

EMPLOYABILITY AND EMPOWERMENT:
DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF CAREER PLANNING

By

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Abstract

Since the 1980s there has been a notable trend of university career centers (UCCs) transforming from job-placement centers into full-service centers that include career coaching, counseling, and job search activities such as mock interviews, resume writing, and career fairs ("Best practices in career services for graduating students," 2012; Garver, Spralls, & Divine, 2009). This shift has accompanied what has been referred to as the "death" of the organizational career where individuals can no longer expect their careers to unfold in a single organization over their lifetimes (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Rather, individuals are urged to prepare themselves for multi-directional careers marked by frequent job and industry changes and even bouts of unemployment (Baruch, 2004). Coupled with mounting external stakeholder pressure for universities to assume greater responsibility for graduates obtaining employment, the need for universities to educate students in job search skills and engage them in career planning is more important than ever ("FACT SHEET on the President's plan to make college more affordable: A better bargain for the middle class," 2013; "Half of recent college graduates underemployed or jobless, analysis says," April 23, 2012).

Thankfully most colleges and universities have staff dedicated to providing career planning and job search assistance in on-campus UCCs. This dissertation explores the communication of a UCC's organizational members in a large mid-western public university. Specifically, I take a communicative look at how career planning was discursively constructed as the empowered pursuit of employability. Toward this end, discourse was focused on how services could increase the likelihood that graduates would obtain employment and be prepared to search and apply for jobs throughout their careers. The career coaching model used in the UCC was intended to center and empower students in the career planning process.

This discourse served as a response to demands for increased university accountability toward students seeking post-graduate employment but also recognized that ultimately it was the responsibility of students to develop their employability. A critical examination of employability reveals this to be a paradox of accountability where the promotion of student employability provides universities with the opportunity to distance themselves from the responsibility for students obtaining jobs after graduation. It emphasizes a “no guarantees” employment culture (Hallier, 2009) and encourages students to accept the responsibility of managing their own futures by developing career identities, personal adaptability, and human and social capital (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2003).

Advising students in effective career planning is a complex matter where multiple facets of students’ lives and identities intersect to create individualized conceptions of success, career, and the role of work in their lives. The career coaching model utilized by the center in this study requires practitioners to employ discursive strategies to promote student motivation and confidence (Orem, Binkert, & Clancy, 2007). Informed by literature on the concepts of socialization, meaningful work, employability, empowerment, and the appreciative coaching model, this study provides an understanding of how organizational members of a UCC promote employability through discursively engaging students’ preconceived notions of work and need, assisting them in preparing for their vocational futures, and constructing action plans to help them advance toward established goals. Interviews with staff of the UCC, participant observations of UCC events, and a textual analysis of the UCC’s website and related career documents and artifacts were used to examine the conceptualization of career and the employability value of career planning.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale

In 2013, President Barack Obama outlined a plan to tie federal student aid to college performance through a new ratings system that would take into account measures such as affordability, graduation rates, and post-graduation employment and earnings ("FACT SHEET on the President's plan to make college more affordable: A better bargain for the middle class," 2013). This means universities are feeling pressure to support and provide evidence of the employability of their graduates. Thus, the need for undergraduate career planning and development seems more important than ever. To help students in the job search and career planning processes, most colleges and universities have staff dedicated to assisting them with their transition out of college and into the world of work.

This dissertation explores the perspectives of the staff at a university career center (UCC) to determine how they conceptualize career and the value of their work, and how they communicatively facilitate the empowered pursuit of employability in the career planning process. Taken as a whole, I consider how the promotion of employability serves as a response to calls for universities to be more accountable toward preparing students for work and the potential consequences of this discourse. In this context, employability literature emphasizing individual accountability in career management provides universities with the opportunity to distance themselves from being responsible for students obtaining jobs after graduation. It reveals a “no guarantees” employment culture (Hallier, 2009) and encourages students to accept the responsibility of managing their own futures by developing career identities, personal adaptability, and human and social capital (Fugate et al., 2003). This study further explores core characteristics of employability as they are related to empowerment and the career planning process. The concepts of employability and empowerment are integrally entwined in this study

and are influenced by socializing messages related to career and meaningful work and the method through which students are assisted in preparing for work. This study uses the employability framework developed by Fugate et al. (2003) to explore both the process and desired outcomes of career planning, from the perspectives of UCC staff.

The UCC studied used a career coaching model rather than a counseling model to work one-on-one with student. Since the differences between career coaching and career counseling are contested in literature (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003) this study examines how staff who hold the title of “career coach” conceptualize the process and the utility of their coaching model. This investigation provided new information regarding the role of career coaches and other career center staff in the development of students’ employability. Results suggested that following the steps of the career coaching model, as conceptualized by staff, potentially enhanced students’ employability by engaging them in activities such as reflection, critical thinking, and strategic planning, which support a broader employability framework. By exploring how UCC staff view career and career coaching, this study provides an understanding of the process and function of career coaching and identified the skills these university career services practitioners believe are important for graduates’ success on the job market.

This chapter provides evidence to support the need for a study that examines employability by considering current trends in career services and demonstrating how a communicative perspective, grounded in literature on socialization, meaningful work, empowerment, employability, and career coaching contributes new insights to this timely topic.

Current Trends in Career Services

UCCs and career planning practitioners have undergone significant shifts in the services they provide and their accepted philosophies toward career planning. This change mirrors a shift

in vocational counseling methods and theory. Frank Parsons' (1909) work on vocational fit set the stage for nearly a century of modernist thought in career counseling that used the "person-environment fit" model to determine appropriate career/job placement for individuals. But since the 1980s, UCCs have gradually transformed from job-placement centers into full-service centers that include career coaching, counseling, and development activities such as mock interviews, resume writing, and career fairs ("Best practices in career services for graduating students," 2012; Garver et al., 2009).

Vocational guidance emerged in response to societal needs and has been shaped by economic, political, and social events such as the end of the industrial revolution, the Great Depression, and the rise of technology and knowledge industries. Twentieth-century work has been largely described as having been bureaucratic and stable where people who worked hard in a job would be rewarded with promotions and job security (Savickas et al., 2009). Theory and the practice of career planning traditionally have been correspondingly based on the logical positivist views of trait-and-factor models (also referred to as matching, placement, and person-environment fit models) (Brott, 2001; Campbell & Ungar, 2004). In these models, individuals' intrinsic traits and interests are identified through quantitative psychological measurements such as the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory and the Do What You Are personality assessments. Results of these assessments were then interpreted by counselors to determine occupational fit for clients. These placements ideally led to life-long careers in one organization. These types of careers are known as "organizational careers" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

Out of this context, linear conceptualizations of career have sedimented into place in western career discourses. Linear career models are predicated on fixed notions of organizational control, loyalty and long-term membership (Baruch, 2004; Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991).

Success seen through these models is externally defined by financial reward and upward movement. The metaphors derived from this model refer to competition and vertical movements (promotion and demotion) and are so entrenched in our society that they seem natural. Buzzanell and Goldzwig (1991) asserted that it is difficult to imagine a world without them but that theorists are exploring nonlinear models that may better capture the experiences of some workers and legitimate alternatives to linear models (Baruch, 2004).

While modernist methods of assessment and linear models have not been abandoned, the organizational landscape has changed dramatically, necessitating revisions to career planning models and metaphors (Baruch, 2004). Twenty-first century occupational prospects are less discernible and predictable than in the 20th century. Now, the formula for a successful career is understood as more complex and shifting; conceptualizations of career and success have changed and are continuing to do so. Organizations have become leaner and flatter in order to compete with international competition, and job security is relatively rare (Lyon & Kirby, 2000). So-called boundaryless and protean career models have become popular in current career scholarship and emphasize the trend of independent career management, identity, and adaptability (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Briscoe, Hall, & Frautschy DeMuth, 2006; D. T. Hall, 1996; D. T. Hall, 2004). Research suggests that workers should expect periodic unemployment and career changes throughout their lifetimes (Jarvis & Keeley, 2003). This trend is already observable when looking to some of the newest members of the workforce. A recent study reported that about 1.5 million (53.6 percent) of bachelor's degree-holding adults under the age of 26 had been unemployed or underemployed in the previous year ("Half of recent college graduates underemployed or jobless, analysis says," April 23, 2012). Developing career planning skills for this new labor market may increase their employability and

career satisfaction (De Vos, De Hauw, & Van der Heijden, 2011; Fugate et al., 2003; McGrath, 2002).

In order to help students face a world of constant change, career planning practitioners may utilize career counseling and coaching with students to explore alternative non-linear career models (Orem et al., 2007; Savickas et al., 2009). First, counselors regularly accept that career development occurs over a lifetime and that it is marked by both continuity and change (Brott, 2001). Second, there is an understanding that clients interact with environmental conditions and find meanings for work and career through social experiences. The modernist psychometric measures used to assess personality and interests and determine career fit are increasingly passed up or used in combination with qualitative methods to assist individuals in developing more personalized understandings and thick descriptions of work and career (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003; Savickas et al., 2009). Practitioners taking more postmodern approaches to career are increasingly concerned with the messages clients have interpreted and internalized about work and career, in other words, with clients' socialization to and conceptualizations of work.

Narrative and relational approaches to counseling result in counselor-client co-constructed career stories that reveal client self-knowledge of interests, abilities, achievements, motivations, and the relationships that positively and negatively affect their ability to imagine a preferred future in their careers (Brott, 2001; Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002; Palladino Schultheiss, 2003; Savickas, 1994). Counselors work with clients to deconstruct the discourses that present themselves in clients' narratives, note the limits of these discourses, and facilitate the exploration of other possible stories (Brott, 2001). These paradigmatic shifts make the field of career planning ripe to investigate from a communicative standpoint.

Theoretical Foundations

Several theoretical areas are important for this project: socialization, meaningful work, employability, empowerment, and the appreciative coaching model. The context of this project situates UCC staff in a field that allows for the existence of a multitude of conceptualizations of career and work values. While there is a disciplinary trend is for context-based, qualitative career intervention, the notion of the stable, linear career is ever-present in media, and popular socialization messages about “dream jobs,” the “American dream,” and upward mobility (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991; Conrad, 2011). Thus, UCC practitioners are likely to engage students who have varying needs and understanding of work and career. Practitioners’ organizational culture and personal beliefs influence how they deal with students and affect how and whether certain socialization and instructional messages are perpetuated or constrained in the organization and deployed in student sessions and other career planning activities.

Socialization is the process through which individuals learn the norms of a group (Jablin, 2001). Anticipatory socialization in a vocational context is “the process of gaining knowledge about work that begins in early childhood and continues until entering the workplace full-time” (Levine & Hoffner, 2006, p. 647). Family, friends, media, and educational institutions will (knowingly and unknowingly) contribute messages that lead to vocational anticipatory socialization. This means while practitioners assist clients in revealing their tacit vocational knowledge and impressions, they are also contributing to clients’ understanding of such knowledge. The messages students absorb may influence their job search practices and how they perceive potential careers. Views on what is deemed meaningful and appropriate work and conduct for students graduating with college degrees will carry into graduates’ jobs as they work to adapt to organizational expectations.

Career research is increasingly including discussions of what constitutes meaningful work. A number of authors have attempted to conceptualize “meaningful work” as both an objective and subjective concept. Bowie (1998) noted that meaningful work is entered into freely and pays a livable wage, allows workers to exercise their autonomy and independence, and develop their rational and moral faculties. Meaningfulness was defined by May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) as the “the value of a work goal or purposes, judged to the individual’s own ideals or standards.” For some individuals, so-called objective factors may also take on intrinsic value such as pay signaling organizational recognition and support (Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008). Cheney et al. (2008) summarized meaningful work scholarship and identified doing interesting work, being associated with good and ethical organizations, having good workplace relationships, and contributing to a greater good or higher cause as common attributes of meaningful work.

Speaking directly to these desires, meaningful work is often associated with the notion of “calling.” Dik, Duffy, and Eldridge (2009) described calling as demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness that may come from a transcendent summons originating beyond the self. This discourse is appealing to college students who report the desire to make contributions to society through their careers (Duffy & Raque-Bogdan, 2010). College students who reported having a calling also reported having high levels of career decidedness, self-clarity, and career commitment (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011).

Subjective interpretations of meaningfulness explain how workers have framed varied types of work as meaningful. This means pursuing meaningful work is a personalized endeavor that depends on job seekers’ skills and individual preferences and differences. Students’ employability may then be directly related to their desires to obtain work they find meaningful.

Employability can be generally defined as “a set of achievements—skills, understandings and personal attributes—that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforces, the community and the economy” (Yorke, 2004, p. 8). Cai (2013) identified graduate employability as a key aspect of education output. Employability has been theorized as helping employees cope with job insecurity because it encourages them to constantly develop skills that are marketable. Although research is mixed, individuals with high self-perceived employability report possessing job-related qualifications, willingness to develop new competencies and or change jobs, and have a knowledge of the labor market (Wittekind, Raeder, & Grote, 2009). University career services is positioned to directly influence students’ knowledge of the labor market by assisting and empowering them in the development of job search efficacy, which includes being able to search for job opportunities and communicate their employability to the job market (Wittekind et al., 2009). In short, UCCs may educate students on the dimensions of employability and help them develop valuable skills and qualities.

Students’ motivation to learn has been linked to empowerment (Houser & Frymier, 2009). Empowered students are more likely to perform tasks, find those tasks meaningful, feel competent to perform them, and believe what they do matters. Whether or not a student will feel empowered depends on a variety of individual and situational factors, but it has been found in studies of teacher-student and manager-employee relationships that superiors are able to influence a subordinate’s level of empowerment in an organization (Geroy, Wright, & Anderson, 1998; Houser & Frymier, 2009). From these arguments, I make the assertion that UCC staff interaction with students plays a part in developing their level of empowerment in the career planning process.

Career development models and counseling philosophies have been described in career literature, but the communication strategies used during the process of career coaching have been largely unaddressed by researchers (Parsons, 1909; Savickas, 1994; Savickas et al., 2009; Yeşilyaprak, 2012). The utilization of coaching models has become popular, yet there is tension between the fields of counseling and coaching because of credentialing requirements of counseling and the similar techniques used by both coaches and counselors (Knowdell, 2009). In brief, coaching has been described as more action-oriented, focusing on strategic plans to move clients toward their established goals where counseling is more problem-oriented, seeking to help clients through self-understanding (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003). Coaching models are explicitly linked to the empowerment of clients as they attempt to prepare them to autonomously make satisfying career decisions that fit with their personalized understandings of career and success (Orem et al., 2007).

Purpose of the Study

With trends in organizational landscapes favoring those with transferable skills and the ability to adapt to a variety of work contexts, the likelihood of new graduates obtaining organizational careers is low (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Students are encouraged to anticipate multi-directional careers marked by frequent job and industry changes and even bouts of unemployment (Baruch, 2004; Jarvis & Keeley, 2003). With external stakeholder pressures mounting on universities to assume greater responsibility for graduates obtaining employment, the need for universities to educate students in job search skills and career planning is more important than ever ("FACT SHEET on the President's plan to make college more affordable: A better bargain for the middle class," 2013; "Half of recent college graduates underemployed or

jobless, analysis says," April 23, 2012). Thankfully, most colleges and universities have staff dedicated to providing career planning and job search assistance in on-campus UCCs.

This dissertation is a study exploring the discursive construction of career planning from the perspective of a group of organizational members in a UCC in a large mid-western public university. Specifically I take a communicative look at how UCC discourse positions career services as facilitating the empowered pursuit of employability. Toward this end, discourse was centered on how services could increase the likelihood that graduates would obtain employment they found meaningful and be prepared to search and apply for jobs throughout their careers. While this discourse is a response to calls for universities to be more accountable toward graduates, it simultaneously promotes the responsibility of students to develop their own employability. A critical examination of employability reveals this to be a paradox of accountability where the promotion of student employability provides universities with the opportunity to distance themselves from the responsibility of ensuring students obtain jobs after graduation. The promotion of student employability emphasizes a "no guarantees" employment culture (Hallier, 2009) to encourage students to accept their responsibility to develop career identities, personal adaptability, and human and social capital (Fugate et al., 2003).

Advising students in effective career planning is a complex matter since multiple facets of students' lives and identities intersect to create individualized conceptions of success, career, and the role of work in their lives. The career coaching model utilized by the center in this study requires practitioners to employ discursive strategies to promote student motivation and confidence (Orem et al., 2007). Informed by literature on the concepts of socialization, meaningful work, employability, empowerment, and the appreciate coaching model, this qualitative case study provides a better understanding of how organizational members of a UCC

promote employability through discursively engaging students' preconceived notions of work and need, assisting them in preparing for their vocational futures, and setting up action plans to help them advance toward established goals. Interviews with staff of a UCC, participant observations of some of its events, and a textual analysis of the UCC's website and related career documents and artifacts are used to examine discourses of career planning.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Career counselors and coaches utilize social constructivist methods to conduct their sessions with the understanding that individuals make sense of their lives through self-reflection and exploration. The language they use when describing their lives and imagining the future is significant (Brott, 2001; Campbell & Ungar, 2004; Savickas, 1994). For example, the vocabulary individuals have to describe *career* and *success* frames the concepts' possible meanings. Individuals' perceptions are also shaped by the discourses of career that they privilege, yet they also have the ability to challenge, change, and or resist those discourses through guided deconstruction and imagining alternative futures. The adoption of the social constructivist viewpoint by many practitioners and the fact that verbal and written articulation of thoughts and ideas is such an integral part of the counseling discipline make the study of communication vital for career planning practice (Campbell & Ungar, 2004; Huges, Gibbons, & Mynatt, 2013; Law et al., 2002; Stead & Bakker, 2010).

With this in mind, the proposed study examining career planning discourse in a UCC is informed primarily by five strands of literature: socialization, meaningful work, employability, empowerment, and the appreciative coaching model. These strands of literature help make sense of the data gathered from interviews, participant observations, and UCC related texts.

Socialization

An overview of organizational socialization as a body of research is necessary to situate career services in communication literature. The messages individuals have internalized as a result of socialization are engaged by career planning professionals as they work with clients selecting majors, making career and job target choices, and imagining themselves in the world of work. Students' perceptions of what it takes to be a successful job applicant and what is possible

for them to achieve in work after graduating from college are in part formed by the socialization process. This stream of research explores how individuals develop expectations about the world of work and adapt in organizational contexts (Kramer, 2010). More specifically, socialization is the process through which individuals learn the attitudes, values and behavior patterns of a group in order to function effectively within it; socialization is inherently communicative (Hoffner, Levine, & Toohey, 2008; Kramer, 2010).

In an organizational context, socialization is important for individuals to assume an organizational role including developing relevant work skills, abilities, behaviors and learning group norms and values (Feldman, 1981; Van Maanen & Scheine, 1979). Both newcomers and organizational members adjust to one another through communicating important social knowledge (Anderson, Martin, & Riddle, 2001). This knowledge is communicated directly and indirectly and absorbed both tacitly and deliberately by individuals throughout the stages of socialization. For example, a newcomer may indirectly learn appropriate workplace attire by modeling her co-workers' dress or directly learn a dress code in an employee manual. More abstractly, a child may indirectly learn to value the extrinsic rewards of employment by hearing her mother complain about her long hours at work but reference how they are necessary to provide a stable income to support her family. This child may also directly learn about work through school assignments and excises that help her explore career.

Since socialization is about acquiring information, researchers have studied the ways in which individuals do so that may reduce ambiguity during socialization (Comer, 1991). Individuals seek out information or have information passed along to them that is related to their task performance as well as relationships such as information on the people with whom they may interact (Comer, 1991; Miller & Jablin, 1991). In the case of active information seeking,

individuals rely on a number of strategies such as overt questioning, indirect questioning, observing and surveying others, disguising conversations to draw out information, and purposefully breaking rules to test the limits of a situation (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Making sense of this information happens retroactively when individuals look back over what has just happened and is also influenced by how individuals were socialized to understand certain phenomena (Weick, 1995).

Socialization has been modeled a number of different ways, but generally several phases are described: anticipatory socialization, organizational encounter, assimilation, and organizational exit (R. Clair, 1996; Jablin, 2001). In a vocational context, anticipatory socialization focuses on the messages received about work before individuals enter the workplace (Jablin, 2001; Levine & Hoffner, 2006). Individuals ideally gain a realistic preview of a field, profession, and or organization and assess where their skills, abilities, needs, and values fit within it (Feldman, 1981). Children begin to learn what it means to “work” early on in life and form aspirations and expectations of what the working world will be like for them. Jablin (1985) argued that students learn about work in four broad categories: general requirements, positive aspects, negative aspects, and information/advice. Jablin (2001) described five sources of socialization: family, educational institutions, the media, peers, and volunteer or part-time jobs. Each source provides individuals with different information and contributes to a constellation of influence that assists in forming occupational and professional identities. In each, the messages typically emphasized are responsibility, hard work, the importance of deadlines, personal characteristics, interpersonal skills, and the benefits of making a good living (Jablin, 1985).

Emerging adulthood (18-25 years old) is a critical age for young people. For many, different directions in life still remain possible, and “the scope of independent exploration of

life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course" (Arnett, 2000, p. 269). It is during this time of life when many seriously begin to consider the type of work that will be satisfying to them in adulthood (Arnett, 2000). College students are commonly asked, "what do you want to do with your major," demonstrating the pressures they face to imagine their professional futures and make career decisions that emphasize a linear career course early on in their degree (Lair & Weiland, 2012). Lair and Weiland (2012) found that not only could this be a very emotionally charged question but that students reported it prompted self-exploration and information seeking but felt judged because of their choices of work and education.

R. Clair (1996) explored the implications of the colloquialism "a real job" to vocational anticipatory socialization through college student explanations of the phrase. She concluded that students believed jobs were less valuable or "real" when they were enjoyable, easy (non-skilled or underutilized skills), performed at irregular hours, temporary or unstable, required little trust, or were not someone's primary means of support. However, the conceptualization of a "real job" may change with age, education, or dissatisfaction with employment. The implications of this for socialization are that colloquialisms not only inform understandings of work, they may also reinforce class distinctions and ignore elements of meaning and value in work that is paid and unpaid. Furthermore, college students may be considered as being in an anticipatory stage of socialization and have a difficult time seeing how the work and skills they use as students are related to work and labor.

Socialization is an important concept for this study because UCCs are sources of anticipatory socialization messages. Many career planning activities will take place in the anticipatory stage for college students seeking full-time employment or a position that will allow

them to utilize the skills and knowledge they developed in college after graduating. Finding value and skill congruence in future employment is one of the objectives of anticipatory socialization (Feldman, 1976, 1981). The UCC supports deliberate action to collect information about a number of careers and job targets in an effort to help students find congruence between personal and organizational values and individual skills and organizational needs. Career coaches directly communicate with students about what to expect in the job search process, such as how employers and other professional connections would expect them to act during interviews and networking events. In addition, the textual artifacts of the UCC (its website, online videos, social media, and other printed brochures and flyers) also communicate socializing messages.

