Tiana stated:

I liked the leadership style color exercise. It was really cool, and I liked how she [the instructor] told the story afterwards about all the different colors going on a road trip and I thought that was the coolest thing ever.

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<sup>3</sup> An abbreviated leadership styles inventory. A short questionnaire categorizes students into one of four leadership groups – orange, blue, green, and gold.

The purpose of this exercise was to show students what their default leadership style was but also highlight the importance of all leadership styles. It was a good activity to begin conversations about teamwork and leadership, which are skills that students should be able to highlight on a resumé and discuss in interviews. Nicole, the other participant in that section, also enjoyed the True Colors activity; however, she had completed this activity prior to this course so she felt she learned more about her classmates from True Colors than she did about her own leadership style. What Nicole found most helpful was the Mind Map Activity in the Brooks (2009) book, “I loved the book, and I found it very helpful. I loved the write-in activities and the mind map. My book is scribbled all over, and I have Post-It Notes everywhere” (Interview).

Gemma valued the activities in the Brooks (2009b) book. She entered the career course already knowing that a college major does not determine one’s future; essentially, she already believed in the non-linear career path. Gemma entered college as a linguistics major because she was interested in languages and based on her mom’s advice, planned to go to graduate school to complete her job-related education. However, after one semester, she started to second-guess her passion for linguistics. Therefore, she appreciated the opportunity to explore her interests in the CCD course. She eventually arrived at a decision to change her major.

The most helpful part of this class was the Wondering Map<sup>4</sup> in the book. I think we already talked about that, but that was what made me decide that I wanted to create my own major<sup>5</sup> because I noticed that like this is what I actually want to do

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<sup>4</sup> Readers are asked to map interests, values, skills, key experiences, as well as their random thoughts. This was an optional assignment, but several of the participants created a Wondering Map.

<sup>5</sup> This University offers students the opportunity to design and complete an individualized major. Students need to seek faculty support and are required to write a proposal and complete an interdisciplinary capstone project.

and none of the majors made sense for what I liked. I knew that those were the things I liked, but I'd never seen it on paper and been like, "Wow! This is not a major so I should probably make it one." (Interview)

Gemma started the process of declaring a major she designed but then stumbled upon another major that interested her, social thought and political economy. By the end of spring semester, she had changed her major from linguistics to social thought and political economy, and she was considering a minor in a foreign language. She was thankful for the space to reflect on her interests so she could find an academic major that suited her interests, skills, and values.

Course essays were not only an opportunity for reflection, but many of the participants also chose to express appreciation for structured reflection time in these essays. For example, Luke wrote, "I really value the time that I have had in this class to reflect on what I want to do with the possible career paths I have been cultivating and I can now better market myself for these career options." Through the process of self-reflection, Luke expanded his goals in the career class. By the end of the class, in addition to his desire to be a working artist, he was considering careers in arts management, graphic design, and art education.

Hunter shared that the opportunity for reflection helped him narrow down his career choices while still allowing him to have broad interests.

I am learning, with much help from this course, that some of these ideas [dream careers] are better suited for me than others, and some of them are just not possible. My list of potential lives has gone from outlandish and wild to possible and tamed. Through self-assessment exercises, I have been able to view my traits, personality, and professional qualities. This has not only reduced my possible lives, but also helped me realize what I truly value in life. (Essay)

In an interview, he expanded on his self-reflection and what he viewed as his skills and talents.

Honestly, not to sound cheesy, but that conversation you and I had before class was so helpful. I was talking to you about my strengths, or more, like, I was telling you I am not good at talking about my strengths, and you said I was really good at connecting with people. You helped me see how in all my jobs, the key to my success is making good connections - being real with people. And I have been thinking about that ever since. You know, I guess you like planted this seed of an idea. This origin of a thought and it has been growing the last three weeks. I realize now that I really need to be in a job that is not only about people, but about forming relationships with people. I think I can do that working in media.

Hunter made immense progress throughout the semester. He started the CCD course as a dreamer with numerous interests, and he was incapable of making decisions about his future career. By the end of the class, he had a variety of interests but also had ideas on how to blend these interests into suitable careers.

Similar to Hunter, throughout the seven-week course, Zian compiled a list of possible career paths as well as determined he wanted to switch his major. Using some of the ideas he learned in the Brooks' book (2009a), Zian realized he needed to speak with his family about a possible change in major.

I drafted my possible lives and asked myself what the most interesting field is or which major would be the best for me that could keep me excited for a lifetime. With the Wandering Map, I find out languages are the love I desire, but I restrain myself to pursue it because my relatives, and especially my parents, make me give up because languages are not worthy to pursue because of financial problems and the lack of job positions. (Essay)

Self-reflection assisted Zian in realizing that he was embarking on a college journey that was right for his family but not right for him. By the end of the course, Zian was considering several careers: speech pathology, child psychologist, and an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. As a newly declared linguistics and psychology major, all of these careers were possible if he was willing to attend graduate school after majoring in linguistics and psychology. Since Zian and his family valued graduate

education, Zian had already planned to continue his education after his undergraduate degree was complete.

Reflection essays were helpful to many of the participants, but of course, not all students valued them. This was apparent in the quality of the essays as well as how students talked about the process of writing essays. In analyzing the essays, I inferred that Harrison and Tiana did not spend a lot of time being introspective. Harrison seemed to repeat back what he gleaned from the assigned readings, and Tiana was brief in her self-analysis, lacking details and depth. Harrison freely admitted that he procrastinated writing his essays, “I’ll be honest, I procrastinated on the reflection papers and then just did them last minute, so not that helpful for me, but they could have been if I did them well” (Interview).

However, many of the participants did express that they found the essays helpful, and I learned plenty about the participants by reading them, especially from the participants in sections taught by other instructors. For students in the humanities and arts, reflection papers/essays are standard practice, and the participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts on paper. Most of the students seemed to enjoy writing them and most of the participants were excellent writers. For example, Shelby talked about the reflections as being similar to assignments in her other classes.

The reflection papers are helpful. In some of my other classes, I have to keep journals as part of the integrative experience of the class and I enjoy that. I think reflection papers give me time to think about what I understand, what I don’t understand, and figure out the questions I still have. Stuff like that.

Hunter enjoyed writing the reflection papers. He stated that the essays helped him realize he had a lot to do; in particular, he was not spending enough time thinking about himself and what was next for him.

I always find reflections helpful. It helps you think about things. Where you are and where you are going. It is important that I realized I haven't been doing enough. You know the reflections probably taught me that I haven't been doing enough reflection, if that makes sense. You know, that idea of talking to an employer and saying, "I'm good at this, because I did this, this, and this." I think that exercise has made me realize how underprepared I am. You know and that is good to know, because I do still have time to prepare. (Interview)

The only participant who wrote high quality (well-written and introspective) reflection papers but did not find them helpful was Michael. He believed that they were important so his instructor could get to know him; however, he did not think they were personally worthwhile. Michael strongly felt he already had a sense of who he was and where he wanted to go. He was more interested in the practical assignments completed in the second-half of the course. In the second interview, he explained his perception of the reflections.

I mean the first couple of weeks were tough to get through because it was like the foundation stuff. Again, it was mostly things that I've already either figured out or learned. But, I like, I understand that the class was not aimed for me. It was aimed for people that need to get that foundation.

Michael's opinion is in stark contrast to the other participants, all of whom truly valued the opportunity to get to know themselves better. Shelby summarized this well by explaining,

As a joke, I always say, "You don't know someone until you really know them." However, every day I am constantly surprised by the application and verity that it holds. As we have journeyed through this class, I believe I have come to understand this phrase as a self-fulfilling prophecy. With each careful step, we analyzed who we were, and are, not just by our hobbies and interests, but we also determined our core values, our morals, and ethics. By doing activities like the, "the island map," we were able to pinpoint what is most important to us and what we should look for in a career. (Essay)

Whether Michael already knew himself or he simply did not enjoy these types of assignments was hard to determine. However, if I were to guess, I would say the latter, since complete self-knowledge is hard to achieve.

### **A Tool for Active Learning**

As the course evolved, I began to search for a book that embodied the constructivist approach. I reviewed many books, but ultimately I chose the Katherine Brooks (2009b) book for three reasons: 1) It provides a balance of theory and practical knowledge. She engages the reader in self-reflection and then encourages him or her to use self-knowledge when networking, completing job applications, and interviewing. 2) Brooks' (2009b) use of Chaos Theory<sup>6</sup> fits nicely with constructivist career development. Chaos theory is tool that provides students with freedom to explore their options. 3) It was an easy read. These students were in other classes that consisted of an abundance of heavy reading. I wanted this book to be light but also thought-provoking. In addition to Brooks (2009b), I assigned some short articles, but students rarely discussed these other readings in their interviews or essays.

Most students enjoyed the Brooks (2009b) book. They found it informative and appreciated the exercises at the end of each chapter. This book allowed the participants an opportunity to engage in active learning, as well as provided career information that students could utilize to complete career tasks. For example, Nicole shared, "I loved the book and I found it very helpful. I loved the write-in activities and the Mind Map"

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<sup>6</sup> Chaos theory proved to be one of the most important components of this course and the idea that seemed to encourage self-authorship. I discuss this in the final section.

(Interview). Shelby completed some of the exercises in the book. She completed the Wandering Map and shared,

I did the Wandering Map. I don't think I did the Possible Lives<sup>7</sup> because I already knew what I wanted to do, but the Wandering Map was helpful. You know the Wandering Map helped me think about what I wanted to put in my resume and cover letter and what I could put in it. You know, the things that really make me stand out from other people and that is really important! At least for the competitive jobs anyway. You know for me, everyone wants to go to Law School. But what is going to make me unique and interesting? And inadvertently, some of the things I have done in my past may help me, so mapping those things out was helpful - really helpful. (Interview)

Zian completed many of the exercises in the book, and he credits those activities with assisting him in identifying his passions.

I found my real joys from doing exercises in "You Majored in What?" Those joys are psychology, linguistics, philosophy, nutrition, arts (drawing/painting, photography, and music), computers, and languages. Although I cannot major in all of them, they can still be interests. (Essay)

Zian learned two important things by completing the activities in Brooks (2009b). First, his current major was not one of his interests. Second, it is acceptable for some interests to simply be hobbies. By the end of the course, he was looking for creative ways to keep his non-major interests alive by joining student clubs and getting involved with other activities.

Another aspect of the book the participants enjoyed was the concept of following a non-linear career path, which pairs with the idea of chaos theory. Tiana explained, "The most important thing I have learned from the book is that my major is not as limiting as people, myself included, think. We have learned about chaos theory and that nothing in life is linear, especially college majors" (Essay). As a Cultural Studies major, Tiana had

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<sup>7</sup> The Possible Lives exercise (Brooks, 2009b) was an optional activity that encourages students to use the knowledge they had accumulated so far to list three to five possible career paths. These paths could be specific or broad, depending on the student and their ability to narrow his or her focus. Brooks is very clear that students should be pursuing at least three possible lives.



felt that her career options were limited to translation, education, and working in the State Department. Although she is still pursuing these options, she was happy to learn her undergraduate major did not limit her to only a few careers.

Likewise, Zian gravitated toward Brooks' (2009b) explanation of the non-linear career path. The readings provided Zian with language<sup>8</sup> to talk about his education with his father, and this conversation was very effective.

Fortunately, my father supports me to select what the best is for me after hearing the knowledge I gained from this course and the book we read. One of the things is that a specific major is not the linear path to a special career, etc. My father has never thought this before. So I talked to my dad about I want to change my major. I like linguistics and psychology. And I like this more than architecture. After I told him about the linear path and how it's is not there for my major. And also about how I can find another job with different majors. And he said to me, "If you really want to do linguistics and psychology as a double major, it is up to you. (Interview)

This was a reoccurring point for Zian. He discussed chaos theory in two of his interviews and two of his essays. He was proud of his ability to apply his learning to a conversation with his dad. During his interview, he talked about how he was very nervous to talk to his father, but in the end, his father respected that Zian had a plan and had researched his options.

Although many of the participants focused on the self-reflection portion of the book, some students valued the practical aspects<sup>9</sup> of Brooks (2009b). Shelby shared some of the practical applications of the book that she found beneficial.

You know I really like the way she talks about resume' and cover letters. Not everything will be the same, everything and everyone will be different. So she really encourages people to do what works for them. I liked the Wandering Map Activity and figuring out our interests because you know, of course I know what my interests are, but I don't always think about them. Or like I have had interests

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<sup>8</sup> Brooks (2009b) includes advice on speaking with parents about majors and career goals.

<sup>9</sup> Chapters 8-11 focus on resumés, cover letters, networking, and interviews.

in the past that I still enjoy, but I haven't done them recently so I am not thinking about them and how to apply them to my job search (Interview)

Although the Wandering Map is more of a self-reflection activity, Shelby found it to be a practical step in preparing her job search materials.

Active learning provided the participants with opportunities to apply their learning to their own lives. The course book (Brooks, 2009b) provided ample exercises with which students could engage, and it seems that assigning a course book that includes space for active learning is critical to maximize student success and satisfaction. Some participants made academic major and career decisions based on active learning opportunities, which allowed participants to commit to their internal voices.

