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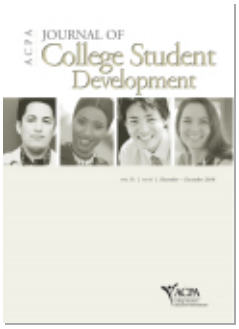

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Student affairs offices in postsecondary institutions devote time and energy to developing programs for students on a wide array of topics. Inspection of college websites reveals numerous program options, ranging from outdoor recreational activities to leadership development, from current events discussions to health awareness seminars, and from college adjustment workshops to cultural diversity experiences. The views presented in *Learning Reconsidered* (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2004) conceptualize student services as learning events encompassing a broad spectrum of outcomes. But to what extent are students prepared to engage in such learning? If students lack clarity in terms of their goals, aspirations, and identities, they may not be able to benefit from these learning opportunities.

One setting in which student affairs programs emphasize learning and development is in the area of career services. These professionals are devoted to assessing the need for programs, developing them, and then marketing them to students. In our experience, follow-up evaluations often reveal that some programs were successful with robust participation and positive outcomes, whereas others were not. Perhaps student readiness for learning is a factor in these variable results.

We were interested in identifying students who might be ready to participate at a high level in a program related to career development, and we undertook a search to find a measure that would help us in this process. After reviewing the literature, we settled on the concept of motivation for our work. Given that motivation is one of the most widely studied topics in the behavioral sciences, we focused our instrument search for a measure of generalized student motivation that was brief, theory based, and documented. Moreover, given that our program was related to career development, we added that to the search criteria.

KOHUT'S THEORY OF THE SELF

Our search led us to the goal instability scale (GIS; Robbins & Patton, 1985), which is based on Kohut's (1977) psychology of the self. Kohut's theory includes two lines of development in the normal adult—the grandiose and the idealizing. These two lines, especially the idealizing line, can be useful in understanding how a person engages the career development process.

Kohut's self-psychology added a humanistic component to traditional psychoanalysis, and focused more on personality than on psychological development (Kahn & Rachman, 2000). Kohut posited that, in the grandiose sector, the immature self represents one whose self-worth is obtained from external influences, such as admiration and approval from others. The mature self, on the other hand, is one able to internally regulate and energize self-esteem and ambition. In the idealizing sector, the immature self is again externally regulated and receives a sense of security and direction from powerful others. The mature self possesses an internal system of ideals and values (Robbins, 1989).

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Kohut theorized that an underlying lack of self-cohesion and vulnerable self-esteem contribute to all disorders of the self. These two characteristics are a result of early childhood experiences and the parent's failure to provide the child with an appropriate model for normal grandiosity. Therefore, the child becomes "fixated" in a less mature stage of self-development, characterized by a lack of mature goals and a healthy expression of grandiosity. Such a person is characterized by an inability to empathize with others; a vulnerability to criticism, separation, and loss; and an inability to formulate realistic life plans, or the persistence to meet those plans (Robbins & Patton, 1985).

MOTIVATION AS GOAL STABILITY

Kohut's psychology of the self addresses motivation by theorizing that the two lines of development in the normal adult—the idealizing and the grandiose—work together to sustain the structure of experience, which is the primary basis of motivation. Kohut believed that individuals who could not develop and maintain a healthy structure of experience were characterized by a sense of not being "real," "inner emptiness," "falling apart," and a lack of purpose, direction, energy, and focus (Pauchant & Dumas, 1991, p.54).

The idealizing sector of development is thought to lead to a sense of self-cohesion, which is demonstrated by an internalized and coherent system of goals and ideals. Kohut believed that, with an adequate level of support in one's life, an internalization of mature goals and values would follow. This internalization would arise in late adolescence by an overarching sense of goal directedness (Kohut, 1977). Such theorizing can inform career development programs for college students because readiness to engage in career planning behavior is dependent upon the relative maturity and stability of the idealizing sector of the self (Robbins & Tucker, 1986).

To measure an aspect of this idealizing self and to examine the absence of personal, orienting goals, the GIS (Robbins & Patton, 1985) was created. *Goal instability* is defined as difficulty in the areas of self-direction, setting goals and keeping a focus on them, maintaining the persistence to accomplish goals, and initiating action. Individuals with low goal instability and possessing personal goals that provide life direction and purpose are expected to independently create career objectives and energetically engage in the career development process. However, people with high goal instability require the support and encouragement of others to pursue the career development process.

For example, persons with low goal instability (high motivation) would theoretically be more inclined to participate in a career planning program. Persons with high goal instability (low motivation) would need more encouragement, targeted marketing, or social support to participate in such programs. Payne, Robbins, and Dougherty (1991) called for counselors and practitioners to measure goal directedness to predict later adjustment and transition difficulties in each stage of development.

