

Current Status and Future Development of Career Centers in the United States

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Career centers in the United States developed in community-based organizations in the early 1900s and later moved into educational institutions. This article profiles these career centers with respect to their history, their current scope and function, and ways in which technology and the global economy will affect their future operations. Studies by the National Association of Colleges and Employers and other reports are summarized and the profile of one comprehensive university career center is described. It concludes with a vision statement for future career centers.

Keywords: NACE; career center; career services; university;
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The invitation to share our ideas about the present and future status of career centers in the United States (U.S.) provided an opportunity to do research on what has been happening in this area, reflect on what we know, and speculate on what might happen in the future. This article begins with a brief history of U.S. career centers in order to provide some perspective on the way career services have evolved over the past

100 years in this country, and what has led to the present state of these programs. It then reviews the current status of career centers based on national surveys, discusses standards used in evaluating career centers, and describes a comprehensive model center operating in one setting. It concludes with an analysis of the forces that we believe will shape career centers in the future.

History

When the vocational guidance movement in the U.S. emerged in the early 1900s (Stephens, 1970), the development of career centers was one of its most tangible and lasting accomplishments. The career and vocational guidance movement sprang from the social reform and humanitarian activities in urban areas in the Midwestern and Eastern U.S. at a time of unprecedented social and economic changes. These changes were characterized by population shifts from rural to urban areas, high immigration rates, increased manufacturing, urban unrest, and high numbers of school dropouts. Career centers, often located in settlement houses, provided a variety of social services including vocational guidance to immigrants and others. Career guidance and counseling services promoted by Parsons (1909) and others developed in the context of these community-based centers. A distinguishing feature was and remains the provision of resources and information related to occupations, jobs, training, financial aid, career planning, and employment skills.

A career center is typically an administrative unit of an organization (e.g., school, business, or agency) that employs staff who deliver a variety of career programs and services. Comprehensive career centers (Schutt, 2008) provide career counseling and assessments, experiential career opportunities such as internships and cooperative education, educational and career information, job-hunting assistance, and employment information. They may also provide services to employers

seeking to fill their hiring needs. Less comprehensive career centers may provide only some of these services.

Frank Parsons, generally regarded as the father of vocational guidance in the U.S. (Zytowski, 2001), created one of the first career centers. His Vocations Bureau was located in the Civic Service House, a Boston settlement house that provided a variety of social and civic services to citizens and Italian immigrants. Parsons created this early career center with a private grant provided by a wealthy Boston matron, and he formulated a process for providing career counseling in this context which is still viable today and used by many career services providers. Parsons's (1909) book, *Choosing a Vocation*, included details about the resources, materials, and staffing of the Vocations Bureau.

It is remarkable that the career centers developed in the U.S. one century ago still operate in much the same way as originally conceived. In the next section, we discuss some key aspects of contemporary career center operations.

Current Status

With the passage of time, career centers moved from community settings, such as settlement houses, into colleges, universities, and high schools, and less often into business organizations, or governmental and social service agencies. The Vocations Bureau, for example, found a new home at Harvard University (Maverick, 1926). Most contemporary career centers on college campuses uniquely integrate the academic and the corporate worlds (Herr, Rayman, & Garis, 1993; McGrath, 2002). These centers have evolved from job placement offices to those providing more comprehensive services reflective of the career development process. In educational settings, the career center is most likely to be located in a dedicated office that provides the resources used by staff and clients to solve career problems and make career decisions.

Career center resources can include inventories and tests, card sorts, books, descriptions of occupations or educational and training institutions, CDs and DVDs, pamphlets, clippings, Web pages, instructional modules, multimedia resources, training materials, magazines, take-away materials (free handouts), and procedures for locating information or preparing for a job campaign, e.g., résumé writing and interviewing (Epstein & Lenz, 2008; Sampson, 2008). Career advising and counseling are another resource often available in a career center, and professional counselors or paraprofessionals, sometimes called career development facilitators (Splete & Hoppin, 2000), may provide these services. The intended outcome of using career resources, including career counseling, is client or customer learning and a change in career-related behavior (Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz, 2004).