### **I am Not Alone: The Power of Peers**

In the first section, when examining external influences, it was clear that 9 out of the 10 participants rarely talked to their peers in meaningful ways about their career plans. This was for a variety of reasons, including that these conversations were often stressful and competitive. However, I found that the participants immensely enjoyed talking to their peers in class about career development. In interviews, I asked participants if they had connected with any of their classmates, in or out of class, and if it was helpful to have career discussions with their peers in class. For the most part, the connections remained in the classroom, but a few of the students did make connections that developed into outside of class friendships. However, the most noteworthy finding was the comfort many of the participants expressed knowing that other students were struggling with the same career questions.

Some participants made connections with students who they felt were good networking contacts. For example, Nicole (the president of a student club) described her connection with another student in her section of the course.

There is another student in the class, Rafi [not a participant in the study]. He is also an English major and an IT minor. Just like me. So that was awesome, and we talked about English and IT classes, and he gave me his Photoshop program. So that was a nice connection as well. He also joined my club.<sup>10</sup> (Interview)

Coincidentally, or perhaps as a result of good networking, several students across the three sections of the class joined Nicole's club (Hunter, Tiana, and two students who were not participants).

Hunter benefited from being in the same course section as Michael. He appreciated hearing the views of someone who had spent time in the workforce. Overall, Hunter expressed the benefit of his peers' perspectives by saying,

I think just being in class with kids that have the same issues as you. Talking to them. You know like Michael gives some good ideas and I'm like, "hey, I hadn't thought about that." You know, getting the feedback from each other, that is the most helpful" (Interview).

Hearing the stories and experiences of the other students was a great benefit to students and this theme surfaced multiple times. For example, Marcus explained,

It's like inherently fun; intrinsically valuable to hear other people's stories. But also, like, to use them, to use their stories, and kind of look back on what you've been doing in comparison. Like they are doing X, what can I do to build my resume'? Like, this guy had a painting company one summer [Michael] and look at all the skills that he built and all the things that he can put on his resume', and so it kind of gets your mind going about where you want to go and what you want to do. (Interview)

Zian liked hearing stories from other students; he attributed this to his love for psychology. "I like to hear other people's experience, because I really like psychology

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<sup>10</sup> ED2010, a student club focused on networking in the magazine industry.

and I really like to learn about other people's feelings and opinions about things. Like, things that I knew and things that I didn't know" (Interview).

Finally, students appreciated that all the students were focused on different goals and had different assets to add to the group dynamic. The students in Michael's section appreciated him because of his "real world" perspective, but furthermore, he appreciated his classmates. He described the class dynamic by saying,

I think we have a good – we have a good mix in that class. Katie [not a participant in the study] has a real interesting perspective and I think that Hunter is hilarious. He cracks me up. But I like the dynamics in the class. Like there's no - not necessarily one student who stands out as like being really helpful or whatever - but together everyone talks things out in a really interesting and useful way. (Interview)

Shelby was in the same section with Michael and Hunter, and she described a similar scene but emphasized that it is okay for each student to focus on what is important to him or her in the moment.

I really like Hunter. We are both interested in political science and public policy. He's really hilarious. I guess in general, we all have something to give to the class. Our opinions, ideas, and justifications as to why we do things. And it is nice having someone older in the class too. Michael has a lot of experience to offer. And he was in a place where he did a job that he wasn't passionate about and now he is back in school following his passion, even if it might be hard. So it is good to see how important that is in the real world. It is nice because we are all at different levels. One person might be more goal oriented and just be fine tuning the cover letter and resume' and someone else might be still be focusing on what major or job to do, sort of like Monica [not a participant in the study], and that is okay. There is a variation of people in the class and that is okay and there is not pressure to be at a certain point. You can just figure out the questions that are important to you. (Interview)

The classroom dynamic that Shelby described was conducive to a constructive career development experience, as it was essential that each student felt safe and comfortable to create his or her own life story.

Finally, the underlying theme in all of these comments was a feeling of comfort. Realizing that everyone is on his or her own journey and it was normal for each journey to be unique to the individual. In the first section, students described the negative stereotypes that accompanied their choice of major. Some of these students felt like they were already at a disadvantage because all of their career-tracked friends had a concrete plan. Hearing that other students were still searching for a plan comforted the participants.

We actually have a pretty decent amount of conversations in class and I've talked to everyone and they're super cool. And like everyone had all these like different backgrounds and stuff. Yeah, I don't know, I just found it really helpful. Comforting - comforting that I am not the only one lost. (Tiana, Interview)

Although many of these students were still searching for possible career paths, none of them was completely lost. As first-year and sophomore students, they were undergoing a normal career development process, and this course emphasized that career exploration is normal, healthy, and even advantageous.

### **Developing Practical Skills**

Self-reflection was a crucial part of the course but how students used their self-knowledge was equally important. In the CCD course, students created career plans, wrote cover letters and resumés, presented their elevator speeches, and completed a mock-interview with their assigned instructor. Students received feedback on all their assignments throughout the seven weeks, including receiving verbal feedback during one-on-one meetings with the instructor to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their assignments. The process of successfully applying their self-knowledge to career tasks was empowering for the students. Instructors engrained into the students' thinking that

the process of career development is continuous; instructors reinforced that there is no such thing as perfection in the career development process, and there was, and is, always room for improvement.

One of the first practical assignments was to complete the SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely) Goals Exercise.<sup>11</sup> Nicole, who was very goal-oriented, appreciated this assignment and described its usefulness.

I really like the SMART goals activity. I really liked how you could break your goals down into different steps and we even talked about how you can develop a better version of the SMART goals throughout your college career. (Interview)

Nicole appreciated the flexibility to constantly revise her goals based on new experiences, opportunities, and interests.

Many of the students appreciated writing a resumé and cover letter, although they found it to be a daunting process. Luke described the value of the cover letter and resumé process,

I think just having to draft a cover letter and getting feedback on it is something that I value. That's something I think I wasn't very good at my first try. I don't know - you hear about your resumé all the time, but not the importance of a good cover letter. (Interview)

Shelby was in the process of receiving final feedback at the time of her second interview. She explained her increased confidence regarding her ability to write a good cover letter and resumé.

I definitely have seen my ability to write a resumé improve. And when Hunter was editing it the other day, he thought it was really good. That was an immediate confidence boost. And I knew I could do it, but I felt really good after getting feedback. And I am happy even though I know there is room for improvement and things I will change before I turn in the final copy. And writing the cover letter, I thought that was easy. Easier than I thought it would be. If you really

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<sup>11</sup> SMART Goals was not an exercise in Brooks (2009b), but a separate 3-page handout (adapted from the Department of Academic Success and Disability Services at the University of Redlands) that students completed week three as an in-class activity.

want a job, you read the position description and decide what skills you have that fit and you write about it. I definitely tried to do that and that helped a lot.

All of the students felt this was a helpful process, and its real world application was apparent. As Michael explained, a well-written resumé geared toward the job description is essential.

It's the number one important thing to do! It is what they're looking for. They want a specific resumé that matches the job description. Employers will read resumé's, and if it's all vague - then trash, trash, trash! They want to see what you did and how you use your skills. (Interview)

Michael's experience working for a company taught him the importance of never writing a generic cover letter and resumé. He reinforced this concept with the other students in the class, and the other students valued hearing his "inside" perspective.

One of the concepts from the course that students appreciated but grappled with was networking. All sections of the course engaged in at least two networking activities: the elevator speech and creating a LinkedIn profile. In addition, one instructor assigned an informational interview, which students seemed to enjoy. Despite the successes of these assignments, by the end of the seven-week course, most students still claimed to be perplexed on how best to network.

For Marcus, the elevator speech<sup>12</sup> was the most helpful networking tool. For this assignment, students prepared a 60-second networking pitch and presented it while they literally rode the elevator in the campus' Student Union building—1<sup>st</sup> floor to 10<sup>th</sup> floor and then back down. The instructor and three of the student's peers were in the elevator to provide feedback, and if other riders entered the elevator, the student needed to continue without pause. Marcus described his experience by stating,

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<sup>12</sup> Also known as a self-commercial

Helpful in terms of career development was the elevator speech. Yeah, I didn't do that well, but definitely when the other group members critiqued me, like gave me positive feedback and constructive criticism, it really helped me to identify my weaknesses. (Interview)

Marcus did not perform poorly, but the feedback he received encouraged him to be concise and to stay focused on his main points. In general, he had a tendency to jump from one topic to the next, but he was working on this and was considerably more concise in his mock-interview. Comparably, Michael explained that he struggled with this assignment; he found the activity to be nerve-wracking. However, he saw the value and was pleased he completed it. "I thought the elevator speech activity was useful. I didn't necessarily like it, but I think it was certainly useful" (Interview).

Luke completed the elevator speech and performed extremely well, but he was still unclear how it all connects to networking. He described this confusion in his final interview.

I don't really know what the word networking means. I think people talk about it a lot and I hear it a lot and I just don't know what that means. I think that, like, like the elevator speech was an example, but I definitely see that being like "OK that's networking. I see that." But I don't really know, like how do I network? How do I set out on a quest to network? I don't understand.

For Luke and some of the other students, networking seemed to be an ominous process that was inherently important but nearly impossible to understand. Shelby elaborated on her gained knowledge versus her ability to implement it when she explained how she felt about her capacity to network,

Networking is a topic that needs its own follow-up course. It is awkward, and you know, I do have some experience, and essentially, I do know how to network, but my experience is with recruitment in the sorority. In that dynamic, I am the older one. But talking to an older audience, people who are authority figures, still makes me nervous. I know how to be polite, but I think I am still too timid. I know what do to, but I'm not confident in my ability to do it. Especially when the person is important, and making a good impression will really matter. (Interview)



Shelby clearly demonstrates a difference between her confidence in knowing the information versus her ability to act based on the information.

Tiana completed an informational interview as part of her networking assignment, and she described the process as extremely helpful.

I liked the Informational Interview. At first, I was freaking out because I didn't know who to talk to, but once I found the person, I don't know, it was interesting. I talked to her and it was great because she was actually a Cultural Studies major too! I guess the biggest thing I learned was that I just need to go with it, like something's going to happen and no matter what - I'll be fine. I just need to keep taking advantage of opportunities and keep learning new things. (Interview)

Tiana's informational interview reinforced that she did not need to have everything figured out right now. Cultural Studies majors do get jobs after college, and as long as she stayed focused on seeking new opportunities, her path would lead her to new possibilities.

Nicole also completed an informational interview. In her final interview, she explained how this assignment led to an internship for Fall 2013.

My club toured the University Press and I did an informational interview there. I know part of the reason I got the internship is because I made the connections. I showed them I was serious about the job, that I really wanted it. That was the key. People need to make connections.

Nicole learned first-hand the power of networking and secured a highly sought after internship by taking her informational interview seriously and following-up with the organization.

The application of the participants' self-knowledge to practical career development assignments initiated the process of building self-confidence. Students completed the course knowing themselves better and having some concrete tools to move forward. Marcus summarized this point in his essay.

When I entered this class, I felt unprepared. I had never talked about steps toward a career and felt overwhelmed. Halfway through the process, I am reassured. By the end of the course, I will have secured the necessary ingredients to getting on my way towards my career: a LinkedIn Profile, resume´ and cover letter, an elevator speech and even a mock interview.

Building self-confidence is crucial to the process of constructive career development. The students in the CCD course needed to feel empowered to forge their own career path, not simply follow a path set by others. As the participants wrote their final essays and met with me for their last interviews, I saw glimpses of confident and empowered students—students who were on the road to self-authorship.

The findings in this section demonstrate that students appreciated the opportunity to focus on their career development in a setting that provided opportunities for self-reflection and active learning. They were able to talk with their peers in a safe space that valued the liberal arts experience.

### **Creating Meaning**

Meaning-making is the primary goal of phenomenological interviewing, therefore, the findings in this section review the key outcomes associated with the CCD course: self-efficacy and empowerment. My secondary research questions asked the following:

1. Did students who engaged in constructivist career development perceive a shift in personal career self-efficacy (career confidence)?
2. Did students majoring in the liberal arts perceive that the process of constructivist career development respects (or even empowers) their individual interests, skills, values, and career goals?

The findings in this section emphasize the use of CCD courses as a way to increase career self-efficacy and to empower liberal arts majors as they begin to put their learning into practice.

### **Career Confidence: Self-efficacy**

Part of the journey toward self-confidence for the participants was realizing that following their passions, even if their passions led them toward a “non-career” major, was a respectable decision. Gemma always believed this, but the negative opinions of other people in her life chipped away at her resolve to stay in the humanities. She enrolled in the CCD course at the right time, as it solidified her original viewpoint. She discussed the importance of the course in her final essay.

This class has presented me with an opportunity to further my self-knowledge, as well as my knowledge of campus resources, and to create solid goals before graduation. Before this class, I was stressed that my major would not lead to employment. I did not know what my major would be, but I knew I did not want to study accounting, engineering, or nursing, which put me in the position to question my decisions. Now I am confident that I can lead myself to employment, regardless of my major. I feel liberated in that I can now study what I want to study, for a higher purpose, rather than to ensure employment. (Essay)

Zian gained confidence in his ability to follow his passions versus choose a career-tracked plan to appease his parents. In his final interview, he explained how it is important to do what you love.