Socialization messages can be contradictory and ambiguous in nature since they come from a variety of sources (Jablin, 1985). Career expectations learned during a lifetime can be mutually reinforcing and or contradictory and incompatible, which leads individuals to have different expectations of work from one another (Knights & Willmott, 1999). Therefore, it seems inevitable that coaches will engage with issues of socialization in their work with students. This study extends research on socialization to work by sorting out one such possible avenue for socializing messages in an institution of higher education. Furthermore it reveals the political side of career planning. UCC discourses provide students with knowledge that inherently privileges certain conceptualizations of work (R. Clair, 1996). Revealing these conceptualizations sheds light on the structuring of higher education career discourses and the beliefs and values held by career planning practitioners.

Meaningful Work

One increasingly popular concept in career research is *meaningful work* (Bowie, 1998; Cheney et al., 2008; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). Socialization literature addresses how

communication imbues work with certain values and meaning (Cheney, Lair, Ritz, & Kendall, 2010; R. Clair, 1996), and research on meaningful work specifically explores what those meanings are. The concept of meaningful work commonly includes discussion of job satisfaction, work-life balance, calling, and work that is personally fulfilling with a prosocial element (Cheney et al., 2008). The investigation of meaningful work is on the rise due to a recent increased interest in positive organizational scholarship examining how individuals flourish and find satisfaction through and at work. Meaningfulness is hypothesized as one of the four values (along with leisure time, money, and security) that influences decisions made about work (Ciulla, 2000). Studying discourses of work present at all levels of society in interpersonal relationships and pop culture, including symbols, messages, and narratives about work, reflect and contribute to popular understandings of meaningfulness.

Cheney et al. (2008) offered a summary of research leading to a collection of common characteristics of meaningful work. Some of the prominent characteristics are the sense that what one does in an organization makes a difference, having good colleagues and feeling united with them, being independent and able to develop and use one's talents, having influence, receiving adequate income, and contributing to a greater good. The experience of meaningful work can vary widely because of individual differences and work-value orientations. Importantly, meaningfulness is not simply a characteristic of job task (Behson, Eddy, & Lorenzet, 2000). Individuals are socialized and educated to pursue particular intrinsic and extrinsic goods that contribute to their sense of meaningfulness (Beadle & Knight, 2012). Individual differences and value orientations explain how work commonly seen as drudgery or that is framed as dirty or repetitive can be experienced as meaningful (Dik et al., 2009; Isaksen, 2000; Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006).

Individuals who describe their work as a calling have reported greater work satisfaction. Believing that one has a calling supports people's desire to elevate the meaning of work beyond its utility and financial reward (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014). The assumption that one's work benefits others can serve to protect employees against burnout and decreased job satisfaction (Dik et al., 2009). Calling has been conceptualized as a transcendent summon or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness in a work role that is primarily motivated by other-oriented values. Career counselors may facilitate discussions of calling using narrative and constructionist techniques and lead clients to focus on the social function of their work tasks and infuse value into their work by its broader occupational mission (Dik et al., 2009).

When careers are viewed as calling rather than "just a job," paid work becomes a means to transcendent fulfillment and the primary site for enacting one's life purpose (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014). Although calling has largely been theorized as contributing to positive work outcomes such as job satisfaction, authors have begun to explore the dark side of calling (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014; Duffy et al., 2011). The requirement of calling can constrain choices of paid-labor and how one occupies her time outside of her job. Individuals may feel obligated to accept undesirable working conditions such as low salaries, inept management, or unpaid overtime because they feel morally bound to their occupation (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014).

Research showed that the discourse of calling is appealing to college students as large numbers of surveyed college students have reported their desires to make contributions to society through their careers (Duffy & Raque-Bogdan, 2010). College students who reported having a calling also reported having high levels of career decidedness, self-clarity, and career commitment (Duffy et al., 2011). Complicating the discourse of calling is the common message

that young adults can pursue any career they desire regardless of their talents and competencies (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014). This can negatively affect career planning because when individuals are overwhelmed with the number of options for employment, are not able to identify a calling, or when they select an occupation or field that is not suited to their abilities, they are less likely to obtain the benefits of finding a calling such as sense of identity and increased self-esteem (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014).

The ethics associated with meaningful work have been explored to consider the questions, “What are the conditions that provide for meaningful work?” and “Whose responsibility is meaningful work?” (Bowie, 1998; Michaelson, 2011; Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, & Dunn, 2014). Reflecting on the works of Immanuel Kant, Bowie (1998) listed six conditions for meaningful work. Meaningful work is work that is freely entered into, allows for workers to exercise their autonomy and independence, enables the development of rational capacities and moral development, and does not interfere with how workers wish to obtain happiness (p. 1083). He contended that Kant argued that work enables the development of self-hood and the ability for an individual to exercise autonomy and independence. Ultimately meaningful work is necessary for respecting humanity in a business environment. Michaelson (2011) continued this line of thought with the assertion that meaningful work is not entirely in control of the worker and that employers are responsible for providing the conditions for meaningful work to be possible. This provides a practical challenge for it is unclear to what extent jobs can fill Bowie’s (1998) criteria for meaningful work. It is also unknown if workers would prioritize meaningfulness over other aspects of work and opportunities such as making more money. Although being paid a living wage contributes to one’s ability to live independently, intrinsic

meaningfulness seems to be presented as more valuable than the extrinsic rewards offered by work (Michaelson, 2011).

Employability

The ability and likelihood one will obtain work depends on a variety of factors including the labor market and individuals skills, connections, and attributes. One concept used to group a variety of these objective and subjective factors is *employability* (De Vos et al., 2011; Fugate et al., 2003). Building on the work of Van der Heijde and Van der Heijde (2006), De Vos et al. (2011) defined employability as, “the continuous fulfilling, acquiring, or creating of work through the use of competences—an individuals’ knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to adequately perform various tasks and carry responsibilities within a job, and to their adaptability to changes in the internal and external labor market” (p. 439). One’s level of employability does not assure employment but speaks to the probability of obtaining employment and self-managing careers that fit new boundaryless and protean career models (Fugate et al., 2003; Yorke, 2004). In these career models, employment security is replaced by employability, which is developed through the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills that are desirable to a number of employers (De Vos et al., 2011; Hillage & Pollard, 1998).

Fugate et al. (2003) theorized employability as a combination of career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital. Career identity is how one defines herself in a work context over a period of time (Fugate et al., 2003). Commonly conveyed in the form of narratives, individuals create stories to frame and make sense of their career related experiences (Ashforth & Fugate, 2001). Career identity can give direction to one’s future by illuminating the meaning and usefulness of these work experiences. It answers the questions of who one is or wants to be in the world of work and provides cognitive schema that guide behavior (Locke,

Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). For example, if a student desires to become an advertising and public relations professional, she might major in strategic communications, obtain an internship in an advertising agency, and make connections with other working professionals in the field. Her choices are fueled by a budding career identity and an expected return on her efforts, which might be to better develop the skills and experiences that further shape and nuance her identity.

The second dimension, personal adaptability, refers to individuals' ability and willingness to change or manage personal factors such as dispositions and behaviors to meet the demands of a continually changing work environment (Fugate et al., 2003). Five individual qualities are particularly relevant to adaptability: optimism, propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control, and generalized self-efficacy. Optimists have a positive outlook on the future, view change as a challenge and approach it with confidence in their abilities. An optimistic person maybe more psychologically equipped to deal with periodic unemployment or job uncertainty, which is likely to become more of a trend in the labor market (Jarvis & Keeley, 2003).

Those with a propensity to learn scan the environment to learn about threats and opportunities to develop skills to engage with others (Fugate et al., 2003). A broad competency package is important to an individual's ability to cope with change and adapt (Van der Heijden, de Lange, Demerouti, & Van der Heijde, 2009). De Vos et al. (2011) argued that organizations can also contribute to the competency development of employees by providing stimulating learning environments where participation in competency building activities such as training is supported by all organizational members. Competency development coupled with organizational support has been shown to increase individuals' self-perceived employability as well as career satisfaction (De Vos et al., 2011).

The characteristics of being open and having an internal locus of control complement a propensity to learn. These qualities lead individuals to accept change, be proactive, and plan in times of uncertainty. These individuals may seek out competency-building activities to proactively develop skill sets for opportunities that may come along or that they actively seek out. Generalized self-efficacy is an individual's judgment of her ability to handle a variety of situations and successfully navigate life challenges. So when presented with an opportunity, those with high personal adaptability should be more confident in their pursuit of the opportunity (Fugate et al., 2003).

Along with career identity and personal adaptability, the final dimension of employability is social and human capital. Human and social capital factors include competencies such as "knowing how," "knowing why," and "knowing whom" (Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters, & De Witte, 2014). Social capital is the support embedded in social networks. Social and formal networks can offer a wealth of insider knowledge to individuals about job positions, companies and fields (Deborah Wright & Konrad, 2001). Network size and strength influence the value of information and opportunities accessible. Human capital refers to a number of personal characteristics such as age, education, work experience and training, job performance, and cognitive abilities that allow an individual to meet the performance expectation of a job. Human capital theory has been a useful theoretical framework for studying employability in the context of higher education as education is an important investment in human capital (Cai, 2013; Wittekind et al., 2009). A basic function of education is to cultivate people to meet the needs of the labor market, but only recently has research been conducted on students' transitions from educational institutions to business and other work environments (Cai, 2013). The dimensions of career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital come together to build a

framework for employability. Career identity guides individuals to explore and seek certain job opportunities; personal adaptability allows them to adjust to fit a variety of those opportunities; social capital connects individuals to others who can assist in providing opportunities and information relevant to job seekers while their human capital prepares them to meet work role expectations (Fugate et al., 2003).

Rothwell, Jewell, and Hardie (2009) also discussed employability as multi-faceted but separate it conceptually into internal and external dimensions. Employability's internal factors are an individual's vocational, job-related, and job search knowledge, skills in critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and potential to learn (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Rothwell, Herbert, & Rothwell, 2008; Yorke, 2004). The external factors include the state of the labor market and demand for particular skill sets. In one study, Rothwell et al. (2008) focused on employability factors for college-level job seekers and discovered that university brand was an external factor that influenced students' self-perceived employability more so than their engagement with their academic studies. In other words, students believed the prestige of their university's brand was more influential in their likelihood to obtain employment than their academic experiences. Considering these factors, university career centers have a clear opportunity to facilitate the development of students' job seeking knowledge and skills and help them leverage external factors such as university brand.

As important as the attempt at theorizing employability as an objective measurable element, self-perceptions of employability are often explored to elaborate on the psychological elements of employability. Self-perceived employability is the individual's perceptions of her ability to obtain and maintain employment (Rothwell et al., 2008; Rothwell et al., 2009; Vanhercke et al., 2014). It also considers competencies such as an individual's perceptions of her

abilities, capacities, and skills that increase her employment opportunities, and perceived dispositional perceptions of attitudes related to career and work in general (Vanhercke et al., 2014).

The practical manifestation of individuals' desires to possess a high degree of employability may be their attempts to continually develop their skills so that they remain competitive in a labor market where organizations are becoming flatter and unemployment is periodic (Hallier, 2009; Jarvis & Keeley, 2003). The idea of employability is attractive to millennials, who are characterized as desiring large amounts of autonomy and flexibility in their careers (Finn & Donovan, 2013). But offering employability as a simple solution to the trend in decreased job security calls into question whether those who embrace the concept as practice actually thrive. Little research has been conducted on the outcome of employability programs and policies, and advocates of the approach have been accused of spouting hollow rhetoric that relates little to actual organizational practice and policy (Hallier, 2009). A critical view of employability contends that the promotion of competency building employability programs allows organizations to distance themselves from the responsibility of protecting jobs and providing stable work and elevates individual worker responsibility over collective organizational support (Hallier, 2009).

Similar to the question of whether employers are ethically obligated to provide the conditions for meaningful work, there is the question of whether employers are ethically obligated to provide and support programs to increase the employability of their employees. Skill development may enhance worker performance in an organization but may also increase the likelihood that highly employable employees will elect to leave the organization for other opportunities. Therefore supporting employability simultaneously can advantage a company

through developing its human capital but also increase the likelihood that employees will choose to leave to seek better opportunities.

Empowerment

Empowerment and in particular the empowerment of students in higher education is relevant to the study of university career services. Empowered learners are said to be more motivated to perform tasks, find those tasks meaningful, feel competent to perform them, and believe what they do matters than those that do not feel empowered (Houser & Frymier, 2009). These characteristics complement the personal adaptability and human capital dimensions of employability in that they have to do with being proactive and acquiring and utilizing skills (Fugate et al., 2003). There are many definitions of the term *empowerment*, but for the purposes of this project, I use a version from Geroy et al.'s (1998) study on employee empowerment to conceptualize student empowerment in career planning. Empowerment is conceptualized as “the process of providing [students] with the necessary guidance and skill to enable autonomous decision making (including accountability and the responsibility) for making these decisions within acceptable parameters, that are a part of an organizational culture” (p. 57).

This definition is appropriate because it was conceived considering the relationship between individuals in a position of power (managers or mentors) and subordinates (employees and mentees) and how superiors may attempt to facilitate the empowerment of subordinates. Similar to this, career center staff members are in the position to offer support to students in mentorship-like roles. Empowerment can be further elaborated to be the act of giving the people (in this case students) who are closest to problems more autonomy in decision making to solve the problems (Blanchard, 1997; Vogt, 1997). In the case of career planning, the term “problem”

can be interpreted as students' need to find employment when they leave college, develop a professional persona, and or imagine paths toward future career goals.

Vogt (1997) discussed important factors of empowerment and argued that empowerment has boundaries and requires skills in decision making, problem solving, and the ability to gather and use information. The discussion of empowerment boundaries resonates with the definition provided by Geroy et al. (1998) in that in order for individuals to be effective and accepted they must recognize the constraints and flexibility inherent in a given organizational culture. For example, it is common convention for a cover letter to be no more than one or two pages. A job seeker may work to individualize the presentation of her skills and value in the letter but failing to conform to length conventions such as submitting a single paragraph or five pages for this type of professional document will distract from the content of the resume and may result in negative evaluations (Lucas & Rawlins, 2015). Considering these factors, the strategic performance empowerment model was created to optimize employee potential. In this model the path to empowerment may be accomplished through coaching, modeling, and career path development (Geroy et al., 1998).

In the context of this model, a coach would help an individual develop, learn, and grow. There is less of a focus on teaching new skills and more on setting up an environment where individuals feel able to make decisions for themselves. Modeling is a part of the skills-based training where individuals model the behaviors and actions of respected and successful people. Finally, there is a focus on career path development where there are clear goals and discernible paths to achieve these goals. Applying this model to career planning, students' accomplishments would be recognized by a coach during the time when students experience an increased level of responsibility and opportunity to advance on their career plan.

While one cannot force another to be empowered, individuals in positions of influence (managers, teachers) can help facilitate the empowerment of others. In Geroy et al.'s (1998) and Vogt's (1997) studies, the organizational superior played a key role in other organizational members' empowerment by providing guidance and opportunity for skill development within culturally acceptable parameters of an organization. Frymier, Shulman, and Houser (1996) concluded that in addition to individual characteristics, the primary factors influencing student empowerment were a teacher's immediacy behaviors and ability to make course content relevant. The career coaching model used by the UCC in this study complements these perspectives well by offering the students chances to have one-on-one contact with coaches who are skilled at providing career guidance.

Student empowerment in career planning can lead to numerous benefits for the students and universities they attend. First, empowered students may hone skills that they can use the rest of their careers, which may lead to them to live more productive and meaningful lives. Second, graduates employment achievement improves the reputation and value of a university education, which could lead to better federal assessments of higher education institutions. Finally, successful alumni may be more likely to donate to their former institutions. Implementing a career coaching model that facilitates student empowerment could prove beneficial to universities and their students.

Career Coaching

Career coaching is a relatively new practice that gained popularity in the 1990s (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003; Knowdell, 2009). The general goal of career coaching is to assist clients in identifying their skills, making satisfying career choices, and becoming more valuable workers (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003). Similar to a life or an athletic coach, career coaches are task-oriented

and help their clients set attainable goals which may allow them to progress to more preferred futures (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003; Knowdell, 2009; Orem et al., 2007). According to the training materials of the UCC in this study, its model of career coaching happens in three steps. First, coaches help students assess their interests, preferences, values, and strengths. Second, coaches provide tools for helping students explore and research possible careers and establish goals and priorities. Third, coaches help students establish action plans to reach their goals including acquiring technical academic and job search skills and experiences such as internships and professional network development. Essentially coaches seek to help students answer the following questions: “Where am I now?” “Where do I want to go?” and “How do I get there?” (See Figure 1).

Career counseling and career coaching have complementary purposes for practitioners and are often thought to be interchangeable terms in the field of career development. Yet, the professional relationship between counselors and coaches has been contentious. This is because while conceptual difference can be identified between the professions, there is overlap in the methods and practices practitioners use with clients. Concern has been expressed that career coaches are essentially engaging in counseling sessions without being licensed or insured to do so (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003). A number of organizations such as the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the Career Planning and Adult Development Network, and the Career Coach Academy offer career coaching training and certification, but the profession of career coaching is largely still unregulated.

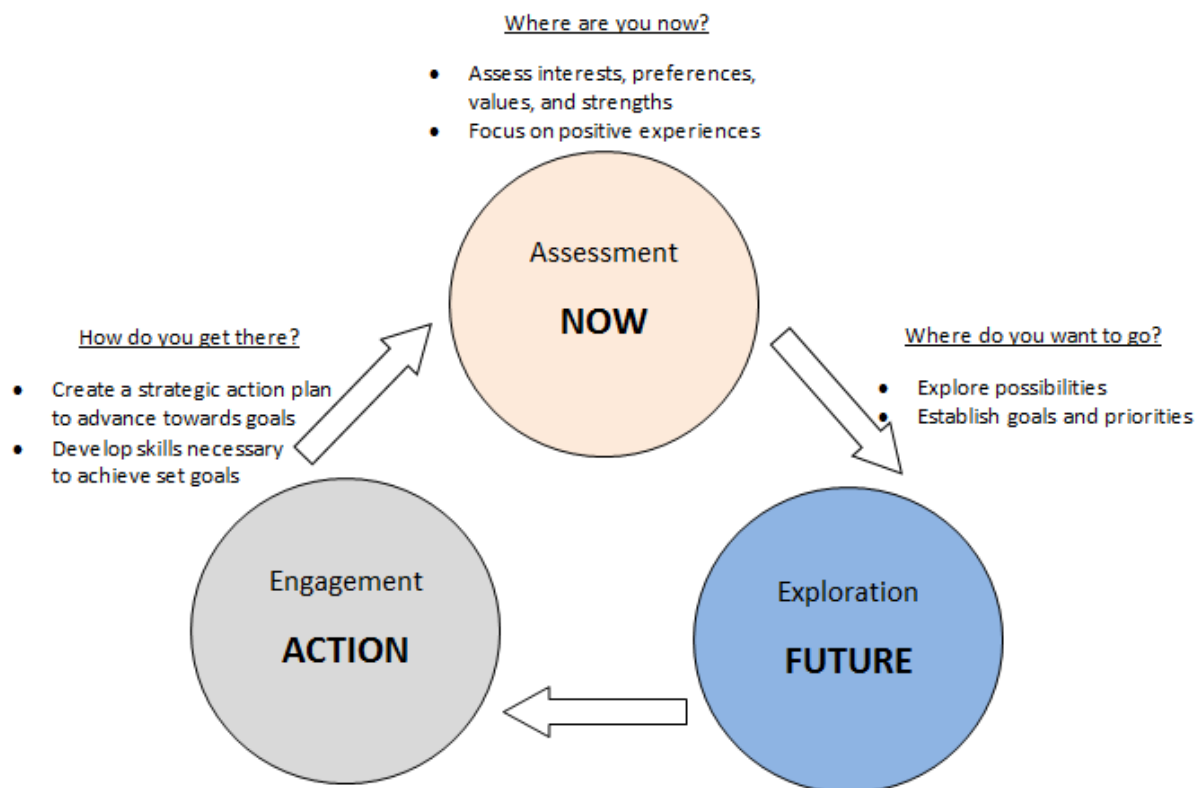


Figure 1. The Appreciative Career

Despite this controversy, career coaching may be a viable option to UCCs that do not have licensed counselors in their offices and are able to refer students with mental health needs to other university counseling centers. Coaches may avoid assuming the role of a counselor by taking an approach that attempts to minimize the discussion of personal issues and past problems to focus on individuals' strengths and possible futures. Of course, work permeates many areas of life, and issues with work and career can often be personal, so exploring clients' skills and desires for the future may require some reflection on the past. One can go further in distinguishing counseling from coaching by looking at the relationship between the practitioner and client. Coaches largely work on achieving tasks and problem solving where counselors use psychological interventions to help clients achieve self-understanding. Coaches are also less restricted by traditional counseling boundaries and may take a more active role in providing assistance (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003).

A hypothetical scenario can help illustrate potential differences between coaches and counselors. Consider Sharon, a sophomore at a large university known for its engineering

program. She declared as a mechanical engineering major freshman year at her parents' wishes because they believed it was a respectable and lucrative career choice. Sharon does well in all of her subjects, enjoys in advanced mathematics, but dreads attending her engineering courses. She is considering changing her major but is worried about what type of career she could have and her parents' reactions. A career coach might ask Sharon to do a personal inventory of her hobbies and interests and take an assessment such as the Strong Skills Inventory. After looking at the results, a coach notices that Sharon enjoys creative pursuits and loves playing online computer games and may suggest she investigate careers in game development. They look at labor statistics for rates of employment and average salaries together and Sharon thinks her parents might be swayed by the numbers and is excited to explore a different career. The coach is even able to help her find the name of an alumnus who works at a gaming company. Sharon leaves the appointment with a plan to investigate common majors of game developers and set up an informational interview with the alumnus.

A career counselor might handle this situation differently. In addition to self-reflections and inventories of interest, a counselor might focus on helping Sharon understand why the wishes of her parents play such a significant role in her life and identify ways in which she might start a productive dialog with them about her career opportunities and potential major change. Sharon receives help from both practitioners on her academic major change dilemma but each focuses on different elements of the situation to help her move forward.

According to the training material issued by this UCC, the Appreciate Coaching (AC) model (Orem et al., 2007) is the guiding philosophy toward the career coaching model employed by staff at this center. AC takes a social constructionist view of the world by contending that individuals construct unique interpretations of the world based on their language use and life

experiences. As such, AC seeks to help clients recognize their abilities to alter their own realities and futures through the application of appreciate inquiry (AI), positive psychology (PP), solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) and positive organizational scholarship (POS).

Appreciative inquiry is an approach to questioning that focuses on successes, motivations, dreams, and possibilities. This approach facilitates an atmosphere of positivity and helps clients frame their situation in a positive light. PP additionally focuses on clients' strengths rather than overcoming weakness and problems. SFBT influences the action step of the career coaching process and focuses on steps to client-set goals rather than dwelling on past problems and failures. Finally POS seeks to identify what makes organizations successful and foster positive change, human relationships, and organizational strength. The foundations of this type of coaching mark it as an action-oriented approach to career planning where coaches emphasize hope, positivity, and the strengths of their clients.

