



## Career development: a Hybrid

By Sara Tusek

In colleges and universities, offices of career development rests firmly at the intersection of three major disciplines: business/economics, counseling, and sociology. Bringing together insights from these three areas of study (and adding a strong dose of practicality and real-life experience), college and university career development is a true hybrid. To better understand the complexity of career development, here's a look at its history and achievements.

### A glance at history

In the U.S., the idea of planning a career in tandem with earning a degree in higher education can be traced to the late 1940's. The GI Bill provided money for servicemen and women returning from WWII to attend college; the colleges sorting mechanisms to match a college education with suitable careers.

These "sorting mechanisms" of the late 40's, 50' and 60's, which form the basis for modern career development, include the following:

- Standardized psychological tests of aptitude and interests (the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory was the original, used by the armed services to classify incoming military personnel; John Holland's codes and the Myers-Briggs tests were later adopted, among many others).
- Career planning programs (including programs to help people analyze their own interests, skills, motivations and goals in regard to employment).
- Career services, including advice on written communications (resumes, cover letters, thank-you letters) and help with career research and interview preparation.
- Job placement, which was chiefly through an on-campus interview system.

- Career exploration through career fairs for employment and for graduate school.

### A new, holistic approach

This mechanistically-organized approach to careers, with everything bullet-listed, was turned on its head by Richard Bolles when he published *What Color Is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers* in 1970. Bolles was the first career practitioner to say that your career is part of your life, not something separate that you work at and then walk away from when you go home.

For Bolles, your career was the main way in which you expressed yourself in the world. Work, far from being simply a way to earn money or express social status, is the "living out" of who you are inside. Your career, then, must be in harmony with your personality, aptitudes, interests and dreams in order for you to fulfill your life's purpose.

This way of envisioning career development went far beyond the categorization and rationalization of finding a job that had prevailed in the 40's, 50's and 60's. It was right in tune with the outcry for social justice, unselfishness and personal integrity heard in the U.S. in the late 60's and early 70's. Affluence made it possible for college students to explore all kinds of "idealistic" careers (the law, medicine, professional services, non-profits, religious service, international relations, university teaching ) that had up to now been unaffordable for people of modest means. Affluence also removed the urgency to graduate and get a job as soon as possible, allowing undergraduates time and space for personal growth, rather than having to rush into the job market and find a job "just to pay the rent." (to p. 2)



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## Career offices evolve

University career offices since then have struggled to combine the step-by-step aspects of traditional career services and programs (as listed on page one) with the spirit of adventure and clarity found in *What Color Is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers* and its many spin-offs. A comprehensive career office must offer career planning programs, job placement services, job search programs and resources for students to research careers. A major task for career offices is to bring students into the office early in the game. Traditionally, only seniors used the career office, losing the chance to serve in internships and summer jobs in their careers of choice.

What most career offices need to show are results, to justify their budgets. This has led to intensive marketing by career offices, to attract students who will use the career resources. Career offices work with the Admissions, Development and Alumni offices; they network with Parents' Councils and Class Alumni officers; they take part in freshman orientation, class reunions and Parents' Weekends.

In this process, many career offices have changed their title to "career development," which encompasses not just student career activities from freshman year on, but the life-long process of correctly matching your skills, achievements, interests and goals with a career in which you can excel. Offices of career development on college campuses have a complex and multi-part function: not only must they provide resources to help students in the transition from the campus to the "real world," they must also interact with parents, administrators, faculty, alumni, employers and their own peers, to keep their knowledge relevant.

## Career development's 3 disciplines

Career development professionals today need to understand both theory and practice from the three diverse disciplines that constitute career development:

1. **Business/economics:** the majority of jobs in the U.S. are in for-profit business. These jobs may be in manufacturing, agriculture, for-profit education

and training, insurance and banking, hotels and restaurants, for-profit hospitals and medical practices—the list goes on and on. Aside from the 30% or so of Americans employed by federal, state or local governments, and the small percentage who work in religious, charitable and education non-profits, most people in the U.S. work in business.

As President Calvin Coolidge said, "The business of America is business." Even non-profits must at least break even to stay in operation, and students with an understanding of business realities have a distinct advantage over those who enter the job market without understanding how it works.

2. **Counseling:** Career planning programs rely on skilled counseling techniques to lead students to a better understanding of their own inner motivations and career goals.
3. **Sociology:** the U. S. job market is complicated, influenced by the same social factors that shape the country as a whole. Unemployment, financial downturns, the percentage of people getting college degrees, immigration, and urbanization all shape the job market and, thus, what students can expect in terms of their own careers.

College and university career development is a true hybrid. Career development professionals spend their days distributing information, programs, services and encouragement to college students as they enter their own career development process, forging the link between education and work.



*What Color Is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers* is the best-selling job-hunting and career-changing book in the world. Twenty thousand people buy the book each month, and there are more than 8 million copies in print

It was first published December 1, 1970 -- self-published, in fact, with the author using a local copy shop in downtown

San Francisco. The author coined the word "parachute" to mean career transitions, back in 1968 when people commonly said, "Well, I'm tired of this job - - I'm going to bail out?" Boles' playful rejoinder at that time: What color is your parachute? A number of common phrases in our culture: "golden parachutes," "informational interviewing," "transferable skills" etc., were all born out of this book.