Humans only have one life. I believe that. It's a one-time thing. So I believe that if I can't do my favorite things and like the careers I want, then I'm not making my one life interesting. So that's why I choose psychology and linguistics. Linguistics is very relevant with my experience. When I was young, I had difficulty communicating with my peers and my brothers. So I feel like I'm very interested in child development, communication, and education because of my experience. So that's why I chose psychology and linguistics.

Zian embarked on a journey of self-discovery in this class. He started as a quiet student who felt trapped, with external pressure to focus on securing a good living. However, he resonated with the philosophies put forth by Brooks (2009b), and he completed several additional activities in the book and submitted them with his essays. By the end of the class, he had challenged his parents' opinion, changed his major, and identified several realistic career paths. He realized his interest in childhood speech development by examining his history. He did not delve into the details of his childhood interactions with psychologists, but those experiences significantly informed his new career path.

Hunter started the CCD course as a dreamer. He had so many ideas and interests that he was paralyzed, incapable of making any decisions about his future. He did not want to make choices because he feared closing a door to something important. Throughout the course, he realized his broad interests were not a hindrance but rather an asset. He sorted through his skills, interests, and passions and began to make decisions about his college career and future possibilities. He explained in his third essay how he had gone from many possible lives to a few possible lives that utilize many of his skills.

By pondering my thoughts, as well as talking about them with others, I have successfully waded through the multitude of possible lives I thought I would enjoy, or would best suit me. I have learned I want to travel, and that I would like to hold a job in the media industry. These may appear to be broad aspirations, however they focus on the sense that I now have two concrete goals that I feel are worth attaining. This knowledge has driven me to switch majors [Political Science and Journalism] in pursuit of this dream.

More so than any other participant, I believe Hunter began to know himself throughout the CCD course. He explained the importance of self-knowledge in his final interview.

You can't really get the most out of this class if you don't spend time really thinking about who you are and who you want to be. Anyone can just list things on a resume' and go to an interview and tell people what they want to hear, but a

good interview is about knowing yourself. You need to be genuine. You need to show people who you are.

This comment demonstrated that Hunter employed the theoretical aspects of the class to inform his completion of the career development tasks outlined in the syllabus. Hunter displayed confidence by demonstrating his ability to articulate the importance of knowing oneself and the ability to articulate values, interests, and skill to others.

For some of the participants, the demystification of career development resulted in gained confidence. For example, Marcus was pleased to discover that he can break career development into manageable steps. During his final interview, he explained how he felt more secure knowing he had the proper tools to move forward.

I think the most valuable thing is sort of developing a game plan. Definitely knowing where I'm heading and being sure that there are steps that I need to be taking - and just slowly sort of hacking away. Learning that it's not that complicated. It's just doing things every few months or so, looking at a few internships, just applying, it's not incredibly hard. Just trying to secure a job and get some experience. It seems overwhelming – it seemed overwhelming before I got this, but we just kind of broke it down step-by-step and did resume, cover letter and I feel like because we kind of separated it so much over a semester, it seems manageable now.

Shelby also valued establishing a career plan to follow. She came into the class secure with her major and her dream to practice law. However, she gained a wider view of her abilities and the paths available within the field of law. She explained in her final essay how this broadened viewpoint has resulted in increased self-respect and self-confidence.

This class has been tremendously beneficial to my career path. Even though I had a strict career path at the beginning, I discovered that as I dug deeper into who I am as a person, and what I want, I do not want to follow the traditional lawyer model of undergraduate, law school, and then lawyer. Instead, I will go to law school and try to work for a federal agency or as a legislative representative. Without the examinations of my inner-self, my strengths, and my outside networks, I would not have understood that I am not destined to be traditional lawyer. I am so much more than that and I really feel like I've gained a lot of self-

respect and confidence from my new understandings of my surroundings and myself.

Shelby has been dedicated to the same career path since she was nine years old. She realized throughout the semester that her potential is more vast and complicated, which was her personal achievement.

The key to self-confidence was self-understanding. Participants who skipped (or skimmed) the self-reflection opportunities missed a crucial element of the course.

Harrison emphasized in his final essay the importance of truly knowing yourself as you interact with the world.

Taking this class has helped me learn about myself, the "real world", and how the relationship between myself and the "real world" will develop as I become older, more marketable, more eager to work, and more sought-after. The most valuable bits have been everything I learned about myself, because knowing thyself is more important than knowing anything else. What I've learned about the possibilities for an English major is also helpful, but it's the self-knowledge I've accumulated that will play the biggest role in my future.

Due to his own battle with self-motivation, Harrison did not always focus on all the details of the course, but he did complete the course realizing a key piece of his career journey—the importance of focusing on his interests, skills, and passions.

Career confidence played a huge role in this study and was a positive outcome of the CCD course. Many of the participants made decisions and began to trust their ability to make decisions as a result of the CCD course. This career confidence will assist the participants that they begin to network, seek internships, and eventually seek post-college employment.

## **The Butterfly Effect: Permission to Explore**

The instructors of the CCD course introduced participants to Chaos Theory via the Brooks (2009b) text. In their essays and interviews, the participants discussed Chaos Theory/The Butterfly Effect often. Their thoughts typically fell into the following sub-themes: 1) relief that they did not have to have a concrete plan, 2) the realization that looking for new opportunities was the key to career success, 3) how the notion of “letting go” actually meant gaining control. In this sub-section, I explore these themes and demonstrate how the use of Chaos Theory within the CCD framework helped to empower students and assist in a new understanding of their liberal arts major.

Chaos Theory, also known as the Butterfly Effect, is an important philosophy utilized in the constructivist career development course and reinforced in the course’s assigned book (Brooks, 2009b). Through chaos theory, students learned the importance of understanding their complex environments in order to successfully adapt their lives to the world around them. This theory is a counter-narrative to the external messaging that there should be a linear path from major to career. Chaos theory reinforces the notion that one cannot control everything and that you simply cannot predict the future. Every new experience brings forth new prospects, and to be successful, one must be flexible enough to adapt to new opportunities.

Brooks (2009b) wrote about chaos theory to demonstrate that careers are everything but predictable. This, however, as the theory implies, does not mean that career development is entirely chaotic. Chaos theory simply states that no one can predict the future. However, understanding who you are as well as understanding your surrounding environment may provide important clues for your future development.

Brooks (2009b) shares with students, five tenants of chaos theory to demonstrate how it is related to career development. I have summarized these five tenants to provide additional context before describing how students viewed chaos theory.

1. Focus on what you know, not on what you do not know. You cannot predict the future, but you can learn about the present.
2. Do not base your career decisions on one factor, such as your college major. Career development is complicated and involves your education, skills, interests, networking contacts, and experiences.
3. Chaos theory assumes change and so should you. Your 10-year, 5-year, and even 1-year plans will probably change.
4. All systems eventually reveal an order. When you are too close to a situation, that situation is more likely to seem chaotic. As time passes and you gain knowledge and experience, you will be able to see the pattern of your life/career.
5. Chaos theory includes signs you need to be aware of. These signs are similar to directions on a map. They indicate negative and positive moments as well as cycles of behavior.

The participants expressed that they connected with the idea of chaos theory and ultimately found it comforting. The following describes how the participants reacted to the use of chaos theory in career development and how they planned to utilize this philosophy moving forward in their career development journeys.

### **Sigh of Relief**

Many of the participants were relieved to know they did not have to follow or create a linear path from major to career. Most of them already knew this to some extent but felt comforted to be hearing this from perceived career development experts. For example, Gemma shared,

I know it sounds kind of strange, but it's nice to have an adult affirm the fact that you don't necessarily know what you want to do right now and that the path to



your career is not linear. Like it's something that my peers have said, and something that my young adult friends, who are in their late 20's have said. But they don't have, like, the authority on this. So it's nice to have an authority say that - that it's okay to explore and study what you love. (Interview)

This reinforcement of knowledge meant a great deal to Gemma because she was very aware of the negative stereotypes surrounding the liberal arts, and she prided herself on her intelligence and motivation to succeed. Knowing that "authority figures" had similar beliefs provided her with confidence in her decision to choose her major based on her interests.

Michael did not need any reinforcement for himself as he stated that he already knew that majors did not connect directly to careers. However, he was pleased to see a course like this offered by the college. Michael felt that many "young people" just do not understand the purpose of college.

It's good to break them out of the, you know, linear career goal sort of thing. They need to be told, "Don't panic. Stop living your linear career path. Here's why." And then you can follow that with the practical stuff like resume's, internships and how to interview. (Interview)

Michael was correct that some of the students did, in fact, benefit from this philosophy being shared in class. For example, this was a new concept for Hunter, Tiana, and Zian, who all felt relieved to learn they were not inferior to students who had found a linear path.

Hunter had so many interests, and he wanted to focus on a major that would lead to a productive career. However, he was afraid that if he became too committed to one major/interest he would miss out on something else. Here is how he described the personal benefit of chaos theory to his career development.

This course has both opened and closed my vision for post-collegiate life. It has opened my mind to the idea of a non-linear career path, where one interest can

blend into another, and it has simultaneously closed my mind to the vast amount of possibilities that once crowded by overly ambitious mind. (Essay)

Hunter was able to focus in on his interests and skills, and he was able to identify some career ideas that were a blend of his strengths and interests. Similarly, Tiana explained, “The most important thing I have learned in this class is that my major is not as limiting as people, myself included, think it is. I have learned about chaos theory and nothing in life in linear, including majors” (Interview).

Zian agreed with Tiana, recommending:

Students should take this class and learn that career is not a linear path. Knowing how your interests and majors with help you and how the knowledge you gain is powerful is so important. And this will help you talk to your parents and other people that disbelieve your choice. (Interview)

All of the students in this course gravitated to the idea of chaos theory. They felt relieved to know they did not need to have “it all figured out” and that their majors could lead them to multiple career opportunities.

### **Looking for Opportunity**

Many of the participants saw value in the advice Brooks (2009b) gave concerning seeking experiences that could lead to unexpected opportunities (or butterfly moments). For example, Luke simply stated, “This class helped me learn things about myself, especially how I feel towards my possible career paths. I know that I definitely want to leave room for the ‘butterfly’ as our textbook put it” (Essay).

Hunter provided an example of one of these “butterfly moments” and how it led to a campus job that he is enjoying,

You know I’ve been thinking a lot about the chaos concept and looking for those random moments. I ended up working in the wood shop this year and it was so

accidental. I was just walking in the studio art building because sometimes I like to cut through there and just see what people are working on. I was looking into the wood shop and just started talking to this guy. Next thing you know I have a job. And I have learned that I am actually good at making things. They have even told me I should take a sculpting class, and hey, I might. The point is you can't always do the same things. I am trying to get involved in new things, meet new people from around campus. I like that I have stepped out of my comfort zone and it is opening new paths for me. (Interview)

Both Luke and Hunter realized that the random moments in life could lead to something unexpected and valuable.

Gemma and Shelby were seeking new “butterfly” opportunities, but their personalities led them to proceed with more structure. For example, Gemma explained,

It is important to create opportunities, instead of waiting for opportunities to come to you. Before this class, I had never considered informational interviews, job shadowing, or volunteering, or even just simply asking about potential opportunities. I just figured I would apply to an internship, get an interview, and see if I get the position. (Essay)

Gemma's realization that she can seek opportunities that can lead to important contacts or even internships was crucial, and by the end of the course, she was actively scheduling informational interviews with people in careers she found interesting.

Shelby, who was career-tracked in her thinking, was utilizing chaos theory to actively find ways to integrate her interests into her career plan. She described how an Italian class had inspired her to consider expanding her career goals.

It is definitely is a realistic theory [chaos theory]. Like you know, I do still want to go to law school and I have always wanted to go to law school, but the how and the why has changed a lot. For example, I don't necessary want to be a criminal prosecutor anymore. Um, I am looking more into international law because I realize more and more that I really like languages and that aspect of world politics. I took Italian with my friend because it is a pre-rec for the College of Humanities and Arts, but then I ended up really liking it. That's kind of veered me in a new direction. (Interview)

Shelby's ability to see new opportunities and the willingness to broaden her scope demonstrated that she was open to the "butterfly moments," even if she liked structure. Throughout the course, she realized that she could do both, specifically she learned that goals could be continually edited and revised.

### **Letting Go Actually Means Gaining Control**

Many of the participants entered this course feeling the pressure to have their lives planned out. They wanted to be able to answer the question, "What will you do with your major after college?" They did not want to be viewed as having a lack of direction or as a failure just because things did not working out as expected. The use of chaos theory assisted the participants in realizing that it is impossible to control the future and that being open to the unexpected is actually a strategy for success. For example, Gemma explained in her final essay,

Forging your own career path means allowing yourself to go where life leads you. In forging a path, there will be streams that cannot be boarded. There will be thickets that cannot be broken through, and you may need to find an alternate route. Realizing it is best to accept these changes in plans is important not just to your career but also your peace of mind.

Hunter added to this idea when he discussed his plan to stay focused on the present, instead of trying to control the distant future. He wanted to focus on the opportunities he was currently engaged in versus opportunities that may, or may not, be part of his future.