Combined, research in socialization, meaningful work, employability, empowerment, and career coaching provide a theoretically rich backdrop for data to be analyzed. Career coaching, and specifically the appreciative career coaching model in the context of the UCC, is designed with the goal of facilitating student empowerment as they move toward an end goal of employability. Ultimately, students are responsible for embracing professional development and the labor market dictates the supply and demand of certain types of jobs, but UCC activities are tied to and can potentially affect graduate employment outcomes such as placement and earnings. Therefore UCCs have the potential to influence university performance ratings if they are utilized by a significant amount of the student population. By examining UCC discourse I identify strategies and tactics UCC organizational members use to attempt to achieve

employability goals with students and shed light on the value and role of empowerment in career planning practices.

Research Questions

I began this study with the assumption that the goal of the UCC was to help students make satisfying career planning decisions immediately and throughout their lives. But the manner in which career center staff communicated to students and the information and skills they taught was unknown. To better investigate the value of career services and understand it in a communication context, I used three research questions to guide my data collection and analysis.

RQ1: How do UCC staff conceptualize career as a foundational concept of their work and when communicating with students?

RQ2: What employability value do UCC services provide to students?

RQ3: How does career services discourse frame the university's responsibility toward students and their future employment?

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

The study of employment in the United States has been dominated by government agencies such as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau, who provide us with statistical evidence on employment trends. These numbers are useful as a generalized snapshot of the state of employment but fail to provide subjective and nuanced accounts of the job search process. Motivated by statistical reports claiming college graduates are having or will have a difficult time obtaining employment ("Half of recent college graduates underemployed or jobless, analysis says," April 23, 2012), the aim of this study is to better understand how UCC staff believe they are helping college students prepare to apply for jobs or advance a career path after college. Specifically I look at the organizational and interpersonal messages about work, career, and employability as they are deployed by the UCC and its staff.

The major dimensions of research are philosophical commitments, methodology, and methods. These dimensions influence how research questions and projects are formulated and implemented (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This chapter explains my philosophical commitments (ontology, epistemology, axiology) and how they lead me to utilize a critical interpretive methodology (Deetz, 1982). Additionally I explain why the qualitative methods of interviewing, participant observation, and textual analysis are appropriate methods for investigating the research questions put forth. Finally, this chapter provides information on the characteristics of participants, and how data were gathered and analyzed. The Institutional Review Board approval, interview protocol, and informed consent documents are included in Appendices A-E.

Philosophical Commitments

A researcher's philosophical commitments guide the structuring of research questions and choice of data collection and analysis methods. These commitments can be understood through a discussion of ontological, epistemological, and axiological beliefs. Ontology refers to the philosophical belief system about the nature of social reality, or more narrowly, the nature of what we seek to know, what can be known, and how it can be known (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Littlejohn and Foss (2008) offered a set philosophical questions for pondering ontology. "To what extent do humans make real choices? Is human behavior best understood in terms of states or traits? Is human experience primarily individual or social? To what extent is communication contextual?" (pp. 28-29). I articulate responses to these questions in this section.

The continuum of ontological beliefs generally span from the assumption that there is an external objective reality to the belief in multiple socially constructed realities that are constantly being structured and revised (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). I ascribe to the belief that humans' experience of reality is socially constructed. The material world around us and our interaction with others have meaning and are meaningful insofar as humans imbue them with meaning. However, I do believe that some meaning and social process (such as hierarchal and bureaucratic organizations or linear career models) can become so heavily entrenched in human interaction that they can appear as natural phenomenon in an objective reality (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991). These meanings and processes make up a reality that is stable enough to measure but are still the consequences of human meaning making and therefore can be disrupted through changes in communication practices (Deetz, 2005).

Epistemology is the philosophical belief system that explores how we can come to know about reality. Some of the philosophical questions of epistemology include: To what extent can

knowledge be certain and exist before experience? Through what process does knowledge arise? (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). On the epistemological belief continuum, positivists and post-positives adhere to objective ways of knowing, while interpretive and critical scholars commit to subjective ways to knowing (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). While I do not dismiss others' use and belief in objectivity and the practice of quantitative research, I recognize that the questions that interest me most, which often focus on the "why" and "how" of a particular individual or group's action, can be accessed more directly through a qualitative research process. I believe that individual group members' experiences and understanding of reality differ. Those differences nuance the often monolithic and generalized understanding of organizational process. I believe that subjective ways of knowing can still be pursued through a qualitative, rigorous, systematic and social scientific approach to research, but I seek out particular and situated accounts that localize and diversify patterns of thought and interaction.

Axiology is the philosophical belief system that considers the role of values in the research practice. Questions that address issues of axiology are: Can theory be value free? To what extent does the practice of research and examination influence the studied subject? Should scholarship attempt to achieve social change? (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Interpretivists and critical scholars both attempt to recognize how their values and identities have influenced the research process, including their choice of research topics, theory, and data analysis techniques. From a critical perspective, theory and the use of theory are value-laden and compel researchers to engage in the world in which they study (Deetz, 2005). Through significant and continuous self-reflection, I recognize the privileges and disadvantages associated with my social position as a heterosexual, white, able bodied, upper-middle-class female, who was raised by educators in a two-parent home. I was expected to go to college and was financially supported by my university

and parents and only kept a part-time job to pay for nonessentials and build my resume. I was raised to value higher education, technical and skilled labor, community engagement, compassion, and equal rights and protection. I am attracted to and motivated by critical positions that challenge singularity and elitism, while attempting to recognize how I have benefited from the systems I wish to challenge. I choose to promote a more critical understanding of career planning through the use of a critical interpretive paradigm and qualitative research.

The interpretive paradigm. Putnam (1983) explained that the study of interpretation is the study of meaning and the way individuals make sense of their world through communicative behaviors. Interpretive scholars attempt to provide in-depth understandings of lived experiences and believe that the phenomena studied in the social sciences are socially constructed (Zoller & Kline, 2008). A basic ontological assumption of the interpretive approach is that perceptions of reality are created as individuals attach meaning to phenomena through interaction (Zoller & Kline, 2008). Interpretive theory does not attempt to be generalizable or predictive but is contextually bound and seeks insight into empirical events (Deetz, 2001; Zoller & Kline, 2008). In particular, many interpretive organizational studies use culture as a dominant metaphor for organizational life and seek to understand the social production and maintenance of organizational realities through everyday communication and activities, rituals and stories (Deetz, 2001). Schwandt (2000) described three tenets of the interpretive tradition: a) human actions are meaningful; b) there is an ethical commitment of respect and fidelity of the “life world”; and c) the contribution of human subjectivity to knowledge should be emphasized.

Putnam (1983) asserted that interpretivists have a concern for social order, but they treat experience as subjective and society as socially constructed. Thus, the role of the researcher is to record and report others’ “life worlds” or the “world of objects, people, actions, and institutions

that is constituted in a characteristically taken-for-granted fashion” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 33). The researcher tries to understand behaviors and motivations from the participants’ points of view and attempts to articulate those worlds to others. Interpretivists focus on the development of insight. They recognize that their investigations position them as co-constructors of the realities they examine but attempt to describe a way of life and a culture recognizable to its members and comprehensible to outsiders. To articulate realities, the researcher comes to know through observation and may employ a variety of methods such as ethnography (participant observation), interviews (structured and informal), focus groups, etc. (Deetz, 2001).

The social “life worlds” of individuals vary to such a degree that two never match exactly, but through communication we have the ability to at least partially understand what others tell about their experiences (Schwandt, 2000). The strength of interpretivism is that it can reveal the complexity of sense-making and complicate grand generalizations to reveal and privilege marginalized perspectives. Interpretive research can provide insight into and rich description of a diversity of life worlds. Through in-depth interviews and participant observations, I am able to provide insight into what organizational members perceive themselves to know, believe, and do in order to operate within the organization and how these beliefs and routines are produced and reproduced (Deetz, 2001).

The critical paradigm. Critical researchers see organizations as historical creations and political sites with power relationships that privilege and suppress people and ideas in society (Deetz, 2001). The Enlightenment led to the belief that democratic societies required objective information about the physical, biological, and social world (Hanna, 1991). Hanna (1991) argued that this belief pushes social scientists to theoretical ideology that can be oppressive and alienating. A goal of critical research is to critique forms of domination and asymmetry and to

create a society and workplaces where all members can contribute to systems that meet human needs (Deetz, 2001). In an organizational context this critique seeks to make organizations more representative of the interests of a variety of workers and stakeholders (Deetz, 2005).

What unifies critical scholars is the axiological assumption that research should include marginalized voices and that the researcher should share power with participants (Davis, Gallardo, & Lachland, 2010). Critical scholars consider struggle, conflict, and tensions (which can be executed in organized and measurable ways) to be the natural state of social systems (Deetz, 2001). Mumby (1997) described critical theory as a discourse of suspicion. He explained that this discourse argues for a social constructionist view of the world that addresses the issues of power, ideology, and how certain realities are privileged over others. Within a discourse of suspicion, surface level meanings and behaviors are suspect and obscure and limit the possibility for a genuinely democratic society.

Ideological critiques aim to identify false consensus and produce “dissensus” where conflict has been suppressed and the universalization of some interests are treated as if they were everyone’s interests (Deetz, 2001). The critical approach is heavily value-laden and has an activist dimension. For the critical researcher “it is not enough to understand the world: one must act in it” (Deetz, 2005, p. 91). Critical researchers at some point must make a claim about the way in which society *should be* changed. Ironically, the researcher who advocates for greater equality declares how others should perceive the world and what others should want. In general, this means that a critical researcher explores alternative communication practices and decision making processes that are more democratic (Deetz, 2005).

The critical-interpretive paradigm. The philosophical boundaries of interpretive and critical thought are not clearly demarcated except in the cases of simplistic grids that utilize

“over characterizations and rigid standards” to articulate them (Deetz, 2001, p. 16). In practice, Deetz (2001) contended that researchers borrow and “steal insights across the lines” and that consistency in schools of thought is less important than interesting analysis. “Most researchers and teachers do not cluster around a prototype of each but gather at the crossroads, mix metaphors and borrow lines from other discourse, dodging criticism by co-optation” (Deetz, 2001, p. 16). Interpretive research has begun “to question the logic of displaying a consensual unified culture and [has] attended more to its fragmentation tensions and processes of conflict suppression” (Deetz, 2001, p. 25).

Deetz (1982) developed a critically-based position within a more general interpretive paradigm. He argued this position offers the greatest value to organizational communication researchers. Based on the premise that all knowledge and personal claims about reality are inherently relational, he contended that organizational members borrow conceptual meanings from their organizations and the society in which they are situated. Critical interpretive research should demonstrate where false consensus about reality exists and the means by which it is constructed (p.133). It has a goal of understanding and reconstructing actors’ meanings as well as pursuing appropriate action to overcome political blockages. Through the exploration of situated context and meaning, the researcher explores the economic, political, and community influences on the organization’s “definition of problems, perception of events, and formulation of response” (Deetz, 1982, p. 139).

Qualitative Research

Corbin and Strauss (2008) asserted that qualitative research “allows researchers to get at the inner experiences of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (p. 12). This approach is fluid, evolving, and dynamic

as compared to more rigid and structured quantitative measures (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition, a qualitative approach is best suited for research projects and questions that seek the intimate, individualized, and personal experiences of participants and look for the “how” instead of the “how many” (Silverman, 2013). Tracy (2013) outlined an inductive emic approach to qualitative data analysis, where behavior is described from actors’ points of view and is context-specific instead of describing behavior in terms of external predetermined criteria. With this approach, the researcher observes interactions and conceptualizes general patterns from these observations. The researcher makes tentative claims about these patterns and then re-examines them in the field before drawing conclusions that contribute to and build theory. In the field of career counseling, there has been a call for practitioners to use more qualitative methods with clients to discover the discourses they privilege in their lives (McMahon et al., 2003). This call makes it additionally appropriate to use qualitative inquiry to gain an in depth understanding of the discourses that are privileged within a UCC.

Through the methods of interviewing, participant observation, and textual analysis, I sought participants’ tacit knowledge and thick descriptions of social reality (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) in the specific context of a UCC. The use of three methods for the purpose of data triangulation is an important contribution to the rigor of this project. Triangulation allows for greater confirmation of results by using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning (Stake, 2005). Triangulation, however, does not fail if data do not converge on a fixed point. Rather, it also can reveal tension among multiple constructed realities (Seale, 1999). The use of multiple methods contributes to a more holistic and thorough understanding of participants’ experiences and organizational messages.

Organization Profile

Career services were offered to students in this large research-intensive Midwestern university in a decentralized model consisting of a number of organizations. This group of organizations responsible for services consisted of five separate career centers: the University Career Center (UCC), Business Career Services Center, Engineering Career Center, Journalism Career Center, and Music Career Services Center, all of which worked relatively autonomously. The UCC primarily assisted students in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Schools of Education, Social Welfare, and increasingly Architecture, Design and Planning. This study focuses on the UCC since it targeted the greatest number of students. During the academic year of 2012-2013, the UCC's annual report recorded that it employed 13 professional staff, six graduate career coaches, seven peer career assistants, five marketing/design interns, and two student program coordinators and that more than 10,000 students attended its workshops and events.

At the time of data collection, the UCC's stated vision was to be recognized as "a premier provider of career services that results in our students leading more meaningful, purposeful lives." The center was structured into four service teams: Career Education, Student Employment/Student Services, Career Networks, and Administration. These were staffed by full-time employees, student workers, and interns. The UCC provided career coaching, and events and workshops on campus that addressed perennial topics such as cover letter writing, interviewing, career fairs, and developing a professional image through learning etiquette for business dinners and dressing appropriately. Rather uniquely, this center explicitly utilized a career coaching model rather than a counseling model, and staff who saw students in an advising capacity were trained to use a specific coaching model. The UCC's main website highlighted

upcoming events, advertised employment opportunities in the local and surrounding areas, connected students with potential employers, and provided information on career planning that students could access without stepping foot in the center. Students could even attend some on-campus presentations via online conferencing tools. The center's physical location was an office suite in the smaller of two student unions on campus and consisted of UCC staff offices and an open common area where students could browse print career resource documents that could help situate them into new careers and contribute provisional professional identities.

Data was collected in the Spring semester of 2014, though a pilot study consisting of some document analysis, an interview, and visits to the UCC sponsored career fair was conducted in the Spring and Fall of 2013 to sensitize the researcher with the center. Please see Appendix A for initial internal review board (IRB) approval and Appendix B for revisions made to the IRB application for Spring 2014 data collection. During these times, unemployment was high and the economy was recovering from a depressed state. These economic and employment realities placed a high demand on new graduates to be not only be well-educated in their fields but also adaptable and creative professionals. At the time of data collection, the UCC's mission was to educate students about career development, planning, and implementation processes; connect students with career opportunities; and enhance career opportunities for students. From the preferred language for resumes to what to wear on a job interview, the UCC assisted students in career planning and job placement. According to annual UCC reports from 2009-2013, the number of students seeking services had increased, with most interested in help with career planning, resumes, and cover letters. This means the UCC had influence over students as they sought ways to get ahead of their peers on the job market by promoting themselves well and demonstrating professional job-seeking skills.

Prior to data collection I met with senior-level staff to discuss my project and gain their support (see Appendix E for original contact letter). An agreement was reached where I was welcomed to attend all UCC events open to the student population and request voluntary interviews with staff and opportunities to shadow career coaches in student appointments. Upon the completion of the project I would (and did) present results and conclusions to staff and ask for feedback. After I had received approval from senior level staff, I was invited to a staff meeting where I explained my project to the majority of staff and let them know that I would be attending events and contacting them via email requesting interviews (see Appendix F for project summary sheet provided to staff).

Participants

Interview participants were organizational members of the UCC. Participants served in a variety of roles, including directors, assistant directors, career coaches, student and professional administrative staff in full-time and part-time capacities, and one affiliated faculty member. Nineteen interviews with individual in full and part-time positions and one interview with a group of student employees were recorded in the Spring of 2014. Using the UCC's staff page on its website I targeted full-time staff and part-time career coaches for interviews and utilized a group interview to speak to some of the part-time student support staff. By suggestion from graduate student career coach interviewees, I also interviewed a faculty member who regularly assisted in the training and teaching of vocational counseling and career psychology to graduate coaches.

All participants identified as white/Caucasian; five were men and 21 were women. To protect the identity of participants in data presentation, all participants were given female pseudonyms. The average age of participants was 35 years old. Twenty interviews were

transcribed by the researcher and totaled 440 pages of double-spaced text. Fifteen of the participants had completed or were in the progress of completing a masters or doctorate degree, while four participants had completed a bachelor's degree and were not currently enrolled in a graduate program. Seven participants (student employees) were in the progress of obtaining bachelor's degrees.

I attended eleven UCC events such as career fairs and resume writing workshops, UCC staff meetings, and student advising appointments on campus to collect participant observation data. On average an hour was spent at each event. In these events I interacted with students and other individuals present such as job recruiters or other faculty or staff. In these circumstances, IRB approval on ethnographic studies allowed me to forgo informed consent when it is impossible or impractical to acquire consent from large numbers of people such as attendees of a career fair. Twelve sets of fieldnotes were taken totaling 44 pages of double-spaced text, and 50 photographs were taken at the center and career fairs.

Research Methods

Interviewing. Eighteen individual semi-structured interviews and one group semi-structured interview were conducted with UCC staff. One semi-structured interview was conducted with a university faculty member who consults with the UCC and assists in the training of graduate student career coaches. Interviewing is a mode of knowledge production where participants are not reporting external facts but constructing situated accounts with the interviewer (Alvesson, 2003). While understanding that interview data can never be taken as objective truth, some of the major purposes of qualitative interviewing relevant to this study are to understand the social actor's experience, elicit language forms, gather information, and inquire about the past (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Understanding participants' experiences contributed to

my analysis and crafting a localized image of career development discourse. Learning commonly-used language forms and jargon assisted me in building rapport with participants to understand organizational culture. Interviews also allowed me to access information about the UCC and the day-to-day lives of participants that were not accessible in any other way such as through their website and staff biographies.

Semi-structured interviews are progressive scripts that guide participants to larger research questions (Dilley, 2000). Starting with closed-ended impersonal questions such as “how long have you worked at the UCC?” and “what is your educational background?” helped ease tension and build to more open-ended questions that related to overarching research questions such as “What are your interactions with students like?” “What does ‘career’ mean to you?” and “What do you hope students leave the UCC knowing?” The semi-structured interviewing protocol, which can be reviewed in Appendix C, provided a planned and ordered framework for the interview but was flexible enough to allow me to ask follow-up questions and revise the protocol as the project progresses (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Qualitative inquiry necessitates that researchers be flexible since surprising themes may emerge from ongoing data analysis that change the focus of the project (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Participant observation. Participant observation is an ethnographic tool that places researchers as active members of a community. They are involved in community life, talk to people, and observe them as they learn their view of reality (Agar, 1996). It has been described as both the most natural and most challenging form of qualitative data collection methods due to community access issues and since it is usually a relatively unstructured activity (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). Data generated are free-flowing and may consist of a researcher’s written fieldnotes in addition to sound recordings, images, and interviews. Agar (1996) presented

participant observation as more about observation than about participation and posited that data collected in this manner should be used to test out and potentially complicate what is learned in interviews and background research. Observations collected by the researchers through their participation at a site can be used to support or complicate suspect self-report data (Guest et al., 2013).

I participated in UCC workshops and events and sat in on two coaching sessions. The coaching sessions were recorded and transcribed, totaling 45 pages of double-spaced text. The main form of data collected at these events, however, was observational notes taken during and after, also referred to as fieldnotes. These notes are written accounts that filter community members' experiences and concerns through the perspectives of the ethnographer (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Fieldnotes are not a reflection of reality, and a researcher always has some effect on the scene in which she is involved (Fine, 1993). In order to minimize some reactivity on the part of community members, I participated in activities as students would. It is suggested that successful researchers who have an interest in "normal" behavior should attempt to fit into the scene well enough to be ignored even if they are doing abnormal things such as taking pictures, recording video or audio, or taking notes (Guest et al., 2013). For example, in a workshop on preparing for the career fair attendants were asked to write an elevator speech on-the-spot and practice it with a partner in the room. I did so and practiced with a student who also allowed me to ask him follow-up questions on how he came to be at the workshop after the session had concluded. I also wrote fieldnotes as unobtrusively as possible. I jotted details and occurrences down but then spent time after events writing up more detailed accounts (Agar, 1996; Emerson et al., 1995).

Issues of consent and revealing oneself to a community have been controversial in the field of ethnography (Fine, 1993; Fluehr-Lobban, 1994). Although my identity was revealed to UCC staff at the beginning of data collection, other participants in workshops and events did not always know the full extent of my purpose for being there. This choice was a practical and ethical one, and I made it for several reasons. First, my main research focus was on UCC staff, who were already aware of who I was. Second, it was not practical to introduce myself to and acquire consent from all participants who were attending events such as career fairs and workshops. In some cases, however, workshop attendants were asked to introduce themselves. In those situations I said I was a graduate student writing my dissertation on the practice of career planning and the work of the UCC. When there were no prior introductions and someone asked me who I was or what I was doing, I replied honestly that I was a graduate student interested in learning more about career development. Third, my goal was not to hide my identity but to preserve the intended objective of UCC activities. The purposes of the activities I attended were to provide students with career development resources and skills. I did not want to disrupt the events with intrusive data collection.

Textual Artifacts. The final source of data for this project was textual artifacts of the UCC that were collected during the Fall of 2013 through Spring of 2014. The artifacts included primarily its website but also brochures, flyers, and posters that the organization distributed. According to the UCC's 2012-2013 annual report, the UCC website had almost 130,000 total visits that year with nearly 7,000 unique visitors. Data gathered from the website and other textual artifacts assisted in comparing organizational macro level discourse with the individualized uses of language and micro discourses collected in interviews and participant observation.

Data Analysis

Interviews were audio recorded using a digital recording device. Interviews and other audio/visual recordings were transcribed by the researcher. In the case of UCC YouTube videos, I utilized the option for the site to do automatic transcription. Once transcription was completed, I checked them against recordings to ensure accuracy. Effort was made to preserve the naturalness and structure of the interviews and video recordings, including keeping original punctuation and commentary even if they were not grammatically correct or acceptable for written text (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The tools of data analysis that were used were thematic analysis and theoretical memoing. Thematic analysis is the search for emerging themes in data that are important to the description of the phenomenon in question (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Themes were identified through the reading and rereading of transcripts in order to code and categorize them. Codes are linkages between data posited by the researcher that have the core purpose of marking units of text as they relate meaningfully to concepts, themes and constructs (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Categories represent higher levels of abstraction than the concepts they represent (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Themes are noted when the discourse meets three criteria. A theme must be recurring, repeated, and presented with force (Owen, 1984). Recurrence is noted when data have the same thread of meaning despite different wording. Repetition is an extension of recurrence and occurs when key words, phrases and sentences are repeated in the same way. Forcefulness is noted with vocal inflection, volume, dramatic pauses or perhaps underlined and bolded words or phrases or other visual text markers.