Motivation is a key factor in understanding student academic persistence and performance (Robbins, Lauver, Le, Davis, Langley, & Carlstrom, 2004). The items on the GIS assess energy and drive, project completion, losing goal-related focus, and confusion about the self (Casillas, Schulz, Robbins, Santos, & Lee, 2006). In addition, the scale is said to be an indicator of general and achievement motivation. Goal instability has been found to be negatively correlated with items measuring personal competencies and self-esteem (Robbins & Patton, 1985). Lese and Robbins (1994) found goal instability

to be negatively correlated with study skills, grade point average, and goal attainment of Southeast Asian adolescent refugees. The concept of goal instability is attached to Kohut's idealizing sector of the self, which is characterized by "hypersensitivity to others, a sense of depletion, longing for attachment to others, and career indecision" (Robbins, 1989, p. 123).

Goal instability has been used to examine topics relating to formats of career advising workshops (Robbins & Tucker, 1986) and adjustment to college life (Robbins, Lese, & Herrick, 1993). Undergraduate students with higher goal instability benefit from the use of interactional workshops (Robbins & Tucker, 1986) and benefit less from the use of computer-based counseling systems (Kivlighan, Johnston, Hogan, & Mauer, 1994). Findings suggest that career services professionals should extend extra support to individuals who possess high goal instability. Although studied in the context of career services, the applicability of such findings can be applied to other aspects of student affairs.

THE CAREER PROGRAM

Our program and the context for our study involved a career planning course. We were interested in learning which students were motivated to fully engage in the course activities. Career courses have a positive impact on college students in various areas, including gains in career decision making, increased college persistence, and reduction of negative career thoughts (Folsom, Peterson, Reardon, & Mann, 2001; Folsom & Reardon, 2003). Reese and Miller (2006) found that students who participated in a career course exhibited increased career decision-making self-efficacy in the areas of obtaining occupational information, planning for careers, and developing career goals.

THE STUDY

Student participation in a career course can be assessed with a behavioral performance contract (Reardon, Leierer, & Lee, 2007). With such a completed contract, students can understand what level of performance is associated with different grade levels, and they can choose the grade they wish to receive, and then work toward that outcome by completing the various activities associated with that level of performance. For example, if the grade of *A* in the course is a clearly held and stable goal for the student, for example, low goal instability, then the student should be motivated to energetically engage and complete course assignments and activities, which is reflected in the completed performance contract.

The present study investigated the relationship between goal instability and participation in a career planning program (course) using the GIS and a completed course performance contract. Specifically, this study addressed the following question: What is the relationship between motivation, as measured by goal instability, and willingness to engage in career program activities? It was hypothesized that students with lower goal instability would perform at a higher level than those with higher goal instability.

METHOD

Participants

Participants included 246 undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory career development course at a large state university. Forty students were excluded from the study because they took fewer than 3 credits in this variable credit course, and 16 either dropped the course, had missing data (e.g., no completed performance contract), or elected not to participate in the study. The final sample (N = 190) consisted of 96 males (51%) and 94 females (49%). Approximately 6.5% of

the sample was made up of freshmen, 28.5% sophomores, 21% juniors, and 46% seniors.

Instruments

The performance contract listed all assignments for the course and the possible points allotted for each. To achieve an *A* in the class, students needed to earn at least 90% of the 653 possible points. Examples of course assignments and requirements included completion of an occupational research paper, occupational information interviews, scores on unit quizzes, class participation, and attendance. Certain course assignments were weighted more heavily; for example, the occupational research paper was worth approximately 30% of the final grade and attendance and participation accounted for approximately 13% of possible points. This performance contract was designed to make performance required for various grades transparent, and to increase a student's motivation to engage in the career planning process and complete related course activities.

The GIS (Robbins & Patton, 1985; Table 1) is a self-report, 10-item scale arranged in a 6-point Likert-type format (e.g., 1 = *Strongly Agree*). High agreement with the items on the scale results in lower scores and is an indication of greater goal instability. In a study of convergent and divergent validity, the GIS was related to the constructs of social withdrawal, depression, and lack of ambition and goals (Robbins & Dupont, 1992). The GIS has been found to have high stability (test–retest over a 2-week interval; $r = .76$) and high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$; Robbins & Patton, 1985).

Procedure

Following procedures approved by the university human subjects committee, the instructor administered research materials to each student. These included the GIS, a statement of informed consent, a student data sheet, and the performance contract. An incentive of 5 points extra credit, added to the total of possible class points (equal to less than 1% of the final grade) was offered, and those students who did not wish to participate were given other options for earning 5 extra credit points. In addition to the overall points earned on the completed performance contract, researchers examined the amount of "optional" extra credit points obtained by students outside of regular class activities. It was believed this might also be an indication of motivation to participate fully in the course program. Finally, the difference in scores between the Unit I and Unit III quizzes (each with 25 items) was examined. Unit quizzes were given in weeks 7 and 16 of the semester and it was believed that higher test scores on the Unit III quiz might be related to student motivation to perform at a higher level.