Worrying is obviously an essential part of life, but keeping the butterfly effect in mind makes me focus a lot more on the short-term rather than the long-term plan, and this has helped me become more productive as an individual. This liberation is something that should not be understated; one lives with far less concerns when questions of the distant future become quieter and quieter or even cease to exist altogether. (Essay)

Although they have different ways of integrating chaos theory in their lives, Hunter and Gemma both articulate relief in knowing that life cannot be controlled or predicted.

Similarly, Harrison has gained a sense of comfort regarding chaos theory, but he may be missing an important component, which is to position himself in situations that can lead to opportunities. The following comment is slightly concerning because he believes he does not have to waste time doing extra career development activities,

I guess where the butterfly fits into my life right now, is that I have this sense of security and comfort. You know as long as I keep doing well enough, stick to me priorities, I don't need to worry about what I need to do after college. I don't have to be going out of my way to every career services fair or whatever, because as long as I do well, it will all work out. You know, I have to keep myself marketable, but I don't have to be so stressed. (Interview)

An increased sense of security and comfort is of course a desired outcome, but attending career fairs and thinking about the future will assist him in increasing his skills and self-awareness. Thankfully, most students did not view chaos theory the same way as Harrison.

In his second interview, Marcus showed his passion for chaos theory and how it makes him want to search for the butterfly opportunities.

I love chaos theory. I've loved it since I was a sophomore in high school, but I never thought about applying it to my job search. But it makes sense, like random variables that can change your life outcome. It's usually when you hear people talk about how they got into some career, "Oh, I ran into this guy in the street" or "He was a friend of a friend," and I think that it's true that your career is kind of out of your control, at least in some respects. But, the more opportunities you build for yourself, the more butterfly opportunities come to you. The more you expose yourself to the right environment like those butterfly effect incidents are more likely to kind of be in your favor. (Interview)

Marcus' conclusion is in essence what Brooks (2009b) wanted students to grasp. Not everything can be controlled, but students need to seek opportunities and recognize the

value in the unexpected opportunities that occur organically, without planning or warning.

The participants liked the concept of chaos theory because it was realistic, and it made sense to them based on their current college experiences. They started to realize that creating a linear path from major to career was not only hard, but also impractical. As the students began to deconstruct the external narratives told to them about their liberal arts majors and the lack of career prospects associated, they began to realize that they actually had limitless career prospects. They felt empowered to take ownership for their future and felt a need to create a career path that was winding, unique, and flexible. This changed their focus from seeking external advice to forging their own path based on internal interests and passions. This process instilled self-confidence and the participants utilized this self-confidence as they developed and implemented career development goals. Finally, the participants began to trust what they knew along: liberal arts majors are broad and can lead to unlimited opportunities. CCD respected the participants' decisions to major in a "non-career" subject and empowered student to see their majors as an asset in the job market.

### **Trusting Your Internal Voice: A Glimpse of a Future Autobiography**

As participants engaged in a process of career development that respected their interests, skills, values, and career goals, they were able to increase their career self-efficacy. The increased confidence to make career-related decisions and to complete career tasks encouraged the participants to develop and trust their internal voices. For example, Shelby discussed the importance of developing her internal voice by confidently explaining the importance of being happy in her final interview. As

mentioned above, this study was not designed to measure self-authorship; however, the CCD course did foster the skills needed to begin their journey toward a self-authored life (Baxter Magolda, 2008 & 2009).

This is my life, and I need to make it mine. And I have been thinking about that a lot. Between this class and hearing this message from my other professor, I'm really thinking about what I want. And that I can do anything I want. I just have to have a plan and really work at it. But really, this is my life, and I have to make sure I am happy and that I do what I want. (Interview)

The development of her internal voice was encouraged in the CCD course and also reinforced in another classroom. Shelby took these messages to heart and was actively considering her wants and her happiness as she made career decisions.

In his final interview, Hunter reflected on the benefits of his major in political science, and it is clear that he believes in his ability to successfully leverage the skills he is gaining as a political science major.

I love my political science major. If you do the readings and you participate in the discussions, it is teaching you a frame a reference, a way of thinking that you can take into your other classes, your job, and basically your life. We live in a globalized world and people are competing for resources and trying to get people to understand their ideas and opinions. Political science teaches you how to think, how to talk to people, how to make your point, which is so important. But if you just coast, you can't do those things, and I think a lot of students do. They want the piece of paper to get them a job, but it isn't the paper, it's the education. I get to take my education into my internships, jobs, and my career. I get to use my lens, but I also developed that lens through my major. If you do that, it's easy to show employers the value, but if you don't, you're stuck. And that is something you can't blame your major for. And too many students think like that, like you are buying a degree and that degree should get you a job. You can't buy your way into a career.

When I first interviewed Hunter, he was concerned that his majors in English and political science would not serve him well after college. However, by the end of the study, he displayed confidence in his ability to utilize his active skills in internships and

his career. He was developing his internal voice and trusting his capacity to act on his internal voice.

By the conclusion of the study, most of these students showed signs that they were moving toward self-authorship, by recognizing negative external messages and developing their internal voices. As a conceptual framework, self-authorship provided a helpful lens with which to view the career development of the participants. True self-authorship would mean the participants not only trusted their internal voice, but also acted on that trust. Many of the participants expressed trust in themselves and described a desire to continue their career development, but from this study, it was impossible to know how they would use their self-reflection, knowledge, and confidence moving forward.

### **Summary**

Exploratory studies provide insight into a process and the findings presented in this chapter display an in-depth and detailed account of how 10 college students experienced a constructivist career development (CCD) course. Additionally, this study indicates that CCD opportunities have the ability to increase career self-efficacy by respecting the strengths associated with a non-career major and empowering the student to utilize his or her values, interests, and skills in the “real world.” As the participants in this study learned more about themselves and the external voices that were affecting their decisions, they began to deconstruct outside influences and to construct their internal framework. By the end of the study, most of the participants showed signs that they were gaining the necessary skills to journey toward self-authorship.



In Chapter 5, I summarize the major findings of this chapter and discuss how these finding can have a positive affect on the declining liberal arts experience. Additionally, I review implications for practice that examine ways to implement CCD opportunities outside of a small course setting. Finally, I review limitations of this study and discuss future research opportunities that can continue to shed light on this topic.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

I think it goes back to what I was saying about you having to live your life for the rest of your life, and so, you have to weigh that out and weigh what you're passionate about and what that might do with the relationship you have with your parents if they don't see your point of view. And you know, you have to think about what kind of power your parents have over you, because some people are like crazy blackmailed into doing exactly what their parents want them to do, and I know people in majors because it is what their parents want. (Luke, Interview)

#### Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the process of constructivist career development (CCD) through the perspectives of 10 participants who enrolled in and completed a CCD career course in Spring 2013. The CCD course engaged these students in a process of self-reflection to investigate their past and present experiences in relation to their own career development. The students then utilized this newly gained self-knowledge in practical career development tasks, such as resumé and cover letter writing, networking activities, mock-interviews, and internship/career exploration. Since relatively few studies have focused on CCD (Grier-Reed & Conkel-Ziebell, 2009; Grier-Reed & Ganuza, 2011; Grier-Reed & Skaar, 2010; Grier-Reed, Skaar, & Parson, 2009; McMahon et al., 2012), this was an exploratory study that aimed to capture the CCD experience through the lenses of the participants.

The overarching research question that guided this study was: What did the participants deem to be the important components of a CCD experience? The first sub-question focused on the concept of self-efficacy: Did the students in the CCD course perceive a shift in personal career self-efficacy (in relation to completing career tasks and career decision-making)? The second sub-question focused on students' perceptions of

the process of CCD: Did the participants, who were all liberal arts majors, perceive that the process of constructivist career development respected (or even empowered) their interests, skills, values, and career goals?

In Chapter 4, I presented the data that were relevant to answering my research questions. In this chapter, I summarize and interpret the findings as well as make a case for why constructivist career development should be integrated into the curriculum for liberal arts majors. Students who choose majors in the liberal arts need positive reinforcement. Furthermore, they need opportunities to develop their internal voices through the process of constructivist career development. The CCD course provided space for students to reflect and converse in a safe environment and the participants enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity for structured self-reflection. Once students had a better sense of their strengths and weaknesses, they were able to “test” their career abilities in a supportive environment by practicing their networking skills and participating in a mock job search. The CCD course assisted students in developing confidence in their non-career major by demonstrating that a liberal arts education is marketable in the “real world.”

This chapter consists of four main sections: summary and interpretations of major findings, implications for practice, limitations, and future research. In the next section, summary and interpretations of major findings, I organize the results by my research questions. The section first relays some of the common themes that students described regarding their experience in the CCD course and then specifically focuses on career self-efficacy and the empowerment of liberal arts students. Section two discusses best practices for engaging students in the process of CCD and also discusses strategies for

providing parents of liberal arts students with the essential skills needed so they can converse with and encourage their students. In the final two sections, I discuss the limitations of my research, as well as strategies to engage in future research on constructivist career development and liberal arts students. This study presents a compelling argument for the use of CCD with liberal arts majors, and this chapter suggests a research agenda for interested researchers and practitioners to pursue.

### **Discussion and Interpretations of the Major Findings**

The data for this research study were collected from a three-part phenomenological interviewing process, corresponding with three course essays that participants completed in the CCD course. This approach encompassed six points of data collection for the 10 participants. The participants were all enrolled in a one-credit CCD course during the Spring 2013 semester, and they were all considered sophomores by either academic credit status or years at the University. The participants were declared majors within the College of Humanities and Arts, representing eight liberal arts majors: art, architecture, English, history, linguistics, cultural studies, philosophy, and political science. Furthermore, these students represented a range of prior academic success, with pre-course cumulative GPAs ranging from a 2.1 to 3.9, with a mean of 3.2. This demonstrates that the participant pool did not solely represent high achieving, focused, and motivated students who would have excelled in their career development regardless of CCD course. Additionally, it shows that this course is interesting to students regardless of prior academic success, as the students who enrolled had achieved various levels of prior academic success.

Although this dissertation was an exploratory study on constructivist career development using a small sample, the paucity of scholarly research on CCD allows it to make a significant contribution to the literature on its usefulness when used with liberal arts majors. The findings have important implications for practitioners who utilize constructive career development in a college setting, and more specifically, this study indicates that CCD is an important intervention for liberal arts students who are combating false stereotypes associated with their college majors. External authorities often communicated to the liberal arts students in this study that they would make less money than career-tracked students and that they would have difficulty securing jobs in a declining economy. However, according to a recent report from the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), over time, liberal arts graduates close the salary gap as they advance their careers by either climbing the corporate ladder or attending graduate school to further their skills and knowledge (Humphreys & Kelly, 2014). In addition, the unemployment rate for recent liberal arts graduates is 5.2%, only 0.4% higher than the rates for those with professional degrees (Humphreys & Kelly, 2014). The AAC&U report provides evidence that the “unemployable” liberal arts major is a myth that is not supported by evidence when you broaden the research beyond initial starting salaries. Furthermore, Brooks (2009a), Koc (2010), and Nell (2003) argue that liberal arts students would excel in the employment market if educators could find a career development model suitable for liberal arts majors

### **What did the Participants Deem as Beneficial Components of CCD?**

As expected, the 10 participants experienced the career course in distinctive ways. They began the course with individual experiences and goals, and the structure of the CCD course allowed each student to identify and explore his or her own unique career journey. Regardless of the individual approach necessitated in CCD, there were some aspects of the course that the participant group pinpointed as particularly helpful and/or interesting. This section summarizes those common themes and examines why they are essential components of CCD interventions for liberal arts students.

#### **Recognizing External Messages**

The first four weeks of the CCD course focused on allowing space for students to identify, deconstruct, and reconstruct their career goals, available resources, ingrained external messages, and their barriers to success (however the participants defined success). The course utilized the works of Campbell and Ungar (2004a, 2004b) and guided students to focus on four essential concepts: knowing what you want, knowing what you have, knowing what you hear, and knowing what constrains you. All of these were important concepts, but the participants seemed to gravitate toward the notion of knowing what you hear. Campbell and Ungar (2004b) emphasize that students need to explore both internal and external voices that convey the values of the dominant culture as these messages can directly correlate to an individual's sense of self-confidence and self-esteem.

All of the participants were aware of the negative stereotypes that others had about liberal arts majors. As highlighted in Chapter 4, these negative stereotypes boiled

down to the “inevitable unemployment” of liberal arts majors and the perception that liberal arts students take “easy classes” compared to students in professional majors. While some of the participants were not as bothered by negative external messages from parents, family members, teachers, and friends, others seemed to be fixated on the lack of assurance directed at their ability to succeed. As a result, many of the students who lacked a clear career plan discussed changes in majors or the possibility of adding a supplemental major that was considered “marketable” by their external voices. However, there are flaws with this type of thinking. First, as taught in the CCD course through readings and activities, there is no substantial research that suggests graduating with more than one major is an asset in the employment market. Hemelt (2010) found that students who double-majored at research universities earned 3.2% more than those who “single” major, but he could not control for student motivation, making his findings questionable. Moreover, student time spent meeting the degree requirements of a second major would be time better spent securing and participating in internships. Studies show that internships are a key component of career success after college and employers are seeking college students that have completed at least one internship (Chegg, 2013; Shoenfelt, Stone, & Kottke, 2013). The participants valued having space to reflect on major changes/adding additional majors, and they welcomed the opportunity to learn about the value of their academic major(s) versus the value of obtaining internships. By the conclusion of the study, most of the participants were thinking less about their academic majors and spending more time focused on securing internships that would add practical skills to their preexisting non-career majors.