Coding happened on three levels: open, axial, and selective (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008). During open coding data were broken down and given a conceptual label. Tracy (2013)

referred to these types of codes as primary cycle codes, which are largely descriptive and recognize local language constructs. During this phase, coding was unrestricted but the research questions were kept in mind to gently guide attention. For example, several codes were created from the quote below from administrator and career coach Patrice discussing career coaching:

The more the trend I think now is going towards that coaching philosophy and it's certainly adopted here and it's something that I don't know, I think I was 90% doing already. Now it has a formal name for it and I think most of my peers that I know from other institutions do it like that as well. There are times when certain students will break down crying, there are family issues that are going on, there are other things, I mean you are talking about their careers in some kind of capacity. So, there is some weight that comes to it. It is just when it is like clearly you are overwhelmed with a lot of this, your grades all this, maybe like I'm happy to start this conversation but we really need to refer you to somebody else to do the counseling part and I think that is where the distinction comes. There are just some elements that are just not in our boundaries and that is I guess how that starts to get defined.

After considering this excerpt, I created several open codes: 1) overwhelmed students, 2) emotional students, 3) coaching avoids emotions, 4) counseling engages emotions.

I developed a code book to help me compare codes with others for similarities and difference in order to form categories. After I had done a preliminary round of open coding on all data, approximately 25 percent of data was selected to build a preliminary code book (Tracy, 2013). Codes from five interviews, three sets of field notes, and all of the pages in the UCC website were entered into a spread sheet. This first set of codes totaled 257, but after examining the list and comparing codes, the list was condensed to 214 when redundant labels were

eliminated. For example, the codes “money motive,” “salary,” “money value,” and “financial reward” all described instances when salary was referenced as a factor considered in career planning. Once it was determined that these codes were used to describe the same phenomena by comparing the data they marked, the single code “money value” was preferred and used in subsequent coding.

Since I was familiar with the complete data set, having already coded and produced theoretical memos for all of the data, this set of codes was determined to be fairly representative though some additional codes were added as coding continued. Latter memos spoke to reaching saturation and by interview 15 no new insights and codes were being produced (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Similar patterns were identified in the memos produced from coding the fieldnotes and textual artifacts. After compiling and consolidating the code book it was determined that the concepts emerging from the data were well developed and defined and efforts to raise the theoretical level of codes commenced (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Open coding breaks data apart and to create collections of incidents; axial coding puts them back together and pushes them to a higher level of abstraction to generate theoretical constructs (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Axial coding takes the concepts generated in the first phase and crosscuts and relates them to one another to seek the full range of variation in phenomena under scrutiny (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008). For example, in the previous quote from Patrice, the codes “overwhelmed students” and “emotional students” were grouped into the larger category “student anxieties.” The code “coaching avoiding emotions” was grouped with other similar codes to develop the axial code “coaching boundaries” where the code “counseling engaging emotions” was grouped into “counseling boundaries.” When these axial codes were conceptualized I entered them into a spread sheet and sorted data marked with open codes into

appropriate categories. Eventually the list was pared down until all open codes had been accounted for and placed into a category. Revisiting the research questions, it was determined that some categories were not relevant to the scope of the project and some revealed unanticipated areas for theoretical exploration. These surprises, such as parallels between career services activities and employability dimensions, lead to some revision of the second research question. For example, research question two originally read “What is the value of career services?” but was revised to read “What employability value do UCC services provide to students?”

Each level of coding moves data up higher in levels of abstraction, so in the final phase of selective coding, all categories are unified around a core category that will represent the central phenomenon of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008). For example, the code “money value” was grouped with other codes such as “status,” “recognition,” and “helping others.” During axial coding the codes were united under the new category of “work values.” In selective coding this category was further elevated and combined with other axial codes such as “identifying passions” and “career possibilities” to create the core category of “meaningful work.”

Analysis is presented in a sequential manner when results are shared, but it was an iterative process where I moved back and forth from different levels of analysis and between reviewing literature, data collection, and analysis. In qualitative research, analysis actually begins when data is first collected with the practice of theoretical memoing. Memos are written records of ongoing analysis and may include asides and commentaries related to data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). They may be rudimentary early on but will develop in complexity and theoretical value as the researcher begins to raise codes to higher levels of abstraction (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Memos were a part of analysis for data gathered from

interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis. Combined with the coding process, they helped me see surprising patterns and make connections among axial codes. For example, a number of open codes focused on staff guiding students to take action and develop skills in their career exploration sessions and job search process. These codes were grouped to form the axial codes of “self-reflection,” “critical thinking,” and “strategic planning” that were then eventually placed into categories representing the different dimensions of employability (Fugate et al., 2003). It was through memoing and returning to literature that a link was identified among the codes and previously theorized dimensions of employability. “Employability” then became a core category.

Throughout the analysis process I met with my advisor to discuss my findings and consider different angles to approaching data and unseen connections. I also presented some preliminary results at the 2014 Organizational Communication Mini Conference at Purdue University and more developed results to several groups of communication and business faculty where I received suggestions on relevant literature and taking a critical approach in data analysis. Member checks were conducted with staff after analysis on March 6th, 2015. A formal presentation with a question-answer period was given to staff still working at the center, and a summary sheet of findings was sent to staff who had participated in the study but had left the center since data collection. Feedback from staff confirmed the presence of the themes articulated in results. Staff felt that employability as a concept was especially relevant to their work and since data collection had increased their effort to more purposefully and explicitly endorse student employability. A discussion of the UCC’s focus on employability since the time of data collection is presented in the Epilogue.

Summary

This study uses a critical interpretive, qualitative approach to examine how UCC staff talk about career and career planning. Interview, participant observation, and textual artifact data were collected and then thematically analyzed. The results of this analysis are presented in the next chapter. Results describe how participants conceptualized career, the value of their work, and how the career coaching process is connected to student empowerment and employability.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter presents findings from the qualitative analysis of interview, participant observation, and textual data that was instrumental to answering the following three research questions: 1) How do UCC staff conceptualize career as a foundational concept of their work and when communicating with students, 2) What employability value do UCC services provide to students, and 3) How does career services discourse frame the university's responsibility toward students and their future employment? Thematic analysis was conducted on the 20 interviews, 12 sets of fieldnotes, and career center documents. Member checks were used to confirm themes found in these data sets. Interviews covered participants' backgrounds in career services and included how they came to work at the center and what attracted them to their positions. Participants were asked to describe typical interactions with students, other staff, what career meant to them and what they hoped students left the career center knowing. A complete protocol is attached as Appendix C. The results below are organized by the first two research questions and the third question is addressed in the chapter five. Descriptions of each theme are provided in this chapter and excerpts from the three data sources are included to illustrate such descriptions. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are presented in chapter five.

Conceptualizing Career

"Career" is a concept that fundamentally grounds the work done at the UCC. The staff's reported understanding and presentation of career influences the organizational practice of career guidance. Particular conceptualizations were crafted, deployed, and privileged over others in interactions and documents. When asked to describe what "career" meant to them in interviews, the majority of participants were consistently positively oriented toward the concept, associating

it with passion, self-betterment, and caring, and described its pursuit as hopeful and exciting. A few described it in more neutral terms, such as a series of work experiences over a lifetime, but no one used negative terms to describe what career was. These descriptions differed at times in some representations of career in textual artifacts and observed events. The differences are discussed in this section. Three themes emerged from data that elaborate on the different conceptualizations of career. Career was presented as an: 1) individualized and lifelong endeavor; and 2) avenue through which to express passion and find meaning.

Career as an individualized and lifelong endeavor. When participants were asked what “career” meant to them in interviews, most readily responded with qualifying statements that career and, whether it was successful or unsuccessful, was different for every individual depending on his or her vocational choices, goals, and values. In other words, individuals’ career stories unfolded in different and potentially unpredictable ways. Career coach Felicity said, “Career definitely varies by person but it is based on what that person’s fit is and what they want to do and what do they find interesting and what are their goals in life.” Consistently, participants believed career was something an individual progressed through her entire lifetime and only through reflection on the past did one’s career story begin to make sense. Administrator and career coach Jane made a comment that resonated with the idea of retrospective sensemaking (Weick, 1995) when she said, “Career is something you look back years later and say, ‘ahhh here is the thing that wove these things together.’ It’s almost a backward looking saying.” In coaching sessions particularly, students were asked to do retrospective sensemaking by considering how and why they feel the way they do about certain experiences, jobs, and careers. This practice guided students to start to articulate their individualized career stories and recognize that their careers have already begun.

Administrator and career coach Veronica defined career “as a very fluid concept that you are slowly surely going through your whole life. You are always building and you are moving towards something.” Other staff members echoed this, and administrator and career coach Patrice said, “For me I think it is finding an area that you are really the most interested in and that you try to better yourself within that extended period of time.” The temporal dimension of career was significant and was an indication of whether one was discussing a career or a job. In fact, careers and jobs were often described at the same time in order to define one another through contrast. Career coach Crystal said career is,

The series of jobs over the lifespan...A student might actually just want a job that is 9-5 and in my mind I guess I would say is less of a career and more of a job. And what they are asking from their work is slightly different than what someone who wants, whose life mission matches up with their vocation. That to me is the career or I think of career as a series over, at the end of your life you have a career made up of all sorts of smaller things. Career is longer term in my mind.

This perspective of career distinctly separated it from a job temporally and but also adds a value distinction. Career was a lifelong mission while a job was characterized by succinct periods of time spent performing a task or filling a role. Yet, somehow, despite being described as devoid of much intrinsic meaning, jobs were the building blocks of careers.

Since becoming an organizational member of the UCC, student worker Doris said that her understanding of career had changed and she began to differentiate between careers and jobs. Rather than a career being “a job you know, something you do in your life to make money” it is “a lot more about your life’s work and what you accomplish like by doing the things you love and a lot less about the mundane job or career path.” Again, temporal and value distinctions were

made between job and career in Doris' statement. Administrator and career coach Lindsay added,

Well you know again I think "career" is a word, it isn't the perfect word because then you hear "vocation," you hear "job," you hear "work," and we kind of use them interchangeably. So, I'm not sure that that is really right. I guess to me, career to me is it is more than just a job it is kind of a path and a type of work and in my mind so somebody said I'm looking for a job to me that seems more like it's a way to earn money. May or may not be something I really care about a lot but I'm just going to do it. For me career is a little bit more of a conscious path that you would take that would lead you to something that is more in harmony with what you really hope to do.

In this comment, Lindsay made the important note that often the words "career," "job," and others associated with the practice of work were used interchangeably in the center and in society despite conceptual differences among the terms.

These comments reflect a long-term understanding of career, yet many of the services provided by the UCC focused on the near future for students. Participants reported that their coaching appointments commonly focused on resumes and an immediate job search. In an effort to speak to the more long-term engagement students could have with the UCC, Patrice described speaking at freshman orientations about how decisions made during college affect students' impending careers and said, "basically every decision you make from here on out is going to affect your career and we can be proactive about it and help make that more prescribed so that it is not randomly occurring if you want." This statement explained how the long-term conceptualization of career could be complementary to the center's focus on college students'

more immediate goals such as selecting a major, obtaining an internship, and a job search as they are catalysts for future career directions.

The examination of textual and participant observation data, however, produced a different picture of career, one that was focused more narrowly on a singular employment opportunity or finding “a job.” An online UCC resource called “Career Connections” was an internally-housed job board, career fair events focused on the job search, and several workshops on preparing for the career fair and how to interview specifically targeted a goal of obtaining employment after graduation rather than finding a long-term career trajectory. It was not that these activities negated the importance of long-term planning, but more that the link and difference between jobs and careers was missing. Many textual artifacts seemed to demonstrate Lindsay’s claim that the terms “job” and “career” were often used interchangeably.

More long-term future-oriented content, however, was presented on the website’s “career exploration” pages. Here, career was not presented as something that could be obtained in the short-term but rather something that could be planned for now and for which individualized goals could be set. The website read that career coaching assisted students to “develop their own career plans.” Graduate school was referred to as a “major career decision,” career assessments were positioned to assist in “career planning,” and volunteering was a way to “explore career interests.” In a different context, the concept of career was never directly articulated in events I attended or the artifacts collected, suggesting that the need to understand it as a lifelong endeavor was not necessary for individuals (college students) who are often in the early stages of their career.

Still the conflation of “job” and “career” was frequently brought up in interviews without my prompting. Career coach Violet said,

I think just like people use it synonymously with job but I think they are very different. I think career is something that you envision some, a direction. Like career is a general area which you kind of build and grow through time and a job is something you pay the bills with. And they can be the same but one implies growth and the other doesn't it implies a means to an end kind of.

Some of the undergraduate student workers in the center who had not gone through career coaching training yet were exposed to UCC messages also grappled with distinguishing the terms. In a group interview, one of the workers said that career was “a job you are going to do for the rest of your life, forever and ever” and another quickly added, “that you hopefully have a passion for.” They discussed that passion was not likely to be present at the beginning of one's career or the “first job” but in general “career” had a more positive connotation and was something that “you love to do hopefully but a job is like what you do to pay the bills.” Career coach Cassandra also spoke to students' first job prospects and said,

It's challenging because in a way I feel like I am bursting their bubble a little bit. You want them to feel like they are going to be very happy in their job and their job is progressing towards something but a lot of times that is hard to sell if you are just trying to get somebody a job to make some money. So that can be challenging.

In addition to the temporal distinction, participants at all levels of the center made value distinctions between careers and jobs. Participants frequently contrasted the positive emotion and passion associated with the concept of career to the more basic financial incentives of jobs.

Career as an avenue through which to express passion and find meaning. The idea of work being the means through which one is able to or should express passion aligns with literature on meaningful work and calling (Bowie, 1998; Duffy et al., 2011). When workers

report meaning in their work beyond financial reward or consider career as a calling rather than “just a job,” they also tend to report greater levels of job satisfaction, performance, and tenure and lower levels of job stress (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014; Dik et al., 2009). Positive organizational outcomes such as high levels of organizational commitment have also been theoretically associated with finding meaning in work. Berkelaar and Buzzanell (2014) argued though that dominant discourse about calling ignores the potential “dark side” of such a sentiment. Calling and meaningful work can constrain career opportunity when individuals believe the calling is necessary. Life, work, and passion become bound to paid work contexts and individuals lose agency in their career paths and are unwilling to address or unable to recognize unfair working conditions and areas in need of organizational improvement.

Consistently, participants spoke positively of the place for meaning and passion in career in either their definitions of career or their explanations of a “successful” career. Critical comments toward meaningful work were never offered. Administrator Jamie asserted, “Career is, it’s more than a job and it is more than work.” Comments like these implied that career had intrinsic value, while jobs did not. In Jamie’s comment we see an example of the positive orientation toward career that was echoed in many of the staff’s comments in online videos. One UCC video posted online for Halloween featured UCC staff assisting zombie students in a career exploration coaching appointment, a mock interview, and at the professional clothing closet (a place where students could borrow professional attire for job interviews and career fairs). The closing caption read, “Don’t just settle for another brainless job. Come to the UCC to find a career that feeds you.” “Brainless” jobs were presented as boring, unchallenging or drudgery work while careers were fulfilling, creative, meaningful work.

Patrice introduced the idea of passion in her definition of career and said, “A career is a little bit more of what you are passionate about and strive to better yourself in for a long sustained period of time.” Administrator Eleanor echoed this in her definition of career and said, “I feel like it’s finding your passions and what you are interested in and being able to apply that to some sort of work setting possibly.” Discovering passion to fuel one’s career plans was also present in videos uploaded to the UCC website. In a series of student testimonials about how visiting the advising and career center benefited them, students specifically mentioned taking career assessments to discover their passion, which suggested that passions were not always immediately recognizable.

Lindsay spoke to career being the practice of doing what one loves, and her mention of love was not unusual. Many participants, in a positive orientation toward career, spoke of love when it came to a successful career. Administrator Lola added a different but also optimistic definition of career and said that to her, career meant “opportunities.” She said, “hmm, um I would say it means um opportunities. Really that is how I would define it. A career is an opportunity to expand to grow, um, and I’m sure it means something different for everyone.” Despite a majority of participants describing career in consistent or complementary ways, it is important to note that the terms of their descriptions such as “passion,” “success,” and “meaningful” were not described. Many staff asserted that the definitions of those terms depended on the individual, which supports the previous theme that career is an individualized pursuit.

Jamie was one of the few who offered a different perspective on passion and suggested that passion in career is ideal, but that individuals could obtain meaning in other areas of their lives too if they were unable to express their passions in their careers. She said that career,

Is something you have that you do that you are passionate about and it is something that can fulfill you. And it is something I don't think everyone has. Even as they are fifty years old and been in a job for a lot of years because sometimes I think it is hard to figure out what career that is for you, or maybe you get fulfillment in other things in your life and having a job that pays the bills is just enough. Being able to spend time with your family--people have different kind of priorities. For me career just means that, it's something that fulfills you and that you get a lot of joy out of doing.

This excerpt highlights how the terms “passion” and “fulfillment” were often linked with the “meaningfulness” of work and how salary was presented as more of a basic need than a characteristic that would make work meaningful and fulfilling. In fact, money seemed often completely disassociated with career and only significant to jobs. Administrator Minerva explained that jobs were for paying the bills and careers were for pursuing passions. “It may be ‘a job’ just means money and it may not be what you are really passionate about so that would be the difference [between a job and career].”

When money and career were talked about together, the pursuit of a career that served as an outlet for passion and a way to locate meaningfulness in one's life was commonly presented in opposition to the pursuit of a career or a job that lead primarily to financial reward. This suggested that high salary and intrinsic meaning could rarely be located in the same career, and it appeared that staff would prefer students to pursue a career for its meaningfulness rather than its financial reward. Despite this bias, staff made efforts not to overtly reveal their opinions on the subject of money versus meaning to students in one-on-one meetings. Career coach Milly justified how someone could consider her career successful if she made significant financial gains,

Um, successful career would be a career where a person is engaged in a career where they are applying their values, their interests, and feeling satisfied in their work. So [if] their value is maybe to make a lot of money and if that is a value for them, they are making a lot of money, then that is a successful career. If money is not important, that is not a factor but if helping people is and they are helping people then that is a successful career so whatever it's, successful career is subject to person to person.

Here, Milly conceptualized money as a value of meaningful work so that her promotion of meaningful work would be relevant to students who were pursuing financial incentives. Staff said they were careful in their communication with and about students who prioritized high salaries over other aspects of meaningful work. They were careful not to disparage money as a value and in interviews made qualifying comments emphasizing the individual right of students to pursue different work goals. Crystal provided this hint in her statement, "And so I think the other thing is we really try to normalize, or I do, anybody's values so it could be you want to make a lot of money and you don't like to share that with people but that is fine. That is a value. So it's fine to own that." Staff repeatedly assured that it was okay for students to value money, creating the impression that they believed that this value might normally be looked down on in career services departments.

Veronica recalled a meeting with a student who told her that he was applying for a job because the salary was higher than his current job. Veronica actively censored herself and withheld stating her opinion to the student about his reasons for seeking a job change. She said, "Okay, you know, and of course and maybe in my own heart and mind I'm thinking 'that's not why you'd take a job,' but that is a value for that person and that's important. It doesn't make it any more not an important value because there are other factors there

too that are very important-- to care for people. And who knows what he needs that money for.

Qualifying comments such as, “not that there is anything wrong with that” and the frequent juxtaposition of salary with meaningfulness though suggested that staff perceived the pursuit of financial reward as potentially misguided or that students had not given themselves the space to critically consider how money would be fulfilling to them in the long run. Lindsay also encountered students who were focused on the extrinsic rewards of work. She made a point not to directly challenge what they seemed to be looking for in a job, perhaps believing that the student would find out eventually that money might not be enough. She instead asked probing questions that might start a conversation on a variety of work values to more subtly address meaningful work. She said,

I might begin like I said, I might try to add some kernels of, could this turn into something, or have you considered this or have you considered that? I would respect what they needed because to them maybe that is part of their journey maybe they are going to try something and they find out that it earned them a lot of money but it wasn't very satisfying but that is their journey that I can't suggest otherwise. But if somebody is super open to lots of possibilities then I think the discussion might be a little bit more “can you begin to identify what you”--I guess I would call it work values, not successes, but—“what are the values that you hold?”

Lindsay spoke to her own belief in the importance of meaningful work and highlighted her effort to honor students' goals for using the career center but at the same time steer them to search for meaningful work.

Violet articulated the position that extrinsic rewards such as salary and prestige dominated common understandings of what a successful career is but that the value of intrinsic rewards such as meaningfulness and expressing passion should not be ignored. She said,

Um I think a huger [sic] portion define success monetarily speaking, which I think is what drives a lot of people to feel that they have a successful career. But in reality they feel that they have been unsuccessful in it because they are not getting that intrinsic reward.

If Violet's assumption is true, then staff's conceptualization of career was different than most of their clients' (students') conceptualizations and they were frequently put in positions where they chose to either accept and or indirectly challenge students' money motives.

In addition to discussing their desires for students to find meaning and intrinsic value in their work and careers, staff sometimes commented on the meaning they found in their own careers, demonstrating how their personal work values related to their philosophy toward career planning. Interview participants frequently mentioned their desires to personally do work that helped others and positively influenced students' lives. Administrator and career coach Genevieve reflected on seeing her student clients obtain job offers with higher salaries than her own and commented,

I've stayed in education all these years so if it was about making money—because there are certainly things you could do that are much more lucrative than staying in education but in terms of having an impact on people's lives and really enjoying that day-to-day interaction it's very satisfying.

The value placed on meaningful work seemed to permeate the professional and personal lives of participants and was more important than making a high salary. The preference for and

promotion of meaningful work was not just a personal philosophy of staff members though, it was part of the organization's stated vision. The UCC's vision statement specified that the center desired to help students lead "more meaningful, purposeful lives." When asked what motivated her to work in career services, administrator Jackie echoed the vision statement and said, "I mean it's wanting to help people lead more meaningful purposeful lives." Evidence of the meaningful work philosophy was located in other textual artifacts too. For example, on a page within the UCC's website addressing potential employers, the text read that the career center's mission was to connect students with meaningful employment.

An overall understanding of an approach to career was identified through analyzing data to answer the first research question. For the most part, staff grounded their interaction with students and the development of guidance materials in the ideas that career was a positive and lifelong journey through which one could express passion and interests to find meaning in addition to financially supporting themselves and families.

The Employability Value of Career Services

Career planning is a constellation of activities. Interview preparation, cover letter and resume writing, internship and job searches, career fairs, and interest and career exploration through one-on-one coaching with UCC staff were some of the regular activities scheduled at the center studied. It became clear during data analysis that these activities contributed to a larger mission of enhancing student employability. While the goals of these activities usually had short timelines (obtaining a job in the next three months, selecting a major by the end of the semester, writing a resume) staff narratives focused on the broader potential of these activities combined to contribute to the overall employability of students. Jackie commented on the center's efforts to reach out to students on campus and online,

So, we have made significant strides in the last year-year and a half as far as our outreach and marketing and I think we have been able to really influence folks more than what we realized through that. In an indirect type of way, in a branding type of way. So what we are thinking is if we can come up with how students can become more employable while they are here on campus and then we can communicate this in a broad way then we can have a significant impact without them coming in and meeting with us.