TABLE 1.
Goal Instability Scale Items

1.	It's hard to find a reason for working.
2.	I don't seem to make decisions by myself.
3.	I have confusion about who I am.
4.	I have more ideas than energy.
5.	I lose my sense of direction.
6.	It's easier for me to start than to finish projects.
7.	I don't seem to get going on anything important.
8.	I wonder where my life is headed.
9.	I don't seem to have the drive to get my work done.
10.	After a while I lose sight of my goals.

Note. See Robbins and Patton (1985).

RESULTS

We used a correlational design to examine the relationship between motivation and engagement in career course program activities. It was hypothesized that individuals with lower goal instability (higher motivation) would outperform individuals with higher goal instability in the course. GIS scores were compared with total points obtained in the course, the amount of extra credit points obtained, and the difference in scores between the Unit I and Unit III quizzes.

GIS score results (M = 45.11, SD = 8.14) indicated low goal instability (high motivation) for students in the class. Using t-tests, correlations between the variables were obtained. In looking at the relationship between GIS scores and total points earned in the course, the P-value was not significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level (P = .08). The hypothesized relationship between GIS and total points on the performance contract was not supported. However, a P-value of .04 was found between GIS and extra credit scores, with a correlation of .13, indicating a significant positive relationship between GIS and extra credit. Lastly, the relationship between GIS and quiz difference scores was also not supported (p = .09).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between a measure of motivation (GIS) and a measure of participation in a career course program (the completed performance contract). The overall mean GIS scores for this sample indicated low goal instability, or high motivation, which may explain the lack of relationship between course participation and GIS scores. It is possible that a ceiling effect was operating with respect to GIS scores for the class. The students who chose to participate in this career planning course program had high levels of motivation and goal stability, and the course provided them with programmatic activities directly related to their life/career goals.

Score differences between the Unit I and III quizzes, which were administered 9 weeks apart, were not related to our measure of motivation (GIS scores). We believe that there may be a variety of factors unrelated to motivation contributing to quiz results on these two tests. Students in general may have a tendency to underestimate the amount of effort required to obtain a good score on the first quiz because these scores are typically lower than scores on later tests. Unit III scores for the class are generally higher because students as a whole are intent on improving their course grades and study more for this quiz. This overall class effect may have masked the effect of motivation on score improvement.

However, the findings indicated a significant relationship between goal stability or motivation and extra credit points obtained in the course. In other words, as motivation increased (i.e., goal instability decreased), the amount of extra credit points earned in the course increased as well. However, the weak correlation (r = .13) was of limited practical significance. Nevertheless, the matter of extra credit activity may be the most efficient way to study the relationship between motivation and willingness to engage in career course program activities, because the extra credit points are optional and must be done apart from regular class activities. Extra credit points could be earned in a variety of ways, for example, by attending a career fair, conducting an extra information interview, or viewing a career workshop. This finding supports the rationale that higher motivation is related to self-directedness in career planning because the other course activities included in the performance contract were established course

requirements. Through an initial assessment of the level of goal instability, student affairs staff offering career programs may be better able to tailor their approaches to assist students in gaining the most out of such program activities.

The point total on the completed performance contracts for this sample (M = 584.1) was at the B+ grade level. Most participants did well in the course, indicating an ability to engage successfully in career planning activities. Participants in this study had high motivation as measured by the GIS and were able to execute the course successfully.

FINAL THOUGHTS

One of the strengths of the GIS is that it is short and can be useful in student development and learning programs that tap into students' personal goals. In a practical sense, the GIS could be used as a paper-based assessment tool or the items could be used as the basis for a structured interview to assess a students' general motivation to engage in relevant student development program activities. As such, it could assist a student affairs professional in determining the student's baseline level of motivation for participation in a program. Those with high goal instability, characterized as having low energy, low self-esteem, and low self-motivation, are less likely to utilize available resources and may be anxious, worried, reserved, and cautious. For students with higher baseline levels of goal instability and low motivation, student affairs staff could start at the very beginning of the student development process and work slowly toward higher levels of functioning. Students with greater goal instability typically require the support and encouragement of others to pursue the learning engagement process.

Staff may be able to increase the level of intrinsic motivation in these students by engaging them in learning activities that increase self-knowledge (e.g., values, interests) and decision-making skills. Improvements in these areas could help students in finding a satisfying life direction. We suggest that the GIS, a measure of generalized motivation and the presence of life-orienting goals, may be useful in identifying students most ready to participate in many student development programs, as well as those needing additional support and encouragement for such participation. Although the findings in the present study are limited, it may be useful to determine whether the course could be a method of increasing goal stability. By examining the level of goal instability at the onset of the course, and again at the end of the semester, we could obtain a better understanding of the efficacy of such a course on the reduction of goal instability.

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