Throughout this study, participants shared external messages that were negative, false, and even hurtful. Every participant had at least one story about being mocked or laughed at for his or her choice of major. These types of interactions seemed to lead to a decrease in overall confidence, but specifically they led to a lack of career self-efficacy in regards to making career decisions. A decrease in career self-efficacy can be detrimental as studies show that high self-efficacy relates to success (Bandura, 1986; Luke, Diambra, & Gibbons, 2014). Specifically, liberal arts students with greater self-efficacy were able to see connections between their academic work and future career possibilities (Luke et al., 2014). If liberal arts majors are to be successful in the employment market, it is essential that they are not only confident in their career skills but have the ability to articulate to employers their ability to be an asset to the company/organization.

### **Structured Space for Personal Reflection and Active Learning**

Many of the participants expressed appreciation for having a structured place to discuss their career journeys and to explore their interests, skills, and values. Career development is hard work and can cause students anxiety as they struggle to learn about themselves and make decisions about their futures (Yang & Gysbers, 2007). The CCD course provided a safe and structured space to explore, learn, and test career knowledge.

CCD values and prioritizes the individual and encourages the student to reflect on his or her past. Similar to the work of Grier-Reed and Ganuza (2012), this course allowed participants to engage with numerous CCD tools, including narrative (telling one's own story), action (exploring skills, interests, and values), constructions (creating their career identity across contexts), and interpretation (using self-reflection to guide career



decisions). The combination of these tools proved to benefit the participants, and they articulated appreciation for the personal reflection opportunities offered throughout the class. Throughout the course, many of the participants experienced “aha moments.” Some participants realized that they needed to incorporate their interests into their career goals, certain students realized that external pressures were affecting their career decisions, and others realized they had talents and skills, that if leveraged properly, were marketable to employers.

The CCD course fostered self-reflection through course readings, activities, personal essays, in-class discussions, and exercises available in the course book (Brooks, 2009b). The active learning that occurred during in-class activities as well as within the exercises presented in the course book seemed to be a highlight of the course for most of the participants. Not only did they find the activities interesting, they also claimed to learn about themselves and the steps they needed to take to be successful in the future. This is not a surprising finding since active learning is a mechanism that allows students to “construct” their own knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1998). Overall, studies on active learning show that students gain a better mastery of course content than students who simply participate in lecture-style learning opportunities (McCarthy & Anderson, 2000), and they have a stronger level of institutional commitment which contributes to college persistence (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). The active learning opportunities in the CCD course allowed the participants to engage with the course material and integrate the learning into their lives. They were able to reflect on how to utilize this knowledge within their personal career development plan and test their personal career theories during class activities and course assignments.

## **Peer Encouragement and Support**

During the first interviews, when participants were asked about conversations involving career development with their peers, I was surprised to learn that 9 of the 10 participants said they rarely discussed career goals and career related tasks with peers. This was contradictory to evidence presented by Astin (1993) who found that a student's choice in career was positively influenced by the percentage of other students at the institution pursuing similar career goals. From his seminal research, which surveyed approximately 25,000 students from over 200 colleges and universities, Astin deduced that peers have a strong influence on career goals and decisions. However, Astin's study focused on business, law, research science, and engineering, which are all considered "desirable" professional majors. Based on the findings from this study, non-career majors may avoid conversations with their peers concerning choice of major/career goals. More recently, Lokko (2011) conducted a mixed-method study examining why students select particular majors. She found that both peers and family initially influenced choice of major, but intrinsic value played a role in the final decision. Lokko's research did not focus on specific academic areas, but she did discuss that students often sought majors with future economic promise. Pre-CCD course, the participants in my study expressed a desire to avoid conversations with peers, especially if they felt their career goals were not finalized.

Peer interaction and dialogue was a critical part of the CCD course. Regardless of the initial avoidance of peer career conversations in their personal lives, the participants expressed appreciation that the CCD class encouraged and fostered in-class conversations with peers. In class, the students shared stories with each other regarding their decisions

to choose non-career majors, their personal encounters with negative stereotypes about liberal arts majors, their career goals, and fears about the future. They brainstormed transferable skills and provided each other feedback on their resumés, cover letters, and elevator speeches. Overall, this was a positive experience, and all the participants felt the in-class relationships with their peers were affirming and comforting. As one student stated, “It is good to know I’m not the other one feeling this way. We are all in the same boat together.” Research shows that peers are a powerful agent affecting persistence and ultimately leading to graduation (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). It can be argued, based on the findings from this study, that fostering supportive peer relationships among liberal arts students as they grapple with career development is a key success component in CCD.

### **Did Students Perceive a Shift in Career Self-efficacy?**

Autonomy, independence, locus of control, and self-efficacy are all concepts that explore the extent to which students are susceptible to external authorities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual’s beliefs concerning his or her ability to perform tasks that influence the events that affect his or her life. Although the term self-efficacy is often used in the realm of academic learning, the research team of Betz and Hackett postulated that career self-efficacy is a useful lens to examine the completion of career tasks and career decision-making (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Hackett & Betz, 1981). They argue that self-efficacy is a cognitive judgment on the ability to perform tasks and, therefore, best utilized when paired with a specific behavior.

For this study, self-efficacy is utilized by examining the confidence displayed as the participants performed career tasks and made career decisions.

An important component of the CCD course that seemed to increase career self-efficacy for the participants was the “debunking” of the linear career myth. In the course book, Brooks (2009b) discredits the common misperception that major to career is a linear path. She advises college students to consider how impractical a linear career projection is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and instead emphasizes the importance of embracing their broad-based education. During the class discussions and activities, the linear myth was unpacked and the course instructors worked with the students to identify the top skills employers seek in college graduates. The participants then matched those skills to the abilities needed to be a successful student in liberal arts majors (i.e., oral and written communication, critical thinking, analysis, problem-solving, creativity, interpersonal skills, and a global perspective). The findings presented in Chapter 4 validate that for the majority of the participants this was a new way of thinking about the relationship between career and academic major. During the CCD course, the participants embraced their “non-linear career path” and began to contemplate the numerous ways their majors would benefit them in an unstable and ever-changing employment market. This idea countered the negative messages from external authorities that many of the students were accustomed to hearing. As the participants broadened their perspectives, they began to develop their internal voices and started to trust their initial decisions to choose a “non-professional” major. The acquisition of career knowledge and the development of an internal voice led to career self-efficacy with regard to choice of major and the ability to make future career-related decisions.

As participants started to gain confidence in their liberal arts majors and the marketability of their majors in the “real world,” it was essential to provide a safe space to allow the students to start testing their career development skills. The CCD course allowed students to write cover letters and resumés focused on their current skills (derived from their academics, extra-curricular experiences, and past employment) and receive feedback from their instructor and CCD course peers. Throughout the course, the students presented their elevator speeches, engaged in networking opportunities, and completed mock-interviews with their CCD course instructors. The findings illustrate that many of the students expressed confidence in their ability to participate in an internship/job search after having the opportunity to test their skills in the CCD course. The process of successfully implementing their new knowledge and acquired careers skills in the course demystified the job search and provided students an opportunity to showcase the talents they have already gained in college. Many of the students were surprised to see they were able to put solid content on a resumé and communicate “stories” in mock-interviews demonstrating their transferable skills. As liberal arts majors, oral and written communication is a key component of their education, and those skills are an asset in the job search process. The CCD course demonstrated the power of their education and participants articulated self-confidence in their ability to navigate the career world.

Overall, the participants displayed signs of increased career confidence. Some of the participants changed their majors to pursue a non-linear career path, while others simply gained the confidence to fully commit to their current non-career major(s). The CCD course focused on the powerful combination of liberal arts education and the career

skills gained by acquiring jobs/internships. The participants began to view their liberal arts majors as an asset and by the final interviews/essays were able to confidently articulate the value of their education in the “real world.” The opportunity to “practice” and receive feedback on career development tasks increased the participants’ confidence in their ability to perform career tasks in an actual job search. The combination of acquired knowledge, self-knowledge, and practice increased the participants’ career self-efficacy with regard to major/career decisions and the ability to write resumés, cover letters, network, and interview.

**Do Students Perceive that CCD Respects (or even empowers) Their Individual Interests, Skills, Values, and Career Goals?**

The students in this study made intentional decisions to declare “non-career” academic majors. The participants followed their passions for particular subject matter, with the hope of finding a way to connect their college experience to a suitable career. Although they realized their majors were helping them develop broad life skills, they were constantly facing negative criticism from external voices regarding their choice of major.

Liberal arts students have a proclivity toward life-long learning, leadership, intercultural effectiveness, and psychological well-being (Blaich & Wise, 2007). Liberal arts education focuses on the development of clear oral and written communication, dialogue, critical thinking, and analytical skills (Roche, 2010). These skills are the foundation of constructivist career development, as students are encouraged to critically examine their pasts, develop their personal career stories, and present these stories in writing (course essays, cover letters, and resumés) and orally (in-class discussions,

elevator speeches, and mock-interviews). While traditional career development models have faced criticism for not respecting the values and talents of liberal arts students (Brooks, 2009a), CCD encourages critical analysis, dialogue, and the communication of “stories.” Throughout the study, the participants discussed the connections they saw between their education and the job market, and they started to realize that their education was an asset in the career development process.

From the participants’ perspective, the use of chaos theory was a crucial component of the CCD course. They talked about chaos theory/the butterfly effect often, specifically expressing relief in knowing they did not have to select a single career path and exclusively pursue that career choice. The participants began to embrace the lack of control they had over their futures as course discussions and the text (Brooks, 2009b) emphasized an ever-changing employment market. The CCD course reinforced the skills they were gaining in their majors as well as how those skills would benefit them in their job search and careers. Chaos theory helped the participants see their “non-career” major as an asset, and the CCD process utilized academic skills they already excelled at, creating a comfortable and supporting learning environment.

Ultimately, the findings from this study showcase the potential for utilizing CCD with “non-career” majors. The participants described their experiences in the CCD course in detail and shared that the course was both enjoyable and helpful. This initial study suggests that CCD can increase career self-efficacy with regard to completing career development tasks and career decision-making. By respecting the academic talents of the students and allowing them the permission to explore and work toward multiple career opportunities, liberal arts students were able to see their education as an advantage in the

“real world” instead of a hindrance. As a career development model, constructivist career development respected the participants’ decision to major in the liberal arts and empowered them to leverage their talents to explore a wide variety of career opportunities. CCD appears to be a well-suited career development model for liberal arts majors, and the findings demonstrate that CCD has the potential to develop a student’s internal voice, to increase career self-efficacy, and to empower the liberal arts student to see their “non-career major” as an asset in the employment market.

### **Implications for Practice**

These findings have practical implications for students, parents, and faculty/staff on college campuses. Students need space to reflect, and they need opportunities to develop their internal compass. For most of the participants, the CCD course forced them to explore their beliefs in a structured environment. The messages embedded in the course encouraged students to think for themselves and make decisions based on their interests, skills, and values. I believe there is a direct link between the opportunity to engage in CCD and the development of self-authorship, although more research is needed to be able to confidently make this claim. Chapter 2 reviewed the theoretical connections between CCD and self-authorship and my findings demonstrate that some of the participants started to show traces of self-authorship in their interviews and essays. The following outlines possible ways colleges and universities can expose non-career majors to constructive career development, and ultimately encourage the development of self-efficacy and self-authorship.



## CCD for Students

### CCD Courses

The participants' perceptions of the CCD course were positive. In Chapter 4, I discussed the participants' appreciation of intentional space for reflection, the active learning opportunities available in Brooks (2009b), the introduction of the non-linear career path, and opportunities to practice their career skills. This course was beneficial to the students who completed it, and I would recommend finding ways to expand enrollment of the course on this particular campus so more students are able to participate. Other colleges and universities should assess the need for this type of career development intervention and consider utilizing CCD courses if their "non-career" majors are facing similar challenges to the student population in this study.

Teaching a CCD course is vastly different from teaching a basic career course, which may place the instructor in the role of the "expert authority figure." It is imperative that the teacher act as a facilitator of knowledge, allowing students to bring their knowledge and experiences into the classroom. All assignments, readings, and in-class activities must inspire critical self-examination, and the instructor must make space for students to explore their career journeys with their peers. Most importantly, instructors must refrain from giving students "the answers." Instead, instructors should be partners in the quest for knowledge. To do this well, instructors need to read the relevant CCD literature and design their course syllabi according to best practice. Academic departments considering this type of course should try and create a cohort experience for students in their second-semester freshmen year or their sophomore year. This seems to be the ideal time for self-reflection in a structured learning environment.

## **Faculty and Advisor Facilitation**

Several of the participants discussed positive relationships and interactions with professors/advisors within their academic majors. Other students discussed situations in which professors/advisors intentionally (and sometimes unintentionally) discouraged them from pursuing their goals or made comments/jokes that reinforced negative external messages regarding students' choice of major. There is no question that faculty and advisor engagement is key to student success (Astin, 1993; Ishiyama, 2002; Kitchener, Wood, & Jensen, 1999; Kuh, 1995), and I suggest utilizing these formal and informal engagement opportunities to engage in constructivist career development. CCD is about asking questions, listening to students' stories, and then helping students deconstruct and reconstruct their stories. If Academic Deans and Department Heads made space to train their faculty/advisors on ways to engage students in CCD conversations and activities, we may begin to see a more organic process of career development emerge within liberal arts majors.