Despite their availability, staff commented that they usually only saw students once or twice for coaching appointments. Most students did not take advantage of the full variety of UCC activities but rather were more likely to attend one or two activities or appointments. The one-time opportunity with students was considered an obstacle to helping them to the center's fullest capabilities. Therefore the results reported in this section do not represent the outcome of student engagement with the UCC but rather portray the potential employability value of services as described and presented by the UCC. Fugate et al.'s (2003) dimensions of employability (career identity, personal adaptability, and social capital) provide a clear framework within which to categorize the ways staff described different career planning activities.

Career identity. Career identity evolves over a lifetime as individuals synthesize and make sense of work experiences (Fugate et al., 2003). Since many students have not had much experience in the workplace, UCC activities can contribute to the development of provisional career identities. Socialization messages about work and career are particularly important for individuals without much organizational experience to draw from because they must rely on second-hand information and the career identity narratives of others to anticipate what work will be like (Kramer, 2010). With the decline of organizational careers and the rise of boundaryless careers, students are faced with a virtually unlimited variety of potential career trajectories

(Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). The development of career identities can help reduce anxiety and increase a sense of control for individuals as these identities act as cognitive compasses to guide individuals to pursue certain objectives and experiences (Fugate et al., 2003).

During coaching sessions, coaches and students were able to engage socialization messages and talk about the stories and experiences that have shaped students' understandings of work. Career exploration gave them an opportunity to imagine possible career identities and identify areas where their skills may be put to use by engaging in structured exploration using the UCC career exploration worksheets and psychological assessments. Three themes emerged from data that elaborate how students were guided to explore and develop career identities. The UCC attempted to engage students' previous assumptions about work to help them develop provisional career identities by 1) myth busting, 2) challenging assumptions with evidence, and 3) invoking self-reflection.

Myth busting. Students receive socialization messages and information about work and career from a number of sources such as parents, peers, media, and educational institutions. Over time some messages and assumptions become pervasive yet may not hold up in the realities of the modern working environment. The UCC referred to these messages as "common myths" on their website, and staff interviews confirmed that myth busting was something frequently engaged in with students. Staff attempted to debunk myths that commonly cause student anxiety in career planning. The UCC website lists five common myths: 1) being undecided about a major is bad, 2) once a student has declared a major she cannot change her mind later, 3) there is one "right" major for every student, 4) majors dictate the types of career a student can have, and 5) career coaches, academic advisors, parents and or career assessments will tell a student what to do. The responses to these myths on the same website page emphasized the normality of change

(changing majors, changing interests) and the ability and importance of students making decisions for themselves. For example, in response to myth five, the site read, “While getting feedback from your parents, [university name] professionals, and career assessments can *help* you choose a major, ultimately the power is in your hands. You are the expert on you - no one knows you better!”

Felicity talked about some of these generalized myths that had come up in her coaching appointments and said,

I think a lot of time when [students] think career they think, I’ll dress up nice and in this office nine-to-five but that is not what career has to be. You could have a career and can be working in a corn field or half way across the world working at 3 a.m. you don’t have to be in an office...The student I was talking to recently, I think she is feeling a lot of pressure from society from her friends from her parents about getting a career that is nine-to-five that had health benefits, that is in a nice office and has air conditioning and things like that. But it is not where she sees herself and so I think helping students through that process is challenging for us and I think a lot of us have to demystify those myths and telling students that major doesn’t equal career. A communications studies major doesn’t mean you have to go into a typical career path in communications, same with English, same with history.

In addition to addressing the myth that students’ majors do not directly reflect the types of job they can pursue, Felicity pointed out another common assumption about work that she and other staff noted addressing with students—the nine-to-five desk job. Again, temporality is an important concept to discussing career.

Veronica emphasized that the way we talk about work can perpetuate myths and that in coaching sessions she would ask how students came to hold those beliefs. She said,

And what are the words we use kinda 'the grind' 'nine-to-five' or more 'eight-to-five' for most of us. But I always like to kinda challenge that and then too they get messages from experience and exposure. What careers you are exposed to? So it is shedding light on it on those ones that they take in without even knowing it.

Career exposure was an important component of career identity development as it served to diversify the number of imagined futures of which students could conceive. Staff had a set of go-to resources such as LinkedIn to help students overcome assumptions and myths that may be holding them back from developing a career identity that was exciting and hopeful. Patrice said,

So, students that might come in when they are panicky about picking a major and just having the conversation--a lot of times students think their major equals their career, it's a very linear path. "If I major in history then I can only do these things." And what have we heard, well "I can teach history or I can work in a museum," that is about the extent of their knowledge, which is not uncommon. That is probably what their parents think as well. So one of the things is like well if you look, we'll go to LinkedIn and here are all the people that majored in history and look at all the different jobs that they are doing and just seeing that open up the possibilities for them. Or if we go to a resource like the Majors and Careers page, yeah sure you can teach history you can do that sort of typical things but you can also work in a corporate office doing business analytics because you have this critical thinking skills set and you have that background, like "oh" and just seeing that change from, "I came in defeated and concerned and I really didn't know how you were going to help me," and just with just a couple things that changes.

Patrice's comments at first acknowledged that no matter their majors, students had a vast number of career options but that as a coach she could provide some focus to students' exploration. Having infinite career options can be as anxiety provoking as having no options (Campbell & Ungar, 2004). By directing students to investigate other graduates' careers, students could begin to focus on a more narrow set of (new) options. Staff seemed comfortable directly challenging common myths, but when assumptions became more specific or tied to particular fields, another approach was often used.

Challenging assumptions with evidence. The act of myth busting was coded in data when staff reported engaging common myths that were in many cases not specific to particular fields or jobs. Sometimes, however, coaches commented that students came in with what they believed were unrealistic expectations of work related to particular job targets. Coaches were reluctant to blatantly say "you're wrong" and would admit that they were not the experts in the fields students were necessarily interested in. Rather, when coaches did not know the realities of specific jobs or had suspicions that students were misinformed, they would investigate the validity of those assumptions together during a career coaching session. Staff would potentially present students with conflicting or additional evidence so that they could reevaluate or further refine their assumptions.

Similar to Patrice's tactic of using LinkedIn to debunk the myth that academic majors dictated career options, career coach Tatyana talked about using other online resources that provided specific information on jobs, such as national salary averages. She described speaking with one student who she believed had an inaccurate picture of what his salary would be in a communications job right out of college. She said,

Or you know as we are talking about these different professions, pulling it up on Onet or BLS um and looking at the median wages that they present there is always a helpful place to start because then they see what people are actually making and go, “Oh! So I can make \$32,000 a year to start with.” “Yes you can, that is where people start.” So, um kind of gently respecting their ideas but at the same time trying to present the realistic information so that they get that piece of things.

In this example, Tatyana did not personally have to be the bearer of bad news but rather let the evidence speak for itself.

Violet had a similar experience working with a journalism student who believed she would be making over \$60,000 in broadcast journalism after graduation. She recalled the interaction with the student and retold the conversation:

“So, let’s take a look at this page and what it says is the average journalism major starts making \$34,000 and is in broadcast. How do you feel when you see that compared to what you were thinking?” Where there is that discrepancy they’ll tell me, “well that can’t be right” and I’ll say, “well tell me more about how you think, what your plan was to get into that position” you know. “What strategy are you using? What specific position or company were you interested in.” They’ll tell me, let’s go research them and I’ll guide them to researching the [name of regional newspaper] and then we will basically, it is informing them on how to do research in an accurate way that will get them *good information* instead of just *information*.

Having students locate and interpret evidence for themselves was an important and purposeful strategy. Rather than telling students that they are ‘wrong,’ staff attempted to lead students to more realistic conclusions and teach them the tools for investigating job targets. These tools were

described as not only useful for the students' present job searches but as useful for future job searches when students, now graduates, might not have access to the UCC. Gathering accurate information about job targets and work environments is important to the development of career identity, but individuals must also have an understanding of themselves in order to imagine what it would be like to work in certain fields. To pursue this goal, the UCC guided students to think introspectively about themselves, interests, strengths and values.

Self-Reflection. Exploring career possibilities requires a certain level of self understanding. UCC staff believed in the importance of students being able to locate their interests and identify their skills rather than focusing on the things they disliked about work and their personal weaknesses. The main tactic coaches used to encourage the practice of this skill was asking probing questions. An assumption coaches commonly said they brought to sessions was that the student already knew the answers they were looking for so engaging them to think about themselves and their lives and verbalizing those reflections helped them clarify their self-understanding. Considering this practice through the lens of employability, self-reflection directs students to articulate narratives of career identity. When asked what her typical interactions with students were like, Violet described the types of questions she asked students to help them see how their personal beliefs aligned or did not align with their career goals. She said,

I kind of, yea I kind of just ask questions. Like um I mean the simple things like: What are your goals? What do you value? What do you want a career to look like for you? What is one thing you would want with your career? What is one thing like, what is the deal breaker? How do you think this profession you are choosing aligns with some of those things you have outlined? So like those open ended questions that prompt them to the conclusion themselves even if you kind of know where you are going with it. If you

like to work with people and you want to make a lot of money then you might maybe you shouldn't be like, you know what I mean, having them see those inconsistencies instead of point them out yourself. I notice when you point it out it isn't powerful anymore anyways. They have to figure it out.

Incorporating the previously discussed theme of challenging assumptions with evidence, she described helping students discover evidence contrary to their expectations of particular types of work. In this example though, the evidence comes from the students as they engage in self-reflection. Again, Violet wanted students to come to the conclusions themselves rather than directly telling them what she thinks they should do.

Other staff described similar experiences of believing students knew more about themselves and what they wanted than they gave themselves credit for and how career coaching appointments gave students' the space to articulate those desires. Crystal said, "Students know more than they give themselves credit for and they know more about what their gut reactions are and what they might really want." Knowledge about the self was intuitive though assessments were commonly noted as helping students recognize their intuitions. In a student testimonial video posted online, a student commented how the UCC helped her through the major selection process. She said,

I went to the University Career Center to take their career assessments that they offer and that helped me get a feel for what my personality and what my passions are. It was things that I kind of had an idea of but it really helped me confirm that yeah, you are right. This is what you are supposed to be doing.

In this video, the student expressed feeling stressed and having a “freak-out moment” when it came time to select her major. Already having an idea of what she might want to pursue, assistance from the UCC helped confirm her ideas.

Veronica reflected on an experience she commonly had during coaching sessions that suggested that the student in the mentioned video fit a common prototype of the kind of student who visited the UCC. She said,

Sometimes we can just end up talking about it, the student does really know what they want to do. They are just having a crisis moment and just need to get over it. Sometimes they have just been very static sort of with their career journey and they have never really explored where they want to go so they finally want to open Pandora’s box and figure out if there is something I’m missing, which is kind of fun.

This excerpt in particular highlights how verbalizing desires is an important sensemaking activity. Staff frequently described the positive effects of acknowledging fears out loud and having students talk about themselves had on clarifying career goals. This comment suggested though that what students want is often hidden from themselves at first but can be revealed through answering questions that provoke self-reflection.

The questions coaches said they asked ranged from what students’ favorite classes were to probing sources of meaningfulness in their lives. Many UCC services offered under the banner of “career exploration” focused on self-reflection and the development of career identity. Students took assessments such as the Strong Interests Inventory or the Focus assessment and discussed results with coaching staff to clarify what they may be interested in pursuing as a major or career path during and after college.

In one observation of a coaching session, the student, Tom, was having doubts about entering a nursing program. The coach asked questions to have him consider what led him to be interested in nursing and what skills he believed he possessed. The student revealed that his interest in nursing was sparked by taking care of a relative but lately he wondered if he had made the decision to pursue nursing before he had considered other potential career paths that could also be satisfying. After some preliminary questions to learn about the student and what his reasons were for coming in to the UCC, the career coach, Veronica, explained to the student,

I always think a little bit too like there is that saying and that principle of living an unexamined life or not asking the question you know isn't any good. It is good to ask like to know do I really want to do this? Is it really what I think it is going to be you know and you might want to ask the questions and maybe we can do some activities or things together once you ask the question you might very well come back to the same question right. Okay so [you might think] "this is just a hard semester, I just have to knock it out" or you might think like "hey, there is this new thing that takes some of my gifts and abilities I thought nursing kinda fulfilled and is able to do another way." Is it mostly the classes that kinda sparked that uncertainty for you or anything else that has happened in life?

In this excerpt Veronica attempted to validate and normalize the student's doubts by assuring him that his hesitations were a positive thing because the "unexamined life" "isn't any good." Later in the coaching session she asked the student questions about his classes, hobbies, and what had originally attracted him to nursing to help him identify the source of his hesitations. They concluded their appointment by setting up a time to meet after the student had taken a career assessment.

Texts from the UCC also emphasized that students must “know themselves” in order to know what careers would be satisfying for them. In addition, UCC messages emphasized that students also needed to be familiar with types of jobs potentially available to them and suited to their skill sets. The UCC website promoted that through part-time, volunteer, and internship work experience, students could test their abilities out in different areas. In the video “Career Coaching and Exploration,” a UCC staff member said that good career decisions came from information about “yourself, career options, and engaging in hands-on experiences.”

The “Volunteering” page of the UCC website encouraged students that there were “service opportunities that will allow you to explore your career interests” through volunteering. It was written on the “Student Veterans” page that, “The [UCC] offers career coaching and assessment services to help you explore your unique interests, personalities, values, skills, and strengths.” The “Career Exploration” page claimed that it is important to assess and gather information on one’s self including academic strengths and career interests, and be diligent about exploring employment options. Self-assessments were framed as important, which suggests an assumption that, prior to contact with the UCC, most students are unaware of their interests. The UCC positioned itself as a key to unlocking hidden information about a student’s self through guided exploration.

Exploration can seem like an intimidating activity because it suggests that students have depth that they are unaware of. It conjures up images of vast landscapes and mystery such as trekking uncharted territory in the arctic or bushwhacking through dense jungles. Amundson (1997) asserted that students often sell themselves and their skills short and therefore career guidance professionals must help overcome self-deprecating tendencies. The UCC engaged this sentiment by providing structured activities to help guide self and career exploration. The

website offered downloadable documents such as the “Majors Research Guide” that was broken up into three sections titled “Three Majors I would Like to Research,” “Where to Look and Who to Ask,” and “Questions to Ask & Things to Do.” This document directed students to specific questions they should ask of themselves and seek answers to in literature on the major such as “Are there student groups on campus related to these majors? *Tip: Check the Student Involvement & Leadership Center’s online organization directory for a comprehensive list of [university] student organizations*” (emphasis in original text). By adding some structure to exploration, the UCC attempted to make the activity more accessible to students who did not for whatever reason want to or were not able to visit the UCC in person.

Although self-exploration suggests individuality is important to the job search process, a significant amount of space on the website and brochures and time in the videos was dedicated to essentially de-individualizing certain aspects of students through attempting to moderate their interaction with potential employers. Students were instructed on things such as how to dress, how to format a resume, and what specific language to use in cover letters. Fieldnotes from the February 12, 2014 career fair commented,

Students are clad in black suits but women are also wearing black dresses. The few students that are dressed more casually clearly stand out but probably not in a good way. They don’t seem to be carrying resumes and look like they are just passing through and came upon the career fair rather than having taken the time to prepare and plan out their attendance.

Even as just an observer I too conformed to the expectations relayed to me in the UCC workshop on preparing for the career fair. I dressed in slacks and a blouse and registered for the event and took the judgment that that was the way one was supposed to look into the event. Effort put

toward empowering students to craft and customize career plans that fit their values and skills is in tension with a structured exploration and career planning process. Yet, conventionalism and learning the common technical practices of the job search have their employability value. They emphasize the importance of learning how to adapt to professional environments and seek out information to help with anticipatory socialization into a given workplace.

Personal Adaptability. Personal adaptability, as a dimension of employability, refers to the willingness for one to change personal factors about themselves to meet the demands of a changing work environment (Fugate et al., 2003). Part of this adaptability depends on an individuals' ability to partake in proactive planning with a positive attitude that is accepting of change and willingness to learn about environmental threats and opportunities (Fugate et al., 2003). While the UCC could not imbue students with particular characteristics, it could encourage certain behaviors and dispositions that would contribute to developing personal adaptability. As Jane identified in this excerpt, flexibility is important and something the UCC is interested in promoting in students:

They can describe to you what they don't want to do. A classic line from students is "I'll do anything but I won't do this, that, this, this, that, and I definitely won't do that." And it's really not based on real experiences, it's really you know kinda junior information and so we want them to have multiple job targets so be focused on each of those. Why are you choosing this and that and that? Be flexible enough so that they consider multiple, plan A, plan B, plan C, maybe a plan D. We do a lot of plan, talking to students about plan B and actually I think I saw this the other day it is becoming a verb, plan "B"ing you know, like an activity.

Recognizing that students may not obtain their first choice job emphasizes the need to stay positive and flexible. Students may face rejection and the best way to cope with that logistically was to be flexible, persistent, and acknowledge their strengths and skills.

Data analysis revealed the use of positive language and activities that were aimed toward bolstering student confidence in times of uncertainty and change. In particular, UCC staff focused on staying positive and future focused, which included 1) using positive language, 2) identifying student strengths and skills and 3) promoting strategic planning.

Using positive language. When staff were asked to describe students who use UCC services, many first stated that students were diverse, coming in with a variety of needs and levels of preparation, but inevitably they discussed students who were in a state of distress. Some of the emotional states and conditions commonly attributed to students who came into the UCC were “panicked,” “freaking out,” feeling “alone” and “pressured,” or having a “crisis moment.” Staff made conscious efforts to reduce the anxieties of students by focusing on students’ strengths to build confidence and through positive messaging in interactions and their texts. On the UCC website, students are described as “empowered,” “talented,” “unique,” and “valuable.” These descriptors serve students’ self-esteem and encourage them to believe that they are valuable and can live the life they choose. In one coaching appointment with a student who was reconsidering his major, Veronica told the student,

There are probably a lot of things that are true for who you are that could be fulfilled by a bunch of careers so know that you have more options than less. So hopefully I can say that to breathe some comfort into the situation um to know to there are options too.

Staff believed that by staying positive and encouraging, students would too have a more hopeful and optimistic outlook on the career planning process.

Although the appreciative coaching process as explained by staff and outlined by Orem et al. (2007) is highly action-oriented, dealing less with individual's psychological states than counseling does, coaches did engage students on an emotional level. Milly described how she attempted to comfort students when they were feeling discouraged and said,

The student has been kind of down on themselves and not feeling like maybe they have what it takes to be a successful applicant, have been kind of rejected by several jobs and is kind of at a point where they are getting pretty frustrated and not very, confidence is pretty low that they are going to find a job. And so I have spent a significant amount of time trying to build them up and point out strengths when they present, typically people get in that perspective that is kind of negative view point. They look over their strengths and they are so focused on the negative so they miss so many of their strengths, so I make a strong effort to when I see a strength to point it out and say, "do you realize you worked over a strong obstacle that showed a great amount of persistence on your part?"

Rather than providing her students with general assurances such as "it will all work out," Milly focused on students' virtues and on their abilities to influence their lives and career futures. In other words, Milly emphasized having an internal locus of control, which is a characteristic associated with adaptable individuals (Fugate et al., 2003). Her comment suggested that students should not rely on only chance or luck alone because their strengths and character will be a reason he or she obtains a job.

It is not surprising that staff mentioned the importance of staying positive when interacting with students because positive psychology is a foundational theory of the career coaching model adopted by the center (Orem et al., 2007). Genevieve said,

I like the coaching model just in terms of its philosophy and what it focuses on certain positive aspects of students to kind of really get them to focus on goals and look at the positive of what they have to offer, you know, what are your strengths?

Consistent with career coaching practice, focusing on the present, on the future, and on positives in a person's life helped liberate students from past failures and motivate them to pursue goals (Orem et al., 2007). In addition to identifying current strengths, Lindsay pointed out that students should not stop there. She wanted students to build upon their strengths and skills and believed that the UCC could help them do so. She said,

We try to build on these strengths that you have. We are not trying to recreate you, we are going to say "Here is where you are, let's see if we can enhance that skill." Let's give you some tips for being out and about so that you can experience more, you can learn more, you can build on what you already have.

Her comment acknowledged the role of the UCC in skill development but also emphasized the responsibility of the student to work toward his or her goals.

Coach and administrator Felicity described focusing on strengths and being positive as something she was specifically trained to do when she began working at the center. This positive orientation was described as a defining feature of a career coach when differentiating it from a career counselor. She said,

I see it as a role that helps students focus on the positives that are going on in their life and not just actual experiences but things that they do well. Skills that they know that they use well or that they like to use... [staff member's name] definitely made sure to train me on career development and just the positive psychology and making sure to let a student focus on the positives in their life. I think I just adopted it. Because I was like that

makes sense and I consider myself a pretty positive person too so I was like why wouldn't you want to focus on the positives or developing good action items that you can take and making sure the student is engaged in that learning process.

It was a part of coaches' training to speak positively toward students in coaching sessions and other interactions to boost their confidence and reassure them they had something to offer an organization.

Positive and hopeful language is also used in UCC texts to inspire confidence in student job seekers. Visitors to the UCC homepage during the time of data collection were met with colorful ads for upcoming events that resembled pep rally posters with handwriting fonts that looked similar to graffiti scrawls. One ad for an upcoming career fair showed a young woman in a pink dress and black blazer, smiling with her hands on her hips. In all capital letters the phrase "I will change the world" cascaded down along the left side of her body. Other ads located on campus from the same campaign also featuring students in suits and blazers had slogans such as "My dream job will be a reality," "My future is calling," and "It's my time to shine." These youthful and energetic ads suggested that the career fair was a fun and exciting event and also emphasized meaningful work. The ads stressed the importance yet accessibility of the event with additional text asserting "just be there." If this statement came from a UCC staff member, it could be interpreted as an authoritative command, but the young women and men were of traditional student age so the message could be interpreted as coming from a peer. In fact, a UCC staff member revealed that the models were all students at the university.

The copy and design of the ads were developed with input from student focus groups and building student confidence was a campaign objective. Minerva said, "Um then as far as the confidence goes we wanted to use really bold confident phrases like 'I will change the world' or

you know, those types of things.” Doris also worked on the campaign and linked the focus on confidence as motivation for action. She said,

I feel like everything is about like trying to build up confidence and students so that is particular, like the career fair. I don’t know if you saw any of the marketing around campus. Yea, they do an annual career fair so the whole campaign was about how do you inspire students to take action? How do you help them think that they can really do it on their own? And they don’t need to like spoon feed them results. They can do it themselves.

