Destination Exploration

an exploratory program for undecided students
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O’Brien Center Mission:

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

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

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

- According to research conducted by Pennsylvania State University:
  - 80% are not certain what they want to major in
  - 50% change their major at least once

- According to the US Dept. of Ed
  - 1 in 5 students who started out at a 4 year college, earned their BA from a different college
BYU Study of Undeclared Majors

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

Personal Characteristics

Academic Areas

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

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

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

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

- Advises students on:
  - Career exploration
  - Decision making
  - Coping with independence

- Partners with faculty to:
  - Advise students during registration periods
  - Guide students toward exploratory classes
Key Player: Faculty Advisors

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

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

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

- 24 attended Fall Orientation session
- 11 September discussion session
- 12 attended October discussion session
Program Snapshot: Where are we now?

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

- Student Outreach
  - Postcard & invitation letter (summer), June & Fall Orientations; Emails from Career Advisor & Peer Ambassadors

- Webpage creation

- Print Materials
  - Brochure

- On campus partnerships
  - Attending Center for Academic Enrichment programs

- Continuous faculty education
Retention at Merrimack

- In 2011-2012, approximately 15% of ULA withdrew within 5 months.

- In 2012-2013, approximately 9% of undecided students withdrew within 9 months.
What have we changed?

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

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

- Boost student attendance at major related events

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

- Majors/Minors Fair
- Advisor identified on transcript and blackboard
- Pre-Advising Workshops
On your campus…

- Defining Undeclared
  - Research the numbers – does it make sense?

- Utilizing Resources
  - Academic Support Services
  - Other advocates across campus

- Benefits…
  - Retention & student success
  - Traffic to your Centers
  - Partnerships across campus
Ideas…
Questions…
Comments…
References