One of the essential outcomes of a liberal arts education is to help a student find his or her voice, to articulate what he or she believes in, in his or her own words (Kent, 2012; Urgo, 2008). CCD is a method for faculty and advisors to help students find their voices in relation to their career goals and aspirations. It is not necessary for liberal arts faculty to become experts on resumé and cover letter writing, interviewing skills, and the like; career skills can be left to Career Services Centers and other career-related resources. What cannot be left to outside parties are critical conversations involving the benefit of a liberal education, the development of transferable skills, and the development of an internal voice. This, at its core, is the function of liberal arts faculty, and it is

essential that colleges and universities build capacity for this type of mentorship to transpire.

### **Mass Messaging**

In the digital age, there is ample opportunity to get a message to the masses (Black, 2010; Bland, Melton, Welle, & Bigham, 2012). The use of email, texting, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram allow for individuals and groups to reach a wide audience. Higher education administrators who work with non-career majors need to think critically on how to best utilize technology in their quest to demonstrate the value of a liberal arts major. A quick internet search will result in numerous cartoons and memes that declare liberal arts majors as “unemployable,” “self-centered,” and engaged in “remedial or kindergarten” academic work. These messages are not only misleading but can be hurtful and debilitating to students with declared liberal arts majors. Those who are invested in empowering liberal arts students need to present the counter-narrative, which includes positive messages that portray the benefits of obtaining a broad education. Messages that debunk the “linear career path” and demonstrate to students the power of chaos theory would benefit students struggling to find a career path.

### **CCD for Parents: Teaching Parents of Millennial Students to Build Self-efficacy and Self-authorship**

The Millennial Generation/Generation Y has received a lot of attention in the media for their self-centered approach to work (Fogg, 2009). They are known for being extremely “sheltered” by their parents as well as being extremely “connected” to them (Harper, Sax, & Wolf, 2012). Talk to any college or university faculty/administrator, and

they can share with you a plethora of stories involving parents who want to take over the college experience by being extremely involved in roommate dynamics, academic advising meetings, conduct conferences, and career development. Although not all parent involvement is bad, it is imperative that we create opportunities for positive parent engagement in the college process rather than allow parents to stifle their child's voice.

As college administrators, we talk about the importance of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2004, 2009) and how to best develop self-authorship during the college years, but how do parents gain access to knowledge about self-authorship? If today's students are connected with their parents, communicating with them several times a day (Harper et al., 2012), perhaps we need to teach parents about self-efficacy and the journey toward self-authorship and how essential it is for students to develop their own voice.

### **Parent Orientations**

With this generation of students and parents, the concept of Parent Orientation has emerged (Mayer, 2011). On many campuses, when students arrive for summer orientation, so do their parents. Parents sit in sessions with other parents learning about the campus: financial aid, university billing, housing, student code of conduct, campus drinking culture, academic advising, and learning resources. At some of these orientations, parents even spend a few nights in a residence hall and attend mock classes (Mayer, 2011). During these sessions, they may learn about the concept of "Letting Go," (Coburn & Treeger, 2009) but the findings from this study suggest it might also be helpful to include a session about self-efficacy and self-authorship and how to help their children develop and secure their internal voices. High school to college is a transition for

parents too and necessitates an adjustment in parenting style: encouraging students to find (and act on) their internal voice, even if it sometime leads to an undesired outcome.

Failure is part of the growing process and allowing students to make their own choices, even if their choices are not perfect, is an important part of becoming an adult.

There is a need to educate parents of liberal arts students on how to apply chaos theory to career development, specifically targeting the concept of the non-linear career path. The employment market has changed significantly over the last 20 years and so has the advice that fosters career development success. It is no longer realistic to plan to work at and retire from one company. Today's students need to be prepared for fast-paced environments and unexpected change (Koc, 2010). Liberal arts majors, when balanced with internships and other career related activities, can prepare students for leadership opportunities in a changing world. Parent orientations can attempt to change the negative external messages from parents to supportive and positive messages that encourage self-authorship.

### **Books and Resources**

As students' parents learn to adjust their parenting style to support their young adult, it would be helpful if colleges and universities provided reading lists that included books on self-authorship and career development. Of course, these would not be mandatory, but colleges and universities could create engaging opportunities to encourage participation. For example, many colleges and universities have made common read programs part on the first-year student experience (Ferguson, 2006). Parent orientation could include its own common read experience, with a book that is more

applicable to parents and their role in encouraging self-authorship in their students. Not only would this mirror the student experience, it would present parents with new information to consider. Other book choices could include Brooks (2009b) and other constructivist career development books that blend 21<sup>st</sup> century career knowledge with developing a student's internal compass.

Finally, it is important to note that there are not many books, based in college student research, that are intended for parents of college students. The developing literature on CCD, self-authorship, and liberal arts students could be the perfect opportunity to write such a book. Teaching parents about the meaning of self-authorship and its link to career development could reinforce positive messaging and help parents realize the importance of their child's independence, especially with regard to career decisions.

### **Future Research**

This study pursued the myth of the “unemployable” liberal arts major and whether or not CCD can serve as a tool to empower and build confidence among humanities and arts majors. CCD as a method of career development is gaining popularity in the literature, but as described in Chapter 2, there is only a handful of quantitative and qualitative research studies regarding CCD. This exploratory study expands the conversation about the process of CCD and links it to the career development of non-professional majors. However, more research is needed to better understand this topic.

The experience of college students who choose non-career majors framed this study. Although the focus was on the process of CCD, the experience of liberal arts majors is interwoven throughout this dissertation. There is an abundance of literature and

research regarding the positive outcomes associated with a liberal arts experience (Barker, 2000; Blaich & Wise, 2007; Ferrall, 2011; Glycer & Weeks, 1998; Koc, 2010; Nussbaum, 2010; Roche, 2010), but little is available on how liberal arts students internalize the external messages about their chosen major, academic abilities, and future job prospects. Chapter 4 provided insights into the negative messages non-career majors receive, but more research is needed to truly understand these external messages and how students' internalize them.

Related to external messages is the theoretical framework of this dissertation, self-authorship. The findings summarized in Chapter 4 suggest that the process of unpacking external negative messages regarding non-career majors and reconstructing them into positive messages may lead to self-authorship, at least with regard to career development. However, further research is needed to link CCD to positive development of self-authorship. A mixed-methods approach, with a greater number of participants, would illuminate any potential links between CCD and self-authorship. This study was limited to questions that directly related to career development. Future studies should look at self-authorship more broadly, examining other aspects of students' lives.

Finally, to truly understand the significance of CCD in the lives of liberal arts majors, a longitudinal approach is needed. The participants in this study seemed to demonstrate increased career self-efficacy as well as growth with regard to self-authorship. However, the true "test" would be whether the participants put their knowledge into action. Moving forward, participants need to engage in career development opportunities: networking events, informational interviews, internships, and a post-college job search. Future participants need to be tracked (and interviewed) until

graduation and potentially through their first two to five years post-college. The process of connecting with students yearly, over a five to seven year span, will provide valuable information regarding how students leverage the information in the course (and potentially knowledge from other areas) to make career decisions and complete career tasks. It may also surface additional challenges that could be addressed within CCD opportunities as practitioners continue to improve the method.

### **Conclusion**

The participants in this study all had declared majors in the liberal arts, but they started the course at varying levels of comfort regarding the marketability of their majors in the “real world.” Negative external voices played a significant role in the participants’ lack of career confidence, and they were continually battling external messages regarding the “unemployability” of their majors as well as the lack of perceived academic rigor associated with a humanities/arts degree. By enrolling in the CCD course, the participants were seeking validation for their decisions to follow a “non-career” path as well as the opportunity to learn and practice career skills. Traditional models of career development focus on attaining career skills, but they do not cater to the unique interests, skills, and values of liberal arts majors. This study provides preliminary evidence that constructivist career development is an ideal career development model for students who have declared majors in the liberal arts.

Since there is no existing research deconstructing CCD from the perspectives of those engaging in the process, this study makes a meaningful contribution to the literature on CCD. The participants identified three aspects of the course that were significant to



their learning throughout the CCD process: recognizing external messages, structured space for reflection/active learning, and positive peer interactions. Through their interviews and essays, the participants repeatedly articulated the importance of gaining self-knowledge and their appreciation for structured conversations and activities, which allowed them space to process negative messages about their choice of major, while integrating the positive messages they were encountering and constructing in the CCD course. Engaging in classroom discussions and activities with peers, who were essentially “in the same boat,” provided much needed support and comfort. Throughout the CCD course, they were able to see that they were not alone and that other students were grappling with the same questions.

Although this study was based on only 10 participants, the findings indicate that CCD has the potential to increase career-self efficacy with regard to certain career tasks. The combination of knowledge acquisition, self-reflection, and opportunities for skill development increased career confidence in the majority of the participants. As the study concluded, many of the participants were articulating their goals of seeking internships, and they expressed confidence in their ability to successfully engage in the search process, even if they ultimately are not offered the job. Throughout the course, they learned that career development is meshed with chaos theory and that no individual is capable of predicting an accurate career path. Chaos theory gave the participants permission to let go of the notion of control, which ultimately freed the participants to explore and be receptive to “butterfly moments.”

Finally, the process of CCD respects the unique skills, interests, and values of every individual. The participants were accustomed to receiving external criticism from

others and were relieved that the CCD course allowed them to engage in career development with their voice at the center of the conversation. This process of identifying their internal voice was a key component of the participants creating their career stories. Baxter Magolda (2001) stresses that it is essential for college students to answer the questions, “Who am I?” and “What relationships do I want with others?” in order to progress on the path toward self-authorship. The CCD course afforded participants opportunities to answer these questions by providing space for structured self-reflection and active learning. Self-authorship is achieved when students trust their internal voice, build an internal foundation, and secure internal commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Research suggests that students typically enter college relying on perspectives they have uncritically accepted and that colleges and universities lack intentional opportunities to challenge and support college students in their transition to internal authority (Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009). This is unfortunate because self-authorship is necessary for some of the most critical outcomes of higher education: effective reasoning, problem solving, leadership, moral reasoning, and intercultural maturity (Creamer et al., 2010). The findings from this study confirm that participants entered the CCD course relying on external authorities; however, by the conclusions of the course, many of the participants were journeying toward self-authorship with regard to their own career development.

Further research is needed to expand on the findings from this study; however, this initial analysis examining the utilization of CCD with liberal arts students demonstrates that the process of CCD respects the liberal arts experience and increases self-efficacy in career decision-making and the completion of career tasks. By

empowering liberal arts students to think differently about their academic majors and viewing their degrees as an asset in the “real world,” colleges and universities can debunk the myth of the “unemployable” liberal arts major.

## APPENDIX A

### CONSTRUCTIVIST CAREER DEVELOPMENT SYLLABUS

#### Spring 2013

**Course Description:**

The College of Humanities and Fine Arts invites students to engage in a one-credit experience that will result in the creation of a cover letter and resume', which students will use to mock apply to an internship. Students will set goals, explore interests and passions, learn how to build a campus support network, create a cover letter and resume', learn interviewing techniques (including etiquette), and practice interviewing. This course includes several experiential components that will enable students to be evaluated on their ability to market themselves before an actual job search.

This course is geared toward second-year students looking to get a head start in preparing for life after college. In addition to receiving a grade at the end of the course, the instructor will provide students with a written evaluation that includes suggestions for improving their internship application, as well as advice on how to build applicable experiences.

**Course Purpose:**

To provide students the tools and knowledge to be successful in their future career search. This course will provide timely feedback that they can utilize in their remaining years at UMass Amherst in order to become a more marketable candidate in the future job market.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

Students will...

- Identify personal interests, skills, and values.
- Set realistic goals that lead to their career(s).
- Identify potential referees (references) that can speak to their skills and experience.
- Learn skills needed to connect with faculty, university staff, and employers in order to build professional relationships and acquire letters of recommendation.
- Develop a resume'/cover letter that they can use as a template for future job searches.
- Be able to successfully market themselves and effectively communicate their skills and experiences.

**Instructional Methodology:**

This course will include the following teaching and learning methods: lecture, individual readings and reflection, small group activities, class discussions, and the development of a final portfolio. This class allows for several opportunities to practice skills learned in class sessions and in readings. Students will receive descriptive feedback as well as a letter grade.

**Required Texts/Materials:**

Brooks, K. (2009) *You Majored in What? Mapping Your Path from Chaos to Career*. NY, Plume.

**Recommended Texts/Materials:**

Curran, S.J. & Greenwald, S. (2006). *Smart Moves for Liberal Arts Grads*. Berkley, Ten Speed Press

Eikleberry, C. (2007). *The Career Guide for Creative and Unconventional People*. Berkley, Ten Speed Press

Ferrazzi, K. (2005). *Never Eat Alone: And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time*. New York, DoubleDay

**Grading:**

I will base final grades on the following:

- Attendance is Mandatory!
  - 5 points deducted from final grade for every class you miss, unless you obtain prior permission or have a doctor's note.
- Course Readings and Class Participation – 30%
- Essays – 40%
- Career Preparation – 30%

Students will receive two forms of feedback for this course. The above outlines how the instructor will calculate your letter grade. In addition, each student will receive a written summary that focuses on the improvements he/she should make prior to starting a career search.