In addition to these ads for the career fair, the UCC homepage was filled with brightly colored links in orange, blues, and red and a list of UCC social media profiles on platforms such as Pinterest, Twitter, Youtube, and Facebook, which offered low-stake and unthreatening ways to connect with career planning resources. A welcoming site may comfort and reduce anxieties associated with career planning, which ultimately will support students during the process. The UCC had a substantial online presence with a large video library on Youtube with approximately 126 uploaded videos at the time of data collection. In an online video entitled “It Gets Better,” a UCC staff member says to the camera, “The world needs you -- your unique perspective, your specific talents, your new and creative ideas, your beautiful mind! There are problems to be solved, cures to discover, inventions to build, people to help, and we need you.... It gets better!” Descriptors such as “unique,” “talented,” “creative,” and “beautiful” further demonstrate an attempt to compliment students and give them confidence in the planning process.

Identifying student strengths and skills. Pointing out student strengths was important for raising student confidence, but their strengths were also identified as important to potential employers. “Strengths” were fairly synonymous with “skills,” which were conceptualized as

different competencies that students may possess. Skills were coded in data analysis as knowledge about and abilities to navigate and perform in one's field, as well as in the job search/career planning process. Personal adaptability relates to student skills as they are needed to proactively plan. In terms of employability, students need job search skills and to be able to demonstrate to employers that they have the human capital necessary to complete work tasks.

UCC texts mention "skills" in a number of areas. The "Veteran Students" page told students that "As a veteran, you offer a valuable set of skills to employers..." The LGBTQ student resource page advised "Know your skills, interests and values and carefully consider your audience. Choose which information you want to include to highlight your skill set. Employers are most interested in relevant and transferable skills and past accomplishments." Similarly on the "Students with Disabilities" page, students are told to "Look beyond your disability and know your unique strengths, skills and traits..." From these pages in particular, skills are positioned as the key to success and a way to overcome obstacles to employment such as discrimination based upon dimensions of one's identity. What these skills were exactly was left ambiguous and perhaps strategically so. There is not one set of skills that is best for all jobs, and students would need to engage in self-reflection and assessments to recognize the skills they possess.

The paper brochure "Resumes, References, and Cover Letters" suggested that students "Point out skills that have been demonstrated in [their] nonprofessional life" and "present the employer with indications of [their] personality and style along with your skills and abilities" (p. 15). In a section on professional communication, it warned that "Employers are evaluating your communication skills with every piece of correspondence..." (p. 17). The paper brochure "Preparing for Job Interviews" focused more specifically on what students should do once they

have been offered an interview and specific “skills” were made more explicit. The document highlighted that students’ should focus on conveying their communication, interpersonal and problem-solving skills—in other words, their abilities to do particular jobs and how well they communicate and solve problems.

The texts often used the term “tools” in association with “skills.” The “Career Coaching” page of the UCC website informed that “career coaching is a process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge and opportunities they need.” Here we see “tools” referring to the job search skills the center aimed to teach. Career courses at the university that were advertised on the website focused on career planning skills including how to explore different fields and prepare for the job market. For example, one course is titled Job Search Skills for Liberal Arts & Sciences Students, and its description is to teach students the “effective use of employment search tools.” Career exploration was positioned as necessary for students to identify in what careers their skills would be valuable. While the UCC cannot offer specific assistance to students for learning skills to complete work tasks beyond identifying potential areas to explore and classes to take, interviews demonstrated that staff were involved in helping students present those skills to employers. Staff spoke to the need for students to identify “transferable” skills and how skills could be “translated” to particular jobs.

Staff commented that students in the liberal arts may have more difficulty identifying their skills because their education is less vocationally focused than in the professional schools such as nursing, engineering, and education. The lack of immediately identifiable skills was noted as something that could cause students’ anxiety and actually present a psychological barrier to seeking help in career planning. Violet, speaking directly about students graduating with liberal arts majors, said, “And in reality we are seeing like a ton of graduates that are

walking away with not necessarily being employable or having the skills they need because [college] doesn't always prepare you for skills and so I think some students tend to realize some of this but don't want to face it, which forces them to not think about coming." In this comment, Violet is referring to technical skills tied to a particular vocation and job search skills. Students may possess soft skills in areas such as critical thinking, leadership, and interpersonal communication but lack a clear picture of how those skills are valuable to organizations and how to talk about them when applying for jobs. Her comment also resonates with popular accusations that universities are failing to prepare students for work (Selingo, 2013). Her specific mention of employability as a desired outcome of higher education emphasizes the importance of considering the employability value of career services.

Getting students to identify and articulate the value of soft skills was presented as a skill in and of itself. When asked what she hoped students took away from a visit to the UCC, administrator Heidi, who worked predominantly with employers, said,

Um that they have skills that employers want. They have the ability to translate their experiences those skills that employers want. And that they can make however many choices they want to further their own goals and be successful in their career and life.

This comment not only provided a positive outlook on students' capabilities and value but emphasized their responsibility to put in the effort to present themselves as a strong applicant. Staff emphasized that they did not do the work for the students. They served as guides through the processes students had to commit to.

It was acknowledged that the skills to successfully complete work tasks evolve as the nature of the labor market changes. Terri, a consultant to the UCC, noted "...and the skills that you use you know in your first job out of college um after five years the occupation that you are

in and you have been trained for might go away. It might be subsumed under something else.”

Career planning skills, however, were discussed as being more stable. The job search skills students used to obtain their first job were presented as the skills they would use to obtain employment over their lifetimes. Genevieve said,

Teaching students how not to just write a resume but how to manage your career through a lifetime, so which is really more our focus anyway, these are skills you are going to use your whole life so you might as well learn them now in college and take advantage of this because you are going to be job searching the rest of your life.

Learning job search skills in college was presented as an investment for a lifetime since trends in labor markets suggest that students should expect to experience periods of unemployment (Jarvis & Keeley, 2003). Eleanor said,

Our job is really to educate [students] so they have the tools to, yes, find what they are looking for now or to get to where they want to be now. But then five years from now, if they lose their job or decide that they don't like their job, that they can refer back to those tools and see it as like a cyclical model that you are going to do this continually throughout your life. So educating them to have the resources they are able to succeed in that beyond [name of university].

Eleanor's comment represented a common theme in the discussion of job search and career planning skills. Specifically, these skills equip students to be independent from UCC staff and confident in future job searches.

Some of the specific career planning skills repeated in the data pertained to interviewing, surveying environments for networking and job opportunities, identifying strengths and specific skills that employers are looking for, communicating those strengths and skills during

application procedures, and creating a realistic action plan to move toward career goals. The skill of creating an action plan was particularly significant in data analysis, which was not surprising since the career coaching model was described as future-focused and action-oriented by both training materials and UCC staff. Strategic planning was identified as an essential skill that could contribute to the employability of a student so much so that its weight in data signified a theme.

Strategic planning. Proactive engagement in work environments has been linked to reducing uncertainty and anxiety and increasing one's perceived control over life events (Fugate et al., 2003; Saks & Ashforth, 1996). Strategic planning in the context of this study refers to the skills of setting up realistic work and career related goals and actionable steps to achieve those goals. Coaches described coaching sessions as action-oriented where they focused on getting students to a place where they felt confident to act. Action plans were used to help students zone in on the realistic steps they could do immediately to breakdown the often overwhelming tasks and decisions they were faced with such as selecting and applying for jobs and majors.

The "Career Coaching" page of the UCC website noted that career coaching offered by the center "helps people bridge the gap between where one is and where one wants to be..." The action orientation is a fundamental component of the appreciative coaching model (Orem et al., 2007). Helping a student take those steps was important to staff, but they recognized ultimately it was the student's choice whether or not pursue further action. Patrice said,

We have had this whole discussion whatever it is, what are you going to do next? And that question is what can you do tomorrow? What can you do when you walk out of here with this information? And just trying to get that engrained. There is no "Hey you did it and now it's over. You went to the career office, everything is going to work out." But

what is it that you are going to do? What work are you going to put in to make sure you are going toward your goals that you just established?

This excerpt in particular emphasized the ethical position coaches took to push students to take responsibility for planning their own futures. Just as coaches would not tell students what to major in, they would also not write the students' resumes or conduct informational interviews for them. With guidance from coaches, students would devise plans that they realistically believed they would be able to follow through with. Not only was this an ethical choice, it was a logical one if coaches believed, as mentioned in a prior theme, that only students could answer what their interests were and what kind of careers they should target.

Strategic planning can provide much desired focus to the job search process but potentially at the expense sometimes of more thoughtful contemplation on what students want. Felicity described a situation where she regretted moving forward with action steps too quickly with a student and said,

The action-oriented person in my head said "oh well here are the resources you can use to get to this place" but it's not what she wanted and she left my office way more confused and more stress because I put all these other options to her and I just didn't listen. I think it was a growing moment for me because I learned to shut-up and ask the right the questions and ask the student how they are feeling. What do they want out of this appointment? What are their expectations?

This comment revealed that while the structured, action-oriented coaching process was useful and conflict free most of the time, it still required coaches to pay close attention to the individualized needs of students. Coaches could not craft strategic plans that were one-size-fits-all. Students needed to ultimately be the architects.

Social Capital. Focusing on positivity, strengths, and strategic planning served to center students as the primary actors in the planning process and combat feelings of hopelessness and discouragement associated with looking for a job. But in order to execute plans and develop realistic goals, students need to have exposure and access to people and information germane to their job searches and career planning (Grant, 2011). In other words, career planning is a social activity where networking can increase one's social capital and therefore one's employability. Social capital considers the social and interpersonal elements of employability (Fugate et al., 2003). Different from human capital, which refers to a variety of personal factors such as age, education, and work experience, social capital refers to the support one may receive from formal and informal networks (Fugate et al., 2003). Fugate et al. (2003) identify both human and social capital as the third dimension of employability, but the results in this section will focus only on social capital. Human capital is largely covered in the previous section as "skills" one might have and work experience. This section of results focuses on where data analysis revealed how UCC activities potentially helped students build their professional networks. The center offered numerous opportunities for students to connect with others on campus and in the field that might provide them with insider information on careers and job opportunities. Staff members themselves also became part of students' networks and acted as liaisons linking students to other groups.

All staff, regardless of their work tasks and how removed they may have seemed from student coaching, reported the centers' connection power as one of its best assets. In fact, all but two staff members interviewed reported never having been to a career center before obtaining employment in one, yet all intimated that they wished that they had had the type of help and connections a UCC could have provided to them. Staff felt that they possessed knowledge and

had relationships with employers that would be difficult for most students to come by on their own. Thus, they were an asset to students and could improve their professional networks. In one study of adult learners, those who had strong personal and professional support networks also reported greater self-efficacy toward school (Lundberg, McIntire, & Creasman, 2008). It is possible, then, that the greater the networks students develop, the greater their levels of career efficacy will be. In regards to building social capital, data analysis revealed that staff emphasized their abilities to connect students to information resources and with employers, alumni, and relevant individuals on campus.

The frequent use of the term “resources” by staff, the website, videos, and variety of printed texts emphasized the importance of accessing information and further situated the center and its staff as an important part of students’ professional networks. On the “Employers” page of the UCC website it was written that “the career networks team is dedicated to fulfilling the mission of the University Career Center by connecting our talented students with meaningful employment...” This statement announced the connection power of the UCC and portrayed staff as dedicated allies for students. The UCC “Communities” page started with a declaration that “a number of individuals make up the [University] Community, and we all work together to help students succeed.” The communities identified on that page were the UCC, students, alumni, parents, and university faculty and staff. Jane talked about the different people that can make up students’ networks and said,

We want them to have developed a network of people who can support them in their career, in their pursuit of a job and internship. You can’t do this alone. You really do need help from professionals or friends and family, anyone who is in their corner.

Looking for a job, looking for an internship is a lonely experience. Someone who can

help them, support them, we want them to have a really good targeted resume for each of their job targets. So, the fact that they know that their resumes take on different looks and approaches and language, sections, based on the industry. Every resume has its own secret handshake.

In addition to emphasizing the social aspects of career planning, Jane also highlighted the social support and insider information a network can provide. Terri, a consultant to the center, believed that networking activities were among the most valuable things a student could do while in college. She said,

So I'll really preach that pretty hard and tell that it is their salvation. They have to get out and do that kind of stuff. Talk to everyone about what they do. Talk to your parents about what they do. So many students don't even know what their parents do, that kind of a conversation, not that they don't know what their occupational title is, accountant, but you know they have never been to his work or mom is a psychologist, they have no clue really what goes on in a typical day. Does she like it does she not like it? But talk to everybody. Talk to people on the elevator, on the bus, on the plane, you know talk to people about what they do at work, what they like, what they don't like about it or not, and you know you learn from that. You pick up all kinds of stuff and you resonate with some stuff you don't with other stuff. That is important data to have so I really really want people to do that.

Terri's comment described networking as a continuous activity. So rather than limiting themselves to networking during designated networking events like career fairs, she suggested students take more of a gunshot approach and speak to any and all individuals they interact with about what they do to diversify the information they could gather.

Lindsay talked about networking in a more targeted way in a coaching session she had with a student who had been discouraged after a number of rejections. She said,

I think at that point we kind of talked about his network and you know like who do you know in this industry or what could that yield any results for you and it was kind of like a light bulb went on and he was like “oh my gosh I haven’t thought about networking at all I’ve been going about it in the way you know the applying for fifty jobs on indeed.com,” which is probably the worst way to approach a job search you know. But the ah-ha moment was when he said, “You know, in every other thing I have done in my life I’ve gotten my job through networking” and so then we were able to spend the rest of the time kind of really building on that and who would you reach out to?

Lindsay’s comment identified how coaches worked with students to evaluate their existing network outside of the center but Crystal pointed out how she too personally added value to students’ networks. When asked what a typical student appointment was like, she said she offered students,

Um different resources that might be useful and then just the knowledge, even connections/encouragement to follow through with those like “Oh I know a professor in the sport psych department. Let me hook you up with them. Let’s write down their email and also I’m going to email them and tell them you are coming over.” That was completely different then like [a student thinking] “I want to do sports psych. I don’t know anyone. I don’t know how to contact anyone.” So I think [I provide] knowledge, encouragement, place to talk.

For most coaches, the face-to-face interactions with students were the favorite part of their jobs. They enjoyed building rapport with students and others to build their own networks as well.

Lola, who worked predominantly with employers, said, “The connections with people I love. Whether it’s outside that I am connecting with students, employers, you know businesses--I enjoy that and I connect with them a lot through e-mail, phone and things.” By developing links in her own network, Lola claimed that she became a greater asset to students as well.

UCC staff and services described themselves as contributing to students’ social capital by connecting them with readily accessible resources such as career planning guides, job boards, and educational workshops and individuals (including themselves) that could provide them with insider information about jobs and careers and potentially connect them to additional employment opportunities such as internships and jobs.

Summary of Results

The results of this study illuminate how career services professionals conceptualized career in their talk, textual artifacts, and interactions with students. Data was framed as promoting meaningful, life-long careers and student employability. Research question one asked how career center staff conceptualized career. The results here demonstrated that career was largely described in positive terms and conceptualized as an individualized, lifelong endeavor and a path through which one could express his or her passion and find meaning. Research question two asked about the employability value of UCC services. The model of employability used in this study articulated three dimensions of employability: career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital (Fugate et al., 2003). The study revealed that UCC services and descriptions of staff interactions mapped well onto these dimensions. Furthermore, the coaching process used in this UCC specifically linked to these dimensions through its action orientation and foundations in positive psychology. Students were asked to engage their assumptions about work, reflect on and explore their strengths, interests, and values as well as

potential jobs and careers. Staff said they attempted to help identify student strengths and lend language to articulate and translate these skills to employers. These activities link directly to developing career identity.

To help enhance students' personal adaptability, staff used positive language and focused on student strengths to boost their confidence. Students were also prompted to engage in strategic planning, a process that would allow them to plan for the future but also figure out how to cope in times of change. To increase students' social capital, they were encouraged to reach out to professionals in the field to expand their contacts and connections. Staff also considered themselves a part of students' growing networks, linking them to resources, opportunities, and professionals on and off campus.

The next chapter synthesizes the findings, addresses the research questions, and makes a case for how this study contributes to communication literature on socialization, career coaching, employability, and empowerment. Additionally, practical implications for the organization and university are offered. In particular, I discuss the critical implications of the paradox of accountability and how promoting a discourse of employability simultaneously is a response to calls for university accountability toward students but also way to affirm students as the primary actors determining their career futures.

Chapter Five: Discussion

University career centers are faced with multiple stakeholder pressures to help students plan for and obtain employment after graduation. Popular discourse surrounding the value of a college degree, especially a liberal arts degree, has graduates, parents, and the government asking for increased university accountability toward students' ability to obtain employment (Barrett, 2014; Selingo, 2013). Responding to this demand means working to increase the likelihood that students are competitive with their peers on the job market and have the skills needed to obtain employment. In other words, there is an increased demand for universities to address the employability of their students. This qualitative communication-focused investigation illuminates how the staff of one UCC conceptualized their work with students to prepare them for future careers and highlights the use of an empowerment and employability approach to career services.

Thematic analysis of 20 in-depth interviews with staff, fieldnotes from participant observations conducted at UCC events such as career fairs, workshops, and student appointments, and texts such as the center's website, online videos, and paper brochures and worksheets demonstrate how the center sought to empower students in the career planning process and increase their employability through the use of a student-centered career coaching model. The localized and wider implications of results are also considered. Suggestions for the UCC studied and the potential outcomes of endorsing employability discourse that invokes a paradox of accountability in higher education are discussed.

This chapter provides both theoretical and practical implications of the results of data analysis presented in chapter four. First, this chapter describes how the conceptualization of career, provided by the center's staff and artifacts, aligns with an employability and

empowerment approach and promotes meaningful work. Second, parallels between dimensions of employability and UCC activities are made to explicate a paradox of accountability that potentially arises when endorsing employability. Third, a case is made for how the results of this study contribute to several of areas of communication and career research including socialization, employability, and career coaching. Fourth, practical implications of the results for the organization studied are offered. Finally, the limitations of this study and areas for future research are presented before final conclusions are made and an epilogue is presented.

Conceptualizing Career

In order to understand how staff guided students through the career planning process, it was necessary to investigate their understanding of career. The conceptualization of career as an individualized long-term venture through which one could find meaning and express passion clarified the center's motives to use a student-centered coaching process. Furthermore it explained why staff found enduring value in their work, as many spoke to their belief that students would use job search and career exploration skills their entire lives. These assumptions support the use of a coaching model that promotes students' responsibility and value in the career planning process rather than a more traditional person-fit model that prioritizes the knowledge of the career services professional over the clients' knowledge (Parsons, 1909; Savickas et al., 2009). This understanding of career pairs well with employability as an overarching framework for center services and activities.

Staff members were quick to identify students as the primary actors in the career exploration process. Staff admitted that while they had certain expertise, they could not and would not tell a student what the ideal major, job, or career was for them. Student autonomy was important and they would ultimately have to make their own decisions in college and many times

later. In interviews, when staff members were asked to explain what “career” meant, it was described as an individualized endeavor. What a career looked like and how it was evaluated as successful or unsuccessful was dependent on individuals’ values and interests. In addition to individualized qualities, career was said to unfold over a lifetime and in potentially unpredictable and nonlinear ways, which is consistent with recent trends in literature to recognize a variety of career models that are more representative of the diversity of workers (Baruch, 2004; Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991; Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006).

Staff acknowledged that individuals may make industry and field changes that appear to be significant departures from other jobs they have held, but staff framed these changes as contributing to a larger career picture that could only be fully understood in retrospect. All work performed in paid and unpaid situations contributed to a career story that would be authored and re-authored as individuals reflected back on their life’s work. These descriptions of career resonate with a more postmodern characterization of career which urges the recognition of nonlinear career paths (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991) and confirms descriptions and increased popularity of protean careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; D. T. Hall, 2004). Ultimately, protean careers are linked to employability as individuals must become adept at managing their careers and potential without organizational support or loyalty. This position acknowledges the responsibility of job seekers for developing themselves as competitive and competent applicants and employees.

In other forms of data gathered for this study, “career,” as described above, was much less a focus. Rather, “jobs” were the focus, and career planning was synonymous with job preparation. Many workshops and textual resources targeted the processes of searching and applying for jobs. Although conceptually different by the staffs’ own descriptions, distinction

was not made between jobs and careers when it came to some of the center's most heavily-used activities such as resume writing, career fairs, and mock interviews. This suggests a consolidated attempt at differentiating the jobs from careers was not a priority for the center. Since career was described as something that unfolded, sometimes unpredictably, through a series of jobs and work activities, it is reasonable to assume that students would not be guided to think they could plan or predict their entire careers while still in college. Thus, to focus on what most students came to the center asking for, many of the activities focused on short-term objectives with the hopes of leading to immediate gains such as selecting a major, or obtaining an internship or job.

The UCC's longitudinal data recording student participation in events and comments from interviews indicated that most students did not use the center's services more than a few times and one-time users were common. Focusing on "jobs" rather than "careers" could then be interpreted as a strategic choice to provide students with information that will be most obtainable and digestible in a short period of time. Targeting more immediate job goals versus career goals may also reduce the psychological barrier students may experience when it comes to considering their futures after graduation. Krumboltz (1992) noted that often when individuals delay career planning it is misdiagnosed as procrastination when really it is that they realize it so important and crucial that it becomes overwhelming and they are unable to face it. This fear can lead individuals to latch on to specific decisions such as a declared major even when there are clear signs the choice is problematic (Campbell & Ungar, 2004). The focus on "jobs" versus "careers" may reduce stress because jobs were described as the intermediary steps of a career and did not need to be completely fulfilling right out of college, though seeking meaningful work was ideal.

In interviews, the majority of staff described career in positive terms and as a path through which individuals could pursue passions and find meaning in addition to a means of

financial support. When they spoke about jobs, the building blocks of careers, these too were seen as opportunities to pursue meaningful work. In general, however, “job” had a negative or at least less inspiring connotation. A job, and in particular, the type of job a student would likely have right out of college, was perceived by some staff and student workers as just a means to support oneself financially while a career was something that fulfilled oneself on moral, psychological, and interpersonal levels. Thus, individual jobs were framed as less important than the overall trajectory of one’s career, which at some point hopefully leads to meaningful work.

The UCC’s vision statement was to provide career services that resulted in “students leading more meaningful, purposeful lives.” Staff interviews demonstrate a preference for meaningful work and a desire for students to pursue work that is fulfilling and satisfying beyond a paycheck. To nudge students to think about what types of work would be satisfying and complement their interests, staff would ask probing questions about students’ academic and personal interests to locate values and activities that they found meaningful. Students were also directed to take assessments to help identify interests and talents that they might not have articulated. Students’ understanding of themselves was an important part of identifying meaningful work as to do so required an estimation of one’s work values and desires for intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Although unwilling to overtly reveal their biases for work that was oriented toward being of service to others to the students in coaching appointments, a majority of staff described feeling conflicted when students did not desire a career helping others, prioritize meaningfulness, or follow a passion, in their job searches. Only seeking financial compensation from work was likened to “settling.” Still, coaches attempted to minimize their moral influence in regards to student-set goals for the sessions. This potentially leads students to more autonomous decision making and an increased sense of empowerment in the

career planning process. Evidence of the center's preference for meaningful work, however, was present throughout the different types of data collected. Staff also attempted to indirectly guide students to think about the potential intrinsic rewards and meaningfulness of work in coaching appointments.