**Incomplete Grade:**

Students are expected to complete the course by the end of the semester. **A grade of incomplete may be given at the discretion of the instructor, but only in extenuating circumstances and with specific requirements to be fulfilled by a specific date.** If you fail to complete the requirements by the due date, you will receive an “F”.

**Academic Honesty:**

Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent.

**Academic Freedom:**

Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class. In any classroom situation that includes discussion and critical thinking, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. These differences enhance the learning experience and create an atmosphere where students and instructors alike will be encouraged to think and learn. On sensitive topics, students may sometimes disagree not only with each other but also with the instructor. It is expected that faculty and students will respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions.

**Academic Accommodations:**

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS) and/or the Center for Counseling and Psychological Health (CCPH), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

**Monday Class Schedule**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Major Assignments</b>
<b>Week 1 – Feb 4</b>	Class Introduction and Knowing What You Want	Brooks – Chapters 1-2  <b>MOODLE:</b> Greenwald & Curran Chapter  Hansen Article	Essay 1 is due by email before the first class
<b>Week 2 Feb 11</b>	Knowing What You Have and Knowing What You Hear	Brooks – Chapters 4-5  <b>MOODLE:</b> Eikleberry Chapter	Complete FOCUS Inventory via Career Services and Submit a Bulleted List of Key Findings
<b>Week 3 Feb 19</b>	Knowing What Constrains You and Goal Setting	Brooks – Chapters 5-6  <b>MOODLE:</b> What Can I Do With an LA Degree?	Essay 2 is due by Email After the 3 <sup>rd</sup> Class and before the fourth class
<b>Week 4 Feb 25</b>	Cover Letter and Resume's	Brooks – Chapters 8-9  <b>MOODLE:</b> Resume' and Cover Letter Handouts	Draft of Cover Letters an Resume's Due by Email Before the Next Class
<b>Week 5 March 11</b>	Networking	Brooks – Chapter 7  <b>MOODLE:</b> Ferrazzi – Chapter 4	Elevator Speech
<b>Week 6 March 25</b>	Interviewing	Brooks – Chapter 10  <b>MOODLE:</b> Interviewing Handouts	Summary of Information Interview

<b>Week 7 April 1</b>	So You Have the Job, Now What?	Brooks – Chapter 11	Final Job Application Due – Cover Letter, Resume´, and References (Please include any supplemental information that the job description requires)
<b>Post Class</b>	Schedule Mock Interview Before Final Exam Week		Final Essay Due Finals Week, After Completing the Mock Interview

**\*Don't Forget to Schedule Final Mock Interview**

### Assignments

#### I) COURSE READINGS AND YOUR ABILITY TO UTILIZE THEM (30% of Your Final Grade)

The readings for this course are mandatory and your ability to integrate them into your reflections, final cover letter and resume´, class discussions/activities, and your oral presentations will be a significant component of your final grade. Being a successful job candidate means knowing yourself (your skills, interests, values, and relational influences). Having this self-knowledge will enhance your ability to market yourself successfully via your cover letter, resume´, references, and interview skills.

#### II) REFLECTION PAPERS (40% of Final Grade)

During the first class, we will go over the syllabus and assignments in detail. Your final portfolio will build on all seven weeks of the course and will result in materials you can use in a future job/internship search. You must select an internship/job and mock apply for this position.

*Week 1 (Due via email before the first class)* – This is a two-part reflection paper (1 to 2 pages). In the first two paragraphs, please explain why you enrolled in this course and what you hope to learn this semester. In the final two to three paragraphs, please reflect on your childhood dream job. Why was this your dream job? Is this a job/career you are still interested in pursuing, why or why not? If it is not your current career goal, please explain what your current goal(s) are and how you made the decisions to pursue it.

*Week 3/4 (Due via email after week 3, but before week 4)* – Over the past weeks, you have reflected on possible career paths, your assets (internal and external), the societal messages about who you are and your chosen major, as well as obstacles you must overcome on your path to success. Please submit a two to three page, typed, reflection paper addressing what you have learned in this class so far. How will you leverage your self-knowledge as you move into the second half of this course, in which you will be asked to choose a potential internship, write a cover letter and resume´, practice your networking skills, present your elevator speech, and participate in a mock interview? What changes might you need to make to your current short and long-term goals?

*Post-Mock Interview Essay (Due via email, before Final Exam Week)* – The foundation of this course is based on helping students get to know themselves better so they can relate their self-knowledge to their career goals. Please submit a final 2 to 3 page, typed, reflection paper addressing what have you have learned about yourself, your major, and your support networks.

Will this self-knowledge be helpful to you on your career/life journey, why or why not? Additionally, what do you think it means to forge your own career path? At the end of your reflection paper, please include a bulleted timeline of your career development goals from now until graduation.

### III) CAREER PREPARATION (30% of your final grade)

LinkedIn Profile

Cover Letter and Resume

Elevator Speech

Mock Interview



**APPENDIX B**  
**PARTICIPANT SUMMARIES**

**Gemma: The First-Year Explorer**

Gemma was a first-year student who had already achieved sophomore status due to the number of Advanced Placement (AP) credits with which she entered college. Her father's education and career was in the sciences, while her mother had an undergraduate degree in genetics and a master's degree in library science. Education was valued in Gemma's household and her parents had encouraged her to explore her academic interests. Therefore, Gemma entered the University as a declared major in Linguistics because she loved language and wanted to study other cultures.

As a child, Gemma's two primary dream careers were artist and veterinarian. As time passed, Gemma realized these dream careers were based solely on interests. She enjoyed drawing and painting and she loved her cats, but recognized these were not areas with which she wanted to work. In middle school, her curiosities evolved and she focused on becoming a doctor, teacher, or pharmacist. Her father was a pharmacist and he often spoke of the good wages and the reasonable work schedule. For a short time, his lifestyle influenced Gemma and she considered becoming a pharmacist. By high school, she switched her focus to speech pathology because she loved the field of linguistics. She stated in both an essay and an interview that linguistics was a passion and speech pathology was a clinical career with which her father approved. She wrote in her first essay, "By high school I had a better handle on my skills and interests, and I wanted to be a Speech Therapist. I decided that I wanted this career because it is a clinical science degree, which my father approved of, and it was a very clear-cut path."

### **Harrison: Seeker of Self-Motivation**

He started his college career as an English major. He completed three semesters, but had a low grade point average because he struggled to stay motivated. In his fourth semester, he failed most of his courses. His academic struggles resulted in two-semester break from the University, working at his father's pizza and sub restaurant to reevaluate his priorities. As a son of Greek immigrants, he felt immense pressure to return to college and complete his education. In Spring 2013, Harrison reentered the University with a new mindset and some very specific academic goals. Harrison enrolled in the career course because he felt it would provide him with a structured experience in which he could focus on writing a cover letter/resume and explore internship opportunities.

Harrison's childhood dream job was to be a professional soccer player. He loved the game and admitted in his first interview that he had real talent, but he did not put in the needed time and effort to excel. He claimed that he coasted in high school while his teammates continued to work hard causing Harrison to move from the top player to simply a good player. By the time he entered college, he chose a more "realistic" dream career, to become a professional novelist. Great authors, like J.K. Tolkien and Dennis Lehane, had inspired Harrison and he hoped one day he could influence others with his writing. His other dream, although he was not as confident about this one, was to become a professional rapper. He loved music, specifically hip-hop, and he enjoyed writing lyrics. However, he viewed this as more of a hobby than an actual career path.

### **Hunter: The Dreamer**

Hunter proclaimed himself to be a dreamer. He had a wide range of interests and abilities, coupled with a fear of making the wrong decisions. He discussed more dream

careers than any other participant: baseball player, politician, filmmaker, world traveler, journalist, comedian, civil engineer, small business owner, author, carpenter, furniture craftsman, architect, teacher, and urban planner. With the exception of baseball player, he was still considering all of these possibilities when he started the CDD course. He wrote in his second essay,

As a big dreamer with a seemingly endless list of interests, it is difficult for me to hone in on a specific, or even vague, idea of where my life is headed. I have always enjoyed dreaming of the different lives I could lead, and because of this enjoyment I have found it hard to narrow my interests down to a practical number of possibilities.

Hunter enrolled in the career course because he dreaded the “real world.” In particular, he feared having to make a choice about his future. He was worried he would follow a career path that turns into a dead end, or even worse, turns out to be boring.

Hunter entered college as an English major. He loved his English classes in high school and one of his teachers encouraged his writing skills. He thought he might want to become an English teacher, but by the end of his first-year he was not enjoying his English classes as much as he thought he would. He declared a second major in political science and at the start of the career class was unsure if he should retain the English major as well. He was not sure if political science would lead to a specific career goal, but he enjoyed the classes and he believed this major would assist in the development of critical thinking skills, which he saw as crucial in the job market.

### **Luke: The Starving Artist**

Luke began college as a landscape architecture and design major. In his mind, this was a practical way to keep his passion for art alive, while still declaring a career-tracked

major. However, he quickly realized he was not in a major he enjoyed. Luke struggled through his first-year of college and he lacked confidence in his ability to determine his own future. However, pre-CCD course, he made a bold decision to change his major from landscape architecture to studio art. Although Luke felt empowered by his decision, he decided to enroll in the career class so he could leverage his art degree in the “real” world.

Art had always been a part of Luke’s life. Although his Dad was a “business man,” he also completed weekend projects in carpentry. Luke described his dad as creative and he felt that his dad valued Luke’s love for art. Additionally, Luke’s grandmother was an artist and a positive role model. However, his dad and grandmother wanted to see Luke find a career plan.

### **Marcus: Untangling Conflicting Messages**

Marcus enrolled in the career class to untangle conflicting messages imposed on him by “adults.” In his first essay, he discussed multiple messages and the pressure that accompanied them - double or triple major, complete multiple internships, study abroad, be a campus leader, make sure you have a GPA of 3.8 or higher, etc. He knew he only had four years and it would be impossible to do everything. When he entered the class, he was a first-year student, but a sophomore by credit status. His short-term goal was to find a meaningful summer job, but his long-term goal was to design his future plan.

As a child, Marcus wanted to be either a writer or a filmmaker. In his first interview, he expressed that he had always enjoyed telling a story. In high school, his career vision changed and he decided that he wanted to pursue a major in philosophy. He

did not have a solid career goal in mind, but he was interested in becoming a professor. However, in his first interview, he told me that he has had some “reality checks” since coming to the University. In particular, he had a conversation with one of his philosophy professors and was told that jobs were extremely limited and that he had to be the best in order to have a career as a philosophy professor. Marcus has since decided that becoming a philosophy professor is an impossible dream. He now plans to add a second major in English (which he laughs about, calling them two pointless majors) so he can pursue a career in teaching. Currently, he sees three possible career paths - English teacher, philosophy professor, and lawyer.

### **Michael: Learning from the “Real World”**

Michael was a non-traditional student with sophomore credit status. Michael entered college as a traditional student in Fall 2005, with a declared major in engineering. After two years, he was not only second-guessing his major, but also his desire to be in college. He chose to leave the University and he worked for several years as a full-time Information Technology (I.T.) Consultant. He returned to the University in Fall 2012 as an English major to pursue a new dream – Broadcast Journalism.

As a child, Michael had one dream career; he wanted to be a meteorologist because he and his mom always watched the weather together. “My mom had this routine where she would come home from work every day, and at 5:15pm on the dot the weather would come on, and we watched the weather every day” (Michael, Interview). However, with age, his dream of becoming a weatherman faded. When Michael entered high school, he toyed with the idea of becoming a writer/author because he loved writing

fiction and poetry, but that was always a “background” dream. Toward the end of high school he decided on engineering because he liked to work with his hands and because he was good with computers. Specifically, he thought he would make a good electrical engineer, but he eventually learned he hated all of the required foundational courses. Consequently, he withdrew from the University and spent time working full-time as an Information Technology Consultant.

Michael returned to the University in Fall 2012 with the clear goal of not having a “desk job” for the rest of his life. He returned as an English major because he thought oral and written communication was crucial to success. Additionally, he was interested in learning about people, other cultures, and traveling the world. Throughout the course, he was exploring a career in Broadcast Journalism because he believed, “I’m an excellent communicator and people have told me I have a voice for TV or the radio” (Interview).

### **Nicole: The Career Development Junkie**

Nicole was a sophomore student who had already accumulated enough credits to achieve junior status. She was majoring in English, with a minor in Information Technology, and a specialization in non-fiction writing. She hoped to graduate from college in three years, but would consider staying longer if she could integrate special opportunities into her educational plan, such as internships and research projects. Last semester, Nicole enrolled in another one-credit career course offered through the English department. She really enjoyed the previous class and wanted to continue her career development in the constructivist career development course.

As a child, Nicole dreamed of becoming a great American novelist. Her passion for writing started early; she was an avid reader and wrote short stories in her journal. In high school, she was a Staff Writer and the Opinion Editor for her school newspaper. When she arrived to the University, she started working for the University newspaper, but she quickly learned she did not like the “business side” of running a real newspaper or the atmosphere in the newsroom. Instead, she began writing for a national blog, *Her Campus*. She really enjoyed the style of writing and started a chapter of ED2010 at the University, a club for students interested in working for the on-line magazine industry.

Nicole’s parents were supportive of her goals and her choice to major in English. Her dad was a successful banking executive and he believed that excellent communication was the foundation of success. He hires English majors because he knows they can write and communicate well, and Nicole felt empowered by her father’s perspective. Nicole’s mother was a publicist for Disney but was not working at the time of the study because she had two younger children. Both of her parents’ valued education and Nicole strived to make them proud. Nicole stated several times that she had a great deal of autonomy in her life because her parents had to focus on her younger siblings. Her dream job after college was to work for the high-end publisher Conde’ Nast, specifically she hoped to combine her love for writing and he skills in technology to focus on the on-line components of the magazine.

### **Shelby: The Aspiring Lawyer**

In her younger years, Shelby was a competitive horseback rider who dreamed of a career as a veterinarian or a professional horse trainer/rider. However, books and

television inspired her to pursue another goal, which was to become a lawyer. Shelby described how books and television generated her fascination with the law by explaining,

When I was in fifth grade, my grandmother bought me my first *Nancy Drew* book. From then on, I was utterly engrossed in how Nancy was able to solve some of the most frightening crimes using her powers of deduction. I was fascinated by the law and how she was able to bring justice to a crime. So much so, I wanted to be an amazing detective and crime fighter like her. Then, when I was in seventh grade, I began watching *Gilmore Girls* with my mom. As Rory Gilmore's life developed and she decided she wanted to go to an Ivy League school, my life started to shift in that direction as well. (Interview)

Throughout the career course, Shelby wanted to attend law school, but she was open to a variety of careers, all of which stem from the field of law.

As a double major in history and political science, Shelby was confident that both her majors would teach her the transferable skills needed to gain entrance into a prestigious law school. In addition to her two majors, she was considering a minor in Italian and a certificate in international relations. Her mother and grandparents were extremely supportive of her career path, which seemed to provide Shelby with confidence in her choice to become a lawyer.

### **Tiana: International Dreams**

Tiana was a first-year student, with sophomore credit status, majoring in Cultural Studies. She enrolled in the career course because she was plagued by the question, "What can I do with a major in Cultural Studies?" As a child, she was interested in two jobs, being a teacher or a translator. In reflecting back she did see a common thread between these two career goals, which was helping others. When she enrolled in the career course, her ambition was to become an overseas American Consulate in the Middle East. She had the opportunity to travel to Qatar a few years ago and she believed



this trip had been extremely influential in her choice of major, because it enhanced her passion for language and culture.

When Tiana first applied to the University, she was a declared linguistics major. However, as she further researched the major, she understood majoring in linguistics was not helpful in her goal of working for the State Department. Tiana was extremely proud and passionate about her goals, but she had experienced her share of opposition. She said she frequently hears comments about people in non-career majors working at Starbucks after they graduate or being reduced to serving fast food to their peers. What bothered her most was the notion that she did not have a purpose, “Yeah you know, people think we are here for our interests, that we have no real goals or direction” (Interview).

### **Zian: New to the United States**

Zian and his family came to the United States from China five years ago. He was hesitant to participate in the study because he worried that the language barrier would prove to be difficult during the interviews. I encouraged him to participate in the first interview to see if he enjoyed the process. The language barrier was only a slight challenge and the more comfortable he became in the interviews the easier it was to fully understand his answers.

Zian was a first-year student (with sophomore credit status) who entered the University as an architecture and design major. In both his first essay and interview, he talked about his love of art but also the need to show his parents he was in a career that will lead to a “good living.” However, at the start of the class, Zian was already considering a change in major. In his first essay he wrote,

I had lots of dream careers in my life because I ardently love to study unknowns as much as possible. Confucius' philosophy influences every Chinese person, and I am one of them. I learned from Confucius that knowledge is the invisible power that others can not steal and it makes one's life better by providing an appropriate career, belief, etc. in this modern society.

As a child, Zian had several dream careers - astronaut, doctor, scientist, and historian. He reported that his parents have always encouraged him to be a medical doctor; although he is interested in the field of medicine, it is not where his passion lies. As a young adult, he was still having a difficult time settling on one major. He stated in his second essay, "Design, psychology, and nutrition are my lifelong interests. Right now, I am confused which one would be best for me. I have decided I will definitely, at least, double-major, but I still need to make a decision on those majors."

## APPENDIX C

### INVITATION TEXT

January 2013

Dear (Student Name),

Thank you for your interest in the HFA career course, *On the Road to Success: Enhancing the Professional You*. My name is Kelly Gray and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education, as well as the Assistant Dean of Students for Student Life at UMass Amherst. I also teach one of the two sections of the sophomore career course and for my dissertation study, I am examining the student experience in this course from the lens of self-authorship. I am inviting students that meet the criteria of my study to participate in a series of interviews to discuss career development and the liberal arts within the context of the course.

These interviews will occur at three points over the course of the spring semester: the end of January, the end of February/beginning of March, and mid-April. Each interview will last 60-minutes and you can schedule the meeting at your convenience during the previously indicated points in the semester. In addition to having the opportunity to discuss your experience in the course and its effect on your career outlook, you will receive a gift bag of University school supplies as a token of my thanks for assisting with this project. Upon completing the third interview, you will also receive a \$20 gift card to the University Store, iTunes, or Antonio's Pizza (your choice).

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will in no way affect your experience and/or grade in the course. Additionally, your name will not be tied to any responses you may provide, nor will your name appear in any report or publication generated from this study.

If you are interested in participating in this project, please email me at [gray@umass.edu](mailto:gray@umass.edu) with your availability January 28<sup>th</sup> – January 31<sup>st</sup> for the initial interview. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you,  
Kelly Gray  
Graduate Student, Higher Education

## **APPENDIX D**

### **SECOND ROUND EMAIL**

Subject Line - \$45 in guaranteed prizes for participation in a research project

Hi (Student First Name),

I am a UMass grad student finishing up the last phase of my dissertation work and I'll also be facilitating a section of the HFA Career Course this semester. I wanted to check in with you to see if you could help with the study I am doing for the last phase of my dissertation research.

I would compensate with \$45 in prizes (a gift box of school supplies, a \$5 Antonio's gift card, and your choice of a \$20 iTunes, Target, or UStore gift card) for participating in three one-hour conversations during the semester. See attached picture to see what the gift box looks like.

If you're interested please let me know by Thursday, January 24th and I will send you more info. About my project. Thank you, this work means a lot to me and I would really appreciate you helping out!

Sincerely,

Kelly Gray  
Graduate Student in High Education Policy and Leadership  
UMass Amherst

## APPENDIX E

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-AUTHORSHIP STUDY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION—EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND LEADERSHIP, HIGHER EDUCATION

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,  
Print Name

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Constructivist Career Development and Self-Authorship Study. My name is Kelly A. Gray and I am a doctoral student in the Education Policy and Leadership Department in the School of Education at UMass Amherst. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how students' perceive their experience in a career course organized and taught from a constructivist career development framework. This study consists of a series of interviews that will occur at three points over the course of the spring semester.

This is a low-risk study with no known physical or emotional risks to participants. Participation in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. As a researcher, I completely respect your decision not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any point. Membership or non-membership in this study will not influence your experience in *On the Road to Success: Enhancing the Professional You* or the grade you receive in the course.

Results from this study will only be presented or published after eliminating any identifying data (names, student ID, etc.). In the event that a student's demographic characteristics (race, ethnicity, and gender) will contribute to identifying a student, those demographics will not be presented or published. Finally, recorded interview conversations will be deleted immediately after written transcriptions are complete. Written transcriptions will not include real names and all participants will be assigned pseudonyms.

If you have any questions or concerns during the duration of the study, please contact Kelly Gray at 413-545 or gray@.umass.edu. You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Benita J. Barnes at barnesbj@educ.umass.edu.

Sincerely,

Kelly A. Gray, Graduate Student in Higher Education

Student Name (Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (HISTORY)

Notes:

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- 1) Tell me about the jobs/careers you have considered in the past (beginning with your childhood dream job)?
  - Do you think these jobs have anything in common?
  - Thinking about your interests, skills, and values - were you drawn to certain types of work?
  - Who (or what) inspired you to consider these careers?
  - Are you still interested in any of the jobs/careers you discussed? Why or why not?
  
- 2) Historically, who has been your biggest influence when it comes to making decisions about your career/future?
  - Besides other people, has anything else had an influence on your career decisions?
  
- 3) Did you start college with a career in mind? Why or why not?
  - Have you selected an academic major? If so, what?
  - Do you think you'll stick with this major?
  - Did you select an academic major with a potential career path in mind?
  - If not, why did you select your major?

- 4) Do you think your degree is preparing you for life after college? Why or why not?
- Thinking back to your first year of college, did people ever ask you what you planned to do with your major? What was that conversation like?
  - Have you heard any negative stereotypes about your major? If so, please explain?
    - Do these stereotypes bother or upset you?
    - Does anyone important in your life think negatively about your choice in major?
    - Do you ever think about changing your major because of these stereotypes?
  - When you declared a major in “X” what were some of the positive things people said about your choice in major?
    - Who were your biggest advocates?
    - Has anyone in your life been a key influence in sticking with your major?
- 8) Before the start of your sophomore year, what types of career development activities had you participated in?
- Who was your greatest resource when it came to career development (thinking about careers options)?
    - Anyone else?
- 9) Before your sophomore year, how much trust did you have in your ability to make decisions about your future?
- 10) Before your sophomore year, how much control did you feel you had over your future?

## APPENDIX G

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (EXPERIENCE)

Notes:

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- 1) Besides the course, what opportunities have you had for career development this year?
  - Career Services
  - Faculty Connections
  - Networking
  - Conversations with your parents
  
- 2) Walk me through your experience in the course so far. What readings, conversations, activities, and assignments stand out for you?
  - Do you like the Katherine Brooks book? Why or why not?
    - Chaos theory – How does that relate (or not relate) to your current path?
  - What in-class activities have been helpful to you? What did you like about these activities?
  - What in-class activities have not been helpful to you personally? Why?
  - What assignments have been helpful? Why?
  - What assignments have not been helpful? Why?
  
- 3) Are you making any connections with other students in the class?
  - Have you engaged in any out of class conversations or learning with your peers?
  
- 4) In the first class, we talked about knowing what you want. Over the past few weeks, how have you reflected on or made decisions regarding your future goals?



- 5) We also talk about knowing what you have – your skills, interests, and values. In what ways have you reflected on this topic over the past weeks?
  
- 6) In the second class, we talked about knowing what you hear or understanding your external influences. What do you remember from your readings or the class about outside influences?
  - How do external influences positively or negatively impact you right now?
  
- 7) On the road to success, we all confront obstacles (or things that constrain us). What obstacles did you identify?
  - How did you identify them?
  - How confident are you that you can overcome them?
  
- 8) Over the past few weeks, the main goal in the course has been self-reflection. What have you learned about your past/present that you think will be useful as your plan for the future?
  - Are there any specific areas that you are stuck on?
  - Aspects of yourself that you are having trouble explaining or making decisions about?
  
- 9) Is there anything else from the course you want to discuss?
  
- 10) Have you started drafting your resume´ and cover letter yet? How is that process going for you?
  - Do you have any questions about the resume´/cover letter process?

## APPENDIX H

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (MEANING-MAKING)

- 1) Overall, how has your sophomore year been thus far?
  - What has been your biggest academic and/or social accomplishment this year?
  - What has been your biggest academic and/or social challenge this year?
- 2) At this point in time, what are you most likely to do after college?
  - How did you come to this decision?
    - What are your biggest strengths or assets as your move toward this goal?
    - What are your biggest challenges as you move toward this goal?
- 3) When it comes to your career journey, what are you still unsure about?
- 4) When you think about everything you have learned in this class, what will be most valuable in your career journey?
  - Are there things you have learned in other classes that you believe will also help you in your career journey?
  - Have you learned any good career lessons outside of the classroom? If so, tell me about what you learned and where you learned it.
    - How will this help you in your career journey?
- 5) If you were to give one piece of advice to a student taking this class next semester, what would you tell him or her?
  - Are there any specific reasons why you would recommend a class like this for a liberal arts' student?
  - Do you think career services on-campus serves liberal arts students well?

- 6) Now that you spent seven weeks learning about yourself and developing career skills, what are the next steps for you as you move toward graduation?
- How confident do you feel about your plans?
  - What do you think will be your biggest challenges?
- 7) As a liberal arts student, what advantages do you think you have in the job market?
- 8) As a liberal arts student, what challenges will you have in the job market?
- How will you overcome these challenges?
  - How will you market your degree to future employers?
- 9) If you were talking to an incoming UMass student who was thinking about selecting your major, what would you tell him or her?
- What if he or she asked you what you could do with a major in X?
  - What if he or she told you that their parent(s) did not want them to select that major?
  - Would you recommend that he or she take a class like this? Why or why not?
- 10) Do you think your major is preparing you for life after college? Why or why not?

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