Extrinsic rewards such as power and money were often juxtaposed against values such as helping others and being creative. Staff agreed that money could be meaningful to individuals, but they described wanting students to get more than a paycheck out of their work and believed that students would be more satisfied with work that was intrinsically meaningful and valuable. Money was a basic need but career had the potential to offer so much more. Despite the prominence of meaningful work as theme in discussion, it was also acknowledged in some interviews that meaningfulness could be located outside of work. A person's family was offered as the alternative, partitioning work-life from home-life. What was not mentioned in interviews was what staff would do when students were unable to locate a passion, where passion came from, and how it could be discovered. Critical interpretations of meaningful work were not discussed. Individuals who are driven by the pursuit of meaningfulness have the potential to tolerate mistreatment, over work, and accept low wages (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014). Pushing students to focus on passion and meaningfulness could potentially marginalize the needs of students who oriented themselves to work as a means of financial support and or those who seek fulfillment in other areas of their lives.

Socio-economic status, race, age, and a host of socio-cultural-political factors influence individuals' assumptions and expectations of work (Jablin, 1985). Hierarchically positioning meaningfulness above financial gain is a privilege and luxury as many people throughout the world do not have the ability to choose their livelihood with such freedom and autonomy. I assert

that similar to the dark side of pursuing a calling (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014), promotion of meaningful work can obscure the role of privilege and material and structural constraints that can limit career actions. This is perhaps more relevant when meaning is sought deductively and individuals begin with a set of characteristics and values that they believe would be meaningful and attempt to find employment that meets their requirements of meaningful work. But as we have seen in studies of those who find meaning in work that is often considered menial, dull, or dirty (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Isaksen, 2000; Kreiner et al., 2006), meaningfulness can also be recognized inductively or develop over time. For example, someone may seek ways to imbue a job with meaningfulness in order to increase their self-esteem and job satisfaction. At the UCC studied, students are guided to pursue meaningful work deductively. It is assumed that students have the privilege and capabilities to choose career paths and autonomy and drive to develop their employability, which will allow them to enter those career paths.

Employability and Career Services

A key set of findings in this study were how the discussion of career center services resonated with themes in employability discourse. Although I did not enter this study with the goal of identifying the employability value of career services, through investigating their perceived value, evidence that the center's value aligned with dimensions of employability emerged on its own. After preliminary open coding, I consulted with my advisor and other communication faculty whose research interests were in organizational communication, student development, and career planning and continued to consult career counseling literature. Through this iterative process I found research on employability useful for explaining and framing results. The value of this career center's efforts could be framed through Fugate et al.'s (2003)

dimensions of employability (career identity, personal adaptability, and human and social capital).

UCC staff guided students to challenge preconceived notions of work and engage in self-reflection to begin to develop a clearer picture of career identity. Results that contributed to career identity were divided into three themes. First, staff engaged in myth busting of common assumptions about college, career, and work. Second, staff challenged students' assumptions that were specific to particular jobs or fields with evidence to induce critical thinking. Finally, staff encouraged students to engage in self-reflection to locate skills, interests and desires that would contribute to a greater sense of career identity.

Myth busting was highlighted in both interviews and textual artifacts. Staff would talk to students about common "myths" such as students' majors determining the type of career they would have, that there was a "right" career or major for every student, and that parents, advisors, career coaches, or career assessments knew what line of work would make students most satisfied. Staff were comfortable correcting these myths directly to students and on the website. Myths about the connection between majors and careers were specifically positioned as potentially relevant to all students regardless of their academic interests. In "busting" these myths, staff emphasized the flexibility of majors and the importance of recognizing transferrable skills. For example, a student who was an English major might market her writing skills in a number of positions such as grant writing in a fundraising position or develop marketing material in a communications director position.

Although staff emphasized they wanted to empower students to make their own informed decisions, some student testimonials online did suggest that students believed they were receiving answers from assessment results or career advice. These students admitted they were

seeking someone or something that would tell them what to do and alleviate some of the pressure of making big life decisions. Despite efforts to bust myths about the center's ability to provide concrete answers to career and job questions, some students' testimonials claimed this was an outcome of services. For staff, however, once students understood that skills acquired through coursework and other experiences such as extra-curricular groups and internships were more important than their majors, it was the process of identifying students' other interests that would provide further direction in the job search process. These opposing views of career services as providing answers versus providing guidance complicate the promotion of employability which supports individuals to make informed decisions autonomously.

The second theme contributing to career identity involved challenging more specific career and job assumptions held by students with evidence. Since these assumptions were more industry-specific and potentially personal, staff were less comfortable "popping [students] bubbles" and blatantly telling them if they were misinformed. Staff showed students where to find information on salary, cost of living, and educational and work backgrounds of working professionals to help them paint a more realistic picture of what it would be like to work in a particular job or field. Providing students with evidence and teaching them how to search for evidence was a way to prompt students to think critically about their assumptions. Staff believed students would be more likely to accept contradictory facts and modify their assumptions if they were the ones to discover the discrepancies in their knowledge. This strategy supports a student-centered approach to career planning that again emphasizes the assumption that students could make good, individualized choices about their career futures. Staff believed that when students were able to come to realistic conclusions on their own after considering evidence, they would be

more accepting of new conclusions and be equipped to do research in the future or on other types of work they were considering.

The second dimension of employability emphasized in career planning was personal adaptability. Individuals can be described as adaptable when they are prepared to alter personal factors about themselves to meet the demands of a changing work environment (Fugate et al., 2003). Characteristics of personal adaptability that were relevant to this study were keeping a positive attitude, identifying strengths, and proactively planning. A lack of confidence has been noted as one of the barriers for students to be motivated and perform well in career planning activities and can prevent students feeling that what they do matters and that they have the ability to obtain satisfying employment (Lundberg et al., 2008). Staff used positive language in face-to-face interactions as well as on the website and in print and online materials to attempt to boost students' confidence and morale. Students were described in data as unique, talented, and skilled and were asked to focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses and past failures.

As a part of keeping a positive attitude, students' strengths and skills were identified in the coaching process. Coaches said they paid attention to the way students described experiences and what they thought they were good at to identify discreet skills that could be conveyed to potential employers or matched with particular career fields. Articulating those skills using language that was deemed to be attractive and would stand out to employers was an important part of developing career documents and interviewing skills. Thus, career planning skills were also an important part of the technical skill discussion. On one hand, students needed to identify their technical skills to show they could complete work tasks and on the other, they needed the career planning skills to market and present those technical skills in career documents and when interacting with others. The emphasis on skills was significant in written documents

too. The assumption was that students had the technical skills, or could be directed to coursework to help them develop them, so the next step was learning how to describe what those skills were and why they were useful to employers.

Skill identification was an integral part of the appreciative coaching model on which coaches were trained; thus it was not surprising that it was frequently mentioned. In the first step of the model, coaches focused on identifying skills and strengths to help as student answer the question “Where am I now?” In the second step a coach would work with a student to determine “Where do I want to go” and identify what skills needed development. In the third step students would work with coaches to develop an action plan to figure out “How do I get to where I want to go?” This third step in particular fits well into the personal adaptability dimension since it asks students to participate in proactive planning, which is a useful skill for operating in an environment marked with frequent change (Fugate et al., 2003).

Staff encouraged and, in the cases of coaching sessions, guided students to craft plans to get them to their set goals. UCC staff described their interactions with students as action-oriented, which emphasized planning and action as particularly important to defining the practice of career coaching. Even in instances where students came to the UCC for career and major exploration, exploration was an activity to move them forward on a path to a greater goal such as picking a major. Every action and activity could be a step in a strategic plan. It was expected that the coaching cycle of assessing where one is, where one wants to go, and then creating a plan to get there would be repeated numerous times since goals needed to be measured and realistic for students. For example, instead of starting off with the goal to obtain a job, a student might first set the goal of developing a resume or contacting someone for an informational interview. Coaches talked about identifying intermediary goals to help make career planning less

overwhelming. Setting realistic goals and breaking down the career planning process into a number of discrete steps was assumed by staff to make the ordeal more manageable and less intimidating. This can also be interpreted as a strategy for increasing confidence in students as it could lead to more frequent opportunities to celebrating student goal achievement (Orem et al., 2007).

Social and human capital is the last dimension of employability identified by Fugate et al. (2003). Human capital refers to personal factors such as age, education, and work experience. In the discussion of personal adaptability, education and work experience contribute to the development of student skills thus only social capital is uniquely emphasized in results. Social capital is the value inherent in one's network. The importance of building and utilizing networks was stressed in print and online materials and student interaction. Career planning was constructed as a social activity requiring an individual to interact with others to identify opportunities and obtain information not readily available in online or print formats. Even in instances when information could be obtained without social interaction, the interpersonal and professional connection made in interactions is said to distinguish individuals from other anonymous job seekers (Krauth, 2004). Social capital in students' networks thus contributes to their employability. UCC staff considered themselves a part of students' networks, connecting them with valuable resources both human and technical such as employers and information resources. Staff worked with students to evaluate their networks to discover looked-over connections they could reach out to to collect insider information and develop professional relationships.

The UCC had staff dedicated to building employer relations who worked with recruiters and local employers and acted as liaisons between students and these individuals and

organizations. Further connecting students, staff believed it was important to know faculty and others on campus who could support students in their major and career planning and job searches. It was suggested that integrating career planning activities into regular academic curriculum would reframe the academic environment into more of a career perpetration environment where the link between course content and skills for work would be emphasized. Faculty would be more immediately thought of as network connections and identifying skills would be a regular part of class activity. The challenges of working more closely with university faculty and administrators on career planning are discussed in the practical implications section.

Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation makes several theoretical contributions to the fields of communication and career studies. First, this study demonstrates the importance of engaging socializing messages about work and career. Second, it investigates discursive constructions of career planning as the empowered pursuit of employability. Third, it contributes to calls to investigate career coaching as a unique practice from career counseling (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003). Fourth, I explore the implications of employability discourse for higher education. Together, these contributions add to a greater understanding of the role of career services in responding to multiple stakeholder pressures for colleges and universities to take greater responsibility for the employment of graduates.

Socialization and career planning. The field of vocational guidance has significantly shifted since the early 1900s when the person-environment fit model was seen as the best way to select a career (Parsons, 1909). Career now is understood as a much more fluid and longitudinal concept since many individuals will likely work in a number of fields over their lifetimes (Baruch, 2004). Still reminiscent of the earlier model, though, is the interest career planning

professionals have in helping their clients locate their natural and learned traits and skills and identify work opportunities that value those traits and skills. Breaking with the idea that individuals and their traits are stable and inborn, however, professionals also assist clients in understanding and discovering the reasons for their behaviors and preferences. In other words, while some personality attributes may be stable, many preferences and ideas have been nurtured by an individual's experience and environment. Individuals are exposed to socializing messages about jobs and work (Jablin, 1985, 2001) and data analysis suggested that UCC staff in this study regularly engaged these messages.

Analysis further revealed that in the UCC, students were guided to make sense of past experiences and where they may have learned these socializing messages. This focus on socialization and sensemaking can be linked to an effort to craft career identity. Since college students have limited employment experience, students must rely on other sources such as parents, peers, and professors to learn about what it means to work in particular jobs or fields. During the coaching process, students are specifically asked to recall these messages and locate where they might have come from and sometimes challenge them. This study identifies myth-busting, question asking, and indirect evidence-based challenges as communicative tactics used by career coaches and demonstrates how socialization messages were directly engaged to clarify and craft career identity.

The concept of socialization links employability research dealing with career identity to communication theory and clarifies how students come to know themselves and understand their career identities. Socialization messages appear to be crucial to the career identity dimension of employability, and linking these two threads of research creates a bridge between communication studies and career development studies that might not otherwise been crossed.

This connection points practitioners and researchers to a valuable collaborative opportunity where theory from each field could contribute to a greater understanding of vocational choices. UCCs provide a specific instance where new vocational socialization messages may be introduced and old ones are challenged.

An empowerment approach. The career coaching process is particularly germane to exploring employability and empowerment as the coaching model articulated by staff and training materials helps determine the boundaries of what coaches talk about and a procedure for how they talk about it. The model directs coaches to privilege student self-discovery and self-set goals. On the “Career Coaching” page of the UCC website it was written, “The goal of career coaching is to empower people...” and it would appear that through pursuing employability staff are also encouraging student career self-efficacy and empowerment. Separating Geroy et al.’s (1998) definition of empowerment into three parts, 1) providing guidance and skill, 2) to enable an individual to autonomously make decisions, 3) that fit within acceptable parameters of an organization, it was clear in data analysis that staff desired to help students become independent from the center and feel confident about their career futures.

Staff reported providing guidance by working with students to identify and develop their strengths and interests and learn how to search and apply for work opportunities. This is not only an example of providing guidance and skill, it is also enabling students to make informed decisions about their academics, work, and career. Staff frequently emphasized that students would need job search and application skills throughout their life and the UCC would not always be there to help them through the process. Descriptions of teaching job search skills mirrored the sentiment behind the common saying, “Give a man to fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” In this context, the UCC had a goal to teach

students how to search and apply for jobs so that they could navigate career transitions throughout their lifetimes. Encouraging the use of network connections was described as contributing to students' abilities to identify acceptable parameters such as behavior and skill expectations for professions and types of employment. Through networking and research, students could learn the "secret handshake" needed to gain entry to a particular type of work or organization.

Although most students were described as having immediate concerns such as obtaining a job after graduation, staff described these skills as useful in the long-term. This long-term outlook could be explained by staff's tendency to conceptualize career as a lifelong endeavor where individuals' career stories are likely to be punctuated by job change. Since career was more often described as a positive and individualized experience and an avenue through which to express passion and find meaning, it is not surprising that the coaching model, which was influenced by positive psychology and appreciative inquirer was attractive to staff. It seems that staff believed the coaching process was a reasonable path through which students could become empowered because it centered students in the career planning process and privileged their personal goals and values and encouraged self-paced development through strategic planning. In the end, however, little could be determined about the actual outcomes of the coaching process and students' perceived levels of empowerment from the data collected. Research would need to be conducted specifically to evaluate self-perceived empowerment and empowered behaviors of students who have gone through the coaching process and whether or not students successfully used skills in the future to maintain or increase their employability and navigate the job market.

Career coaching as a viable alternative to career counseling. Little research has been done on the practice of career coaching outside of the business environment (Chung & Gfroerer,

2003). This study clarifies how one group of coaches and staff familiar with the process described the coaching process. These descriptions can be used to differentiate coaching from counseling to further legitimize it as a distinct practice. The coaching process specifically targeted building the confidence of students and it imposed structure on the task of career planning and more specific objectives such as picking a major or applying for a job, which can seem immense, intimidating, and or confusing for students new to the world of work. In addition, staff were trained in using the model relatively quickly and did not need a counseling background in order to learn the process. Coaching staff underwent a two-week intensive training unit, shadowed experienced coaches, and had experienced coaches sit in on their coaching session prior to being allowed to meet with students independently. This process happened over the course of a couple of months and was accomplished in significantly less time than it would take for staff to receive academic and professional credentials in counseling.

This has implications for career services because if demand for services increases with the added pressures on universities and colleges to support students' post-graduate employment, additional staff will be needed to meet service demands. In addition, centers that are unable to attract those with counseling credentials can train existing and future staff in the coaching model. Individuals from diverse student services and counseling backgrounds could step into the role of a career coach relatively easily. This examination of the use of career coaching at a large state university further legitimizes the approach and professionalizes it through discussing the practices of staff who have advanced through the training and work with students on a regular basis and demonstrates how it supports student empowerment and employability.

Employability discourse and career services. The results of this study suggest that this particular university career center constructed career planning as the empowered pursuit of

employability. This conclusion resonates with popular discourse that emphasizes college as a necessary stepping stone to a job (Barrett, 2014). Employability discourse on the surface appears to be beneficial to job seekers as it emphasizes their ability to take control of their career futures but there are wider implications to its use in an academic setting. A critical view of employability contends that its promotion allows organizations to distance themselves from the responsibility of protecting jobs, providing stable work and instills a “no guarantee” work culture that elevates individual worker responsibility over collective organizational support (Hallier, 2009). Since employability focuses on individuals’ responsibility for making themselves attractive applicants, endorsing it as a response to calls for greater university accountability is paradoxical. This approach is simultaneously a move to help graduates be more competitive job seekers upon graduation but lessens the accountability of universities to students regarding their post-graduate employment at a time when stakeholders are calling for increased responsibility. In short, a paradox of accountability arises when taking responsibility for others means asking them to take responsibility for themselves. If a student does not learn job search skills or how to develop and use a professional network for example, the student would be to blame when they were not competitive against others who had worked to develop their employability because utilizing career service is largely voluntary at the university studied. Student responsibility is elevated over collective university employment support, arguably making educational institutions not accountable if graduates fail to obtain jobs. With popular discourse and research revealing that students are not equipped with the skills necessary to succeed or meet expectations of employers ("It takes more than a major: Employer priorities for college learning and student success," 2013), institutions will have to articulate and defend the kind of responsibility for employability and job acquisition they do have toward their students.

Clouding attempts to take a critical look at employability is that “responsibility” can easily be discussed as a characteristic of empowerment (Frymier et al., 1996; Geroy et al., 1998; Houser & Frymier, 2009). Empowerment, generally hailed as a positive state of being, fends off would-be critics. It is difficult to criticize the desire for students to be autonomous decision-makers and responsible for their futures. If it takes an empowered person to pursue employability or at least the two concepts are intertwined, it becomes difficult to say employability has pitfalls without saying empowerment has pitfalls.

Pragmatic Implications

Although my analysis uncovered problematic facets of seeking student employability and increased institutional responsibility toward graduate employment at the same time, I still believe that an employability and empowerment approach could make a positive difference in the lives of students. As such, I offer some practical take-away points in the form of suggestions for the center I worked with and other career coaching-based centers. First, the center should consider the political and practical consequences of promoting deductive pursuits of meaningful work. Second, it also needs to consider ways in which an employability approach changes the way career services are perceived. Third, it will need to generate plans for how to gather support for an employability approach throughout the university and entice students into a more long-term endeavor through the use of macro and micro-level strategies.

My first suggestion is to consider how promoting a deductive pursuit of meaningful work potentially ignores material and structural constraints of career actions. Although uncomfortable to admit, some students will not be able to find work that meets the conditions for what they believe will make work meaningful. Alternatively students may not be convinced that they need to consider intrinsic rewards and will choose to focus on financial reward. Thus, in addition to

activities that help students identify meaningful work criteria it may be useful to also practice inductive approaches where students begin with job descriptions and consider ways in which those positions could offer opportunity for one to find meaning and express passion. This would allow the center to still maintain its vision to help students' lead more meaningful lives but also address the material realities of seeking meaning in work. The benefits of meaningful work such as increased job satisfaction and tenure may then be more widely experienced.

My second suggestion is that the UCC should consider how employability branding may change the way the way the university and stakeholders perceive the importance of career services. The use of an employability approach allows career services practitioners to use an innovative framework that existing services can be categorized into and could highlight areas for further programmatic development. Reconceptualizing career services as employability services addresses the changing nature of work and popularity of protean careers and could be an attractive change for stakeholders. This approach is not without its political risks, though. On one hand, offering employability development activities demonstrates how career services and higher education can directly target helping students prepare to compete on the job market, yet it also can be interpreted as further emphasizing the responsibility of the student, not the university, in the outcome of job searches. In the current political context this may not be interpreted as universities increasing their accountability toward students.

Looking to the third suggestion, in the descriptive level analysis of UCC discourse, open coding pointed toward the academic major and job search and application preparation as the dominant activities in the center. It was only through lifting these codes to a higher level of abstraction and investigation into career and vocational counseling literature did employability become more pronounced. Although career services fit with conceptualizations of dimensions of

employability, most students did not take advantage of the full range of services offered at the center studied, so it is difficult to infer the influence activities have on students' employability. Career services and an employability philosophy will have to become more integrated into academic programs and or reach students sooner for the benefits of developing employability to become significant.

Employability can be seen as analogous with preventative health care. If individuals learn healthy lifestyle habits and regularly check-in with a physician, they are more likely to manage health problems before they become immediately life-threatening. Similarly, if individuals learn how to navigate the labor market and prepare for and find employment opportunities, then they may be less likely to find themselves in a state of emergency where they are unable to obtain employment. Although engaging in preventative care or activities to develop one's employability makes logical sense, many do not seek assistance until an emergency or panic is upon them. For employability to be developed, students will need to buy into focusing on career from the beginning of their academic careers.

The development of employability is a process requiring students to engage in developmental activities over a longer period of time than a single coaching appointment or career services workshop. A successful move toward promoting employability would require greater effort to engage students throughout their academic career rather than in the last year of studies, which is certainly easier said than done. This endeavor, of course, is not a novel idea as the center studied here is always attempting to reach students earlier and more often in their time at the university. Considerable support from university administration, other student services and academic departments would be needed to change student attitudes. With external stakeholder

pressure mounting, however, now may be a ripe time to again explore connections with university allies.

Academic and student support departmental collaboration is a macro-level suggestion for promoting employability but micro-level campaign decisions might also help raise students' awareness of the importance of employability and make them more comfortable with exploring career ideas earlier. Since student self-reflection and identification of strengths, skills, and interests is a foundational part of the career coaching process, the center might seek ways to place important questions in the minds of students as they travel through campus.

Signs/advertisements for the career center could highlight some of the probing questions coaches ask during the first step of the career coaching model. Thinking about a question is a small task that can be accomplished while waiting for the bus, washing hands, or taking a drink from a fountain and could provide an easy entrance into a larger discussion of career. Promoting employability and career services would require macro and micro strategies to draft university allies' support and students' interest.

Future assessment of UCC work should consider utilizing perceived employability and empowerment scales to evaluate students' progress before and after their involvement with the career center (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijde, 2006). Few studies have attempted to determine the employability outcomes of organizations that offer employability development programs, which fuels skepticism on the approach (Hallier, 2009). Having this type of data would support an employability approach or potentially point to reasons why students may not be benefiting from it. In addition to post-appointment and destination surveys, employability and empowerment assessments would provide further data to inform career center practices.

Research partnerships with vocational psychology and counseling faculty and graduate students would be beneficial for conducting this type of research.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are inherent in qualitative case study analysis and involve access to participants, the amount of data I was able to collect given the timeframe for the study, and the generalizability of results. Although data triangulation was attempted, interview data was more often privileged in analysis because of its depth and range. Participant observation opportunities such as staff meetings and student coaching appointments were limited by logistical and privacy considerations. Often coaches had little control over or foreknowledge of their appointment schedules and may not know of an appointment until just a few hours before they were scheduled to start. This made contacting the student for consent and then contacting me to come to the center difficult, and as a result I was only able to attend two student coaching appointments. Greater opportunity to shadow coaches would have provided additional data to challenge and confirm themes that were present in interview data and further particularize tactics. Additionally, being able to undergo the center's intensive career coach training could have bolstered the participant observation data collected and reported on. Unfortunately schedules did not align and I was unable to attend training.

This study attempts to provide a snapshot of career services discourse at one particular UCC. Results here may be applicable to other universities' centers that share common student and staff demographics and programs but some results will be unique to this center. As such, results have limited generalizability, but this is not the goal of qualitative research. So, although results may not be applicable to all UCCs, they are a reasonable and realistic representation of the discourse at the UCC studied.

Future Research

Extending from the last noted limitation of the study, additional case studies of UCCs using similar and different approaches would diversify our understanding of career planning discourse and determine if the career coaching approach was as positively perceived by others as it was the staff in this study. Additionally, research needs to be done evaluating the outcomes of these employability based programs. Research investigating students' levels of perceived employability and employer perceptions of students who had assistance from career services would help determine the success of implemented programs and their objectives.

As noted by staff in this study, students who came to the career center represented a diverse set of needs and demographics. A fruitful extension of studying student perceptions of their employability would be the investigation of how identity and difference affect the career planning process. How do staff approach students who are members of marginalized groups or have concerns about their identity? How are these students' needs serviced by UCCs? For example, the UCC website had a career coach dedicated to assisting students with disabilities but how could diversity be addressed more regularly given that many differences are invisible (J. A. Clair, Beatty, & Mclean, 2005)?

As significant as what was said in data was what was not said. Career services discourse focused on teaching students how to get jobs and but not how to be job creators. There is an absence of talk about entrepreneurship, and it is unclear how increasing one's employability could influence one's ability to be a successful entrepreneur. Since more and more graduates will likely have protean type careers (D. T. Hall, 2004), it is likely many will create their own businesses which will succeed and fail with labor market trends. Understanding the connection between employability and entrepreneurship would further support how universities could

provide opportunities that could prepare students for the world of work and to be productive members of society.

Conclusion

This study characterizes career planning discourse of the UCC studied as the empowered pursuit of employability. Utilizing a career coaching model, students were described as centered in the career planning process where their personal goals and values were prioritized. Staff said they guided students through the process of determining what their strengths, skills, values and goals were and articulated strategic action plans to put them on the road to achieve their goals. This process ideally lead to students' empowerment by guiding and teaching them how to autonomously make educated and thoughtful career decisions.

Fundamentally grounding the discussion of career planning was student employability and its dimensions: career identity, personal adaptability, and social capital (Fugate et al., 2003). In addition to career coaching, other career services such as resume and cover letter writing, career fairs, and mock interviews were available to students. During these activities, staff would engage students' assumptions about work and career. They provided opportunities for them to re-evaluate, confirm, and diversify their knowledge about themselves and work to develop their career identities. Additionally, career planning activities supported the development of students' social capital and possibly allowed them enhance their personal adaptability through staying positively focused and proactive in career exploration and job searches.

This study highlights the importance of socialization messages in career planning and further articulates career coaching as a viable option for university career centers. It also discusses the potential positive and critical outcomes of promoting the pursuit of meaningful work and the employability. In a time when stakeholders are pressuring universities to prove

they are preparing students for work, employability discourse could 1) emphasize how university sponsored activities could assist students to be competitive job seekers, but also 2) instill a “no guarantees” academic culture where students are ultimately to be held responsible for their levels of employability upon graduation (Hallier, 2009).

Epilogue

After I had completed a full draft of results and conclusions, I presented and discussed them in a formal presentation to the UCC staff to complete member checks and receive feedback. Upon arranging a time and place for the presentation, a senior staff member shared with me a proposal for an employability curriculum that the center had developed since my data collection. This document addressed some of the macro-level suggestions I originally outlined as practical implications. The development of this proposal had just started when I began data collection and was only mentioned briefly in one interview. The proposal outlined an employability curriculum by defining employability and discussing its relevance to and potential outcomes for college students. In this document, employability was described as a process that had the potential to maximize student preparedness. Employability was conceptualized as the “fitness of an individual to find suitable work by possessing both expert proficiency in a discipline or field, while also having the intelligence to apply that expertise to a wide range of contexts, communicate well, and adapt to new information.” Employability was positioned as a positive connection between the university and the marketplace, and endorsing this curriculum would be a defense of the value of higher education. Through a review of employability literature that did not include a reference to Fugate et al.’s (2003) work, the proposal listed seven dimensions of employability: 1) Academic Learning, 2) Experiential Learning, 3) Career Maturity, 4) Professional Skills, 5) Career Management, 6) Meaningful Connections, and 7) Global Perspective.

Academic Learning referred to course work that provided both breadth and depth of knowledge and contributed to career aspirations. Experiential Learning was the engagement of experiences and self-reflection outside of the classroom to apply, expand, and enhance career

interests. Career Maturity was developing a career identity through career exploration and engagement activities. Professional Skills referred to students' ability to demonstrate the skills employers' valued such as communication, problem solving, teamwork, and leadership. Career Management referred to developing job search skills and making informed decisions about career later on in life. Meaningful Connections related to building personal and social networks to increase one's opportunity to learning and career related opportunities. And finally, the Global Perspective dimension spoke to the need to develop a broader understanding of cultures and global systems and being able to apply those perspectives to work contexts.

The center had begun to utilize these dimensions to guide programs and services offered and intended on evaluating each with rubrics for assessment to ensure the center's support of the curriculum. At the time of member checks, staff had already coded their entire website with their defined employability dimensions to evaluate how their current site did or did not support the newly developed curriculum. Social media messages were also coded and intentionally written to connect to specific dimensions so that the center could track what messages were most often engaged by students. The trajectory for this curriculum would be to develop an Employability Certificate where students could take coursework that had the curriculum integrated into it or via self-paced online learning where each dimension would have its own online module.

The development of this curriculum responds to some of the suggestions made to the center by refocusing the stated objective of the center to that of employability rather than more short-term endeavors such as the job search. Their conceptualization of employability does attend to this important activity but also promotes other activities and development that would prepare students to compete on the job market and manage their careers long-term. While I believe this focus to be beneficial, it is interesting to note that the center's fundamental argument

for the employability curriculum is that it is a responsible and feasible answer to mounting pressures for universities to more clearly demonstrate their role in developing students' for work. This perspective contradicts the assertion that promoting employability is also used as a strategy to potentially distance organizations from the responsibility to its members. When presented with this perspective, senior staff admitted that while one could interpret employability that way, it was clear to them that this approach was appropriate and responsive to students. Guiding students to take responsibility was a responsible act and it would be difficult to argue otherwise considering the attention and research that had been put toward developing the curriculum. In other words, the accountability paradox was dismissed because staff believed their work demonstrated the responsibility and accountability outside stakeholders had been calling for. The obstacle was not that their work could be interpreted as distancing themselves from responsibility but how to draft other university departments into the employability curriculum.

In summary, the center has embarked upon an effort to raise the profile of employability as a fundamental concern for itself and the university and is pursuing collaborative relationships with other university departments to integrate career planning earlier in students' academic programs. In addition, assessing the influence of employability messages also has been established as a priority with greater attention paid to the type and purpose of online content and messages engaged.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval Pilot Study

4/2010

 HSCL # _____
 (to be assigned)

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS
 Human Subjects Committee Lawrence
 Application for Project Approval

1. Name of Investigator(s) Rose Helens-Hart
2. Department Affiliation Communication
3. Campus or Home Mailing Address: 1440 Jayhawk Blvd., Room 102, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7574
 - a. Email address: rosehelenshart@ku.edu
 - Phone Number(s): (a) Campus: (785) 864-3633 (b) Home 320-493-5284
5. Name of Faculty Member Responsible for Project: Don Stull
HSCL must receive faculty approval via email notification or hard copy signature before a student application may be processed.

a. Email address of Faculty Member: stull@ku.edu

6. Type of investigator and nature of activity. (Check appropriate categories)

- Faculty or staff of University of Kansas
 Project to be submitted for extramural funding; Agency: _____
 KU/KUCR project number: _____

(HSCL must compare all protocols in grant applications with the protocols in the corresponding HSCL application)

- Project to be submitted for intramural funding; Source: _____
 Project unfunded
 Other: _____
 Student at University of Kansas: Graduate Undergraduate Special
 Class project (number & title of class): ANTH 783 Doing Ethnography
 Independent study (name of faculty supervisor): _____
 Other (please explain): _____
 Investigators not from the Lawrence campus but using subjects obtained through the University of Kansas
 Activity to be registered with clinical trials.gov (when registered, notify HSCL of registration number)

7.a. Title of investigation: Construction of College Students' Provisional Professional Selves

7.b. Title of sponsored project, if different from above: _____

8. Individuals other than faculty, staff, or students at Kansas University.
 Please identify investigators and research group:

9. Certifications: By submitting this application via email or hard copy I am certifying that I have read, understand, and will comply with the policies and procedures of the University of Kansas regarding human subjects in research. I subscribe to the standards and will adhere to the policies and procedures of the HSCL, and I am familiar with the published guidelines for the ethical treatment of subjects associated with my particular field of study. I also certify that I have verified and disclosed any potential conflict of interest between myself and/or my team members and the project sponsor (if applicable). **Type or write name(s) in the signature lines below depending on your electronic or hard copy submission.**

Date: 2/12/13

Date: _____

Signature: Rose Helens-Hart _____

Signature: _____

First Investigator

Faculty Supervisor

Signature: _____

Signature: _____

Second Investigator

Third Investigator

First Investigator: Rose Helens-Hart

Project Title: Construction of College Students' Provisional Professional Selves

10. Please answer "Yes" or "No" for the following questions about the proposed research activity. (Provide details about questions checked "Yes" on the last page of the application.)

Does the research involve:

no a. drugs or other controlled substances?

no b. payment of subjects for participation?

no c. access to subjects through a cooperating institution (other than KU)?

no d. substances taken internally by or applied externally to the subjects?

no e. mechanical or electrical devices (e.g., electrodes) applied to the subjects?

no f. collection of fluids (e.g., blood, urine, etc.) or tissues from subjects or exposure of subjects to hazardous materials (chemical, biological, radiation, etc.)?

Environment Health & Safety (EHS) Approval number (required):

no g. subjects experiencing stress (physiological or psychological)?

no h. omission of information concerning any aspect of purposes or procedures (misleading or withheld information)?

no i. deception of subjects (active misinformation or false feedback provided)?

no j. subjects who could be judged to have limited freedom of consent (e.g., minors, developmentally delayed persons, or those institutionalized)?

no k. any procedure or activities that might place the subjects at risk (psychological, physical, or social)?

yes l. use of participant observation interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, audio or video recordings? (check all that apply)

no m. data collection over a period greater than one year?

yes n. indicate the consent procedure(s) to be used signed, oral, information statement, parent/guardian, assent procedure for minors or the cognitively impaired (Check all that apply) Note: HSCL makes the final determination on waiver of a signed consent form or consent. Justification must be provided for waiver of signed consent form or consent.

no o. indicate the type of data you will be acquiring in this project private health information, academic records, social security information, KU ID number

no p. other data that may increase participant risk (46.101 (b) (2) (ii) in the areas listed criminal civil, financial, employment, reputation

11. If any of the key personnel or research team members of this project have a financial interest* in a project sponsor or a provider of goods or services to the project, the individual and the relationship must be disclosed.

Neither I nor any member of the research team has a financial interest in the project sponsor or a provider of goods or services to this project.

I am disclosing the following financial interest(s)** :

Name of Individual	Role on Project	Financial Interest Entity

* An individual’s financial interests include those of the individual, his or her spouse, dependent children, and other members of the personal household (i.e., ownership, compensation received or anticipated, a position of officer or director, or receipt of fees or commissions).

** If this financial interest has not already been disclosed on a Conflict of Interest report, an ad hoc disclosure via the Conflict of Interest reporting form may also be required. Direct inquiries to coi@ku.edu. COI resource information is also available at the following link: <http://www.rcr.ku.edu/coi/index.shtml>

Additional COI Notes:

--

Complete the following questions on this page. Please do not use continuation sheets.

12. Approximate number of subjects to be involved in the research: 30

13. Project Purpose(s):

The purpose of this project is to explore how college students discursively construct and perform professional identity as they prepare to enter the workforce.

14. Describe the proposed subjects (age, sex, race, or other special characteristics). If there is a physical or mental health condition that characterizes the subjects to be included in the study, please indicate this here as well.

Proposed subjects will be volunteers over the age of 18, in their junior or senior years of study at the [REDACTED]. Student participants will likely come from the [REDACTED] or sought out through the [REDACTED] (CSC). In addition, employees and those involved in CSC activities such as the career fair or workshops may also be observed or engaged in conversations or interviews.

15. Describe how the subjects are to be selected. Please indicate how you will gain access to, and recruit these subjects for participation in the project. That is, will you recruit participants through word-of-mouth, fliers or poster, newspaper ads, public or private membership or employee lists, etc. Drawings/raffles are not permitted for payment or recruiting. (If subjects are to be recruited from a cooperating institution, such as a clinic or other service organization be aware that subjects' names and other private information, such as medical diagnosis, may not be obtained without the subjects' written permission.)

Subjects are to be recruited through the [REDACTED] Research Participation site and through flyers posted around [REDACTED] campus (see Appendix D). Participants may also be personally encountered by the primary investigator at KU or community sponsored career events. The primary investigator will attend various CSC events to learn of services and meet those actively engaged in promotion of career development. These events are located in or around the [REDACTED].



3/26/2013
HSCL #20760

Rose Helens-Hart
COMS
102 Wesco Hall

The Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL) has received your response to its expedited review of your research project

20760 Helens-Hart/Stull (COMS) Construction of College Students' Provisional Professional Selves

and approved this project under the expedited procedure provided in 45 CFR 46.110 (f) (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

The Office for Human Research Protections requires that your consent form must include the note of HSCL approval and expiration date, which has been entered on the consent form(s) sent back to you with this approval.

1. At designated intervals until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the HSCL office.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human_subjects_compliance_training.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the Committee immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform HSCL when this project is terminated. You must also provide HSCL with an annual status report to maintain HSCL approval. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from HSCL one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dyson Elms
Coordinator
Human Subjects Committee Lawrence

cc: Donald Stull

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Request for Modifications

Request for Modifications

For Use with eCompliance

Upload this form to the Basic Information page in eCompliance, Question #8

HSCL #: 20760

Principal Investigator (PI): Rose Helens-Hart

Please select ALL the categories of modification(s) you are requesting.

Change in Study Title

Change in Principal Investigator

Addition of/change in research personnel (All study staff must be added as study staff in eCompliance. Please contact HSCL if they are not in the system.)

Change to research/study design, methods or procedures (e.g., observations, interventions, collection of biological samples or biometric information, participant tasks, etc.)

Addition of/change to study population

Addition of/change to recruitment or compensation procedure(s)

Addition of/change to survey(s), questionnaire(s), or other research instruments

Addition of/change to the identifiers collected in the study, or any others that would impact the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants

Addition of/change to informed consent/assent document(s) and/or procedures (Upload consent forms on the “Consent Forms and Recruitment Materials” tab in eCompliance)

Other changes

For each of the above categories you selected to change, please describe the change you are proposing. New title: “Preparing students for boundaryless careers”. Change to interview protocol: This protocol includes questions about career and work rather than professionalism. Change to consent form: Consent form now includes correct title and more accurate description of study. The faculty advisor for this project is Dr. Tracy Russo not Dr. Don Stull.

Please state the reasons you are making modifications to the study. After having collected some data the new title better reflects the direction of the project. Rather than focusing just on professionalism, I am researching broader concepts of career and work. As such, I would also like to revise my interviewing protocol and consent forms to better represent the study. Dr. Tracy Russo is my dissertation advisor and Dr. Stull is no longer involved in overseeing this project.

Are any of these changes the result of something that occurred during human participant interaction or an unexpected event? Yes No Briefly describe the occurrence(s).

[Click here to enter text.](#)

How will the proposed changes have an impact on the risks or benefits to research participants? There will be no change.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Part 1: Demographics/Background

What is your age?

Do you identify with a particular race or ethnicity?

Do you identify with a particular social or economic class?

What is your educational background?

What is your previous professional history?

What is your employment title?

What is the different between a career coach and career counselor?

How many years have you been employed in career services and at the UCC?

How did you become involved in Career Services?

What attracted you to this type of work?

Part 2: Professional Duties

What is a typical day in your job like?

Tell me about the students who come to you.

What is your interaction with them like?

What are students' most common questions?

Most pressing concerns?

How are these similar or different from what you think they should be concerned with?

What is the most enjoyable part of your job?

What is the most challenging?

What is the least enjoyable?

How were your trained for job?

How would you describe your coaching/counseling philosophy?

How did you develop this philosophy?

What does “career” mean to you?

How does your own career match up with that description?

What do you think career means to students?

Do you challenge their perceptions? How?

What is a “successful/unsuccessful career”

How does one obtain it?

Part 3: Career Planning:

What does the UCC offer to students?

How does it attempt to prepare students for a career?

What do you hope students leave here knowing?

What do you think is one of the most valuable things students can learn at the UCC?

What do you, in your role here at the UCC, offer to students?

How satisfied do you think students are with services they receive at the UCC?

Are there things students should learn about careers that the UCC doesn't or can't provide?

Where/how might they learn them?

Where do you see the field of career planning in 5 years?

Where else do you think students receive information about career planning?

How are these messages similar/different than what might be communicated at the UCC?

Appendix D: Informed Consent Document
RESEARCH PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM
“Construction of College Students’ Provisional Professional Selves”

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study and even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas. If you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study. There are no risks associated with your participation. However, you may refuse to answer any question during the interview. No compensation will be paid for participation.

The purpose of this project is to explore how college students construct and perform professional identity as they prepare to enter the workforce. You will be asked to discuss your professional skills and development or how you assist others’ in their professional development. This conversation will take approximately 45-60 minutes of your time. With your consent, this discussion will be digitally recorded. This file will be used by the researchers only, and will be free from any information that might identify you, and will be stored in both a password-secured computer and a locked cabinet for five years. All files relating to participation, including transcripts and audio files will be destroyed after 5 years. You may withdraw or ask questions regarding your consent to participate in this study at any time (before, after, or during any interviews, observations, or interactions with the researcher). You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request the Principle Investigator.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu. I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

 Type/Print Participant's Name

 Date

 Participant's Signature

Researcher Contact Information:

Rose Helens-Hart
 Principal Investigator
 Dept. of Communication Studies
 102 Bailey Hall, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd.
 University of Kansas
 Lawrence, KS 66045-7545
 (785) 864-3633

Tracy Russo, Ph.D.
 Investigator
 Dept. of Communication Studies
 102 Bailey Hall, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd.
 University of Kansas
 Lawrence, KS 66045-7545
 (785) 864-4370

Appendix E: Oral Consent Document
ORAL RESEARCH PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM
“Construction of College Students’ Provisional Professional Selves”

As a student in the University of Kansas's Department of Communication, I am conducting research on how students develop professional identities before entering the workforce and factors in the university system that may influence this development. I would like to (a) participate in this workshop/seminar, (b) interview you to obtain your views on professional development. Your participation is expected to take about 45-60 minutes. You have no obligation to participate and you may discontinue your involvement at any time.

Although participation may not benefit you directly, the information obtained from the study will help us gain a better understanding of how students prepare to enter the workforce. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission.

**This interview will be recorded. Recording is (not) required to participate. You may stop taping at any time. The recordings will be transcribed by me. Only I and my faculty supervisor Dr. Tracy Russo will have access to recordings which will be stored on a password protected computer and will be destroyed in five years.

Participation in the interview indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. Should you have any questions about this project or your participation in it you may ask me or my faculty supervisors in the Department Communication. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at (785) 864-7429 or email irb@ku.edu.

Researcher Contact Information:

Rose Helens-Hart
 Principal Investigator
 Dept. of Communication Studies
 102 Bailey Hall, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd.
 University of Kansas
 Lawrence, KS 66045-7545
 (785) 864-3633

Tracy Russo, Ph.D.
 Investigator
 Dept. of Communication Studies
 102 Bailey Hall, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd.
 University of Kansas
 Lawrence, KS 66045-7545
 (785) 864-4370

Appendix F: Study Proposal to UCC Senior Staff

Dec. 30, 2013

Dear XXXX:

I am writing to ask for your support in research for my doctoral dissertation. I hope you will approve my plan for data collection at the University Career Center beginning in February, 2014. I would like to investigate how the career planning methods and philosophy of your University Career Center influence students' preparation for the world of work. Specifically, I would like to focus on how counseling, group activities, and events, serve as contexts that can potentially effect positive change in the professional lives of students. I would also be happy to assist in or conduct research that would benefit current UCC initiatives.

I value the UCC for its commitment to providing career services that result in students obtaining meaningful work and leading successful and purposeful lives. I believe this research program will provide an opportunity to develop a complex understanding of how the work of UCC staff intersects with current career literature and the lived experiences of student patrons. I have a long-standing interest in career development, professionalism, and qualitative research. For instance, I have

- Completed my PhD comprehensive exams, which focused on qualitative methods, organizational communication, and diversity;
- Readied a number of manuscripts on professionalism and career for submission for publication in *Communication Studies*, *Women & Language*, and *Transformative Works of Media and Culture*;
- Presented related research at national communication conferences; and
- Participated on a funded research project exploring career stories of young women from North East Africa, India, and the Middle East.

I would be happy to work out details of this research program with you, particularly in how this project would support UCC efforts. Attached is my résumé and a tentative plan for this research. I can provide names for and/or letters of recommendation. I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss this proposal at your convenience: rosehelenshart@ku.edu

Sincerely,
Rose

Rose Helens-Hart, ABD
Department of Communication

Appendix G: Participant Recruitment Summary

WHO: My name is Rose Helens-Hart and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas. I have been approved to work with your University Career Center (UCC) to collect data on how organizational members talk about career and work with students.

WHAT: In order to explore the career planning methods and philosophy of your UCC, I am interested in interviewing organizational members in all areas. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission.

****This interview will be recorded. Recording is (not) required to participate. You may stop taping at any time. The recordings will be transcribed by me. Only I and my faculty supervisor Tracy Russo will have access to recordings which will be stored on a password protected computer and will be destroyed in five years. Participation in the interview indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. Should you have any questions about this project or your participation in it you may ask me or my faculty supervisor in the Department Communication. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at (785) 864-7429 or email irb@ku.edu.**

WHY: I value the UCC for its commitment to providing career services that result in students obtaining meaningful work and leading successful and purposeful lives. I believe this research will provide an opportunity to develop a complex understanding of how the work of UCC staff intersects with current career literature and the lived experiences of student patrons.

Sincerely,
Rose Helens-Hart

Researcher Contact Information:

Rose Helens-Hart
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Dept. of Communication Studies
102 Bailey Hall, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd.
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