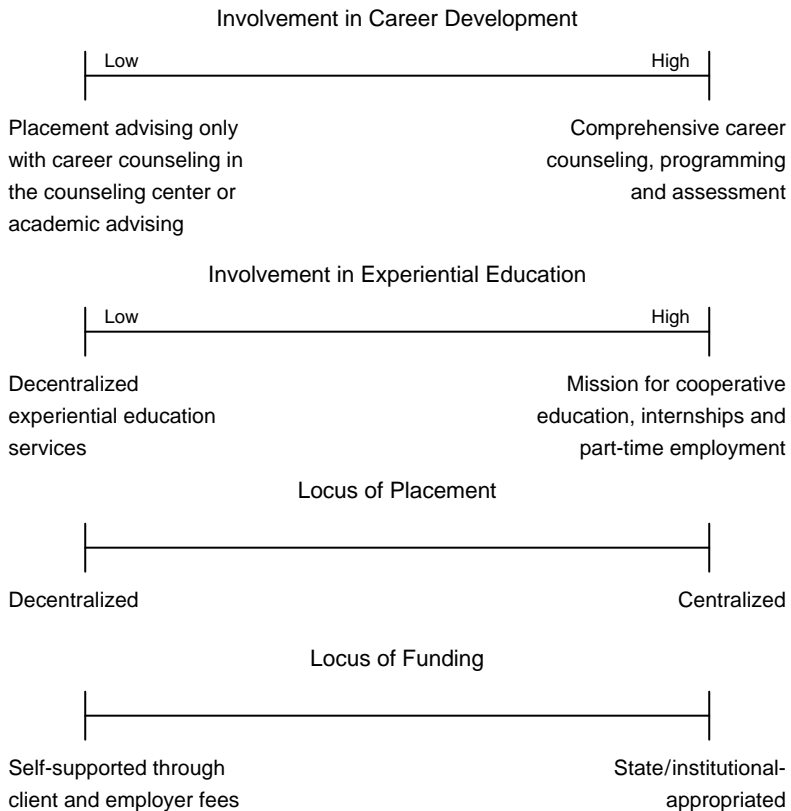
Comprehensive career centers in the U.S. would typically offer the following core services and programs:

1. Career advising and intake
2. Individual and group career counseling
3. Assessment and computer-assisted guidance
4. E-portfolio systems
5. Career information and networking
6. Career planning classes for credit
7. Career education outreach and programming
8. Web-based and onsite services
9. Experiential education
10. Career expositions, job fairs
11. On-campus recruiting
12. Job listings and résumé referral services
13. Fundraising

Career centers vary in both mission and the scope of programs and services across colleges and universities. However, the general

configuration of U.S. career centers can be conceptualized using the four continua presented in Figure 1 (Vernick, Garis, & Reardon, 2000). Some exceptionally comprehensive career centers will fall on the extreme right of a continuum while others may not include any of the features associated with this continuum and fall on the extreme left. Many U.S. career centers can be placed near the midpoint of these four continua. In the section below, we elaborate on each dimension and provide examples of how they might impact the design and delivery of services and programs in a particular career center.

Figure 1. Career Center Continua



Involvement in Career Development

The first continuum reflects the degree to which career centers hold the mission for providing career development services, including career advising, counseling, assessment, and information. At some institutions, the mission for career counseling and assessment resides in the student counseling center or with the academic advising program rather than the career center. In such instances, the career center may provide assistance with employability skills (e.g., résumé writing, interview preparation, networking) but does not offer programs for academic/career choice or for reducing career indecision. Career centers with this mission would be placed on the far left side of the continua. At other institutions, the mission for counseling and assessment for career choice may be shared with a variety of offices including the student counseling center, academic advising, and the career center, placing these career centers in the middle of the continuum. Finally, career centers providing the full range of services would be placed on the right side of this dimension.

Involvement in Experiential Education

The second dimension in Figure 1 addresses the degree to which a career center holds the mission for providing experiential education services such as externships, internships and cooperative education programs. Part-time, work-study, and volunteer or summer job programs could also be included in this area. Many institutions have internship or cooperative education programs residing in academic units rather than career centers. This places them on the left side of this dimension. At some institutions, the mission for delivering experiential education is shared across colleges, academic departments, financial aid offices, and career centers, placing them in the middle of the dimension. A smaller number of schools would be located on the right side of this continuum, indicating that the career center is designated as the sole unit charged with administering experiential education programs.

Locus of Placement

Placement services or as they are now more commonly known, employer relations services, represent the third dimension in Figure 1 and range from decentralized to centralized. Many U.S. institutions have several decentralized placement offices residing in academic colleges, placing them on the left side of this dimension. Other institutions have fully centralized career centers charged with the college or university-wide mission for placement or employment services. Some institutions fall toward the middle of this dimension with the career center providing most placement and campus recruiting services while certain “vocationally oriented colleges” or professional schools such as business, law or engineering maintain their own “placement” offices.

Locus of Funding

Finally, the degree to which career centers are funded by the institution can be plotted on a continuum. At some colleges and universities, the operating budget for career services is not funded by the institution which requires career centers to generate funding through charges and fees to students, alumni, and employers, coupled with varied fundraising programs (e.g., room sponsorships). At other institutions, career centers enjoy the full support of their institution for their operating budget and any fees or contributions are used as enhancement funds (e.g., purchasing additional technology, career assessments, career information materials, job subscriptions). The reality of funding for most U.S. career centers today is that offices must depend on some institutional funding, which is then supplemented by any outside funds obtained. Much like university presidents, U.S. career center directors are frequently charged with being the unit’s “fund raiser in chief” to deal with ever-shrinking financial support (Bash & Reardon, 1986).

In the following section, we review survey data collected over the

past 30 years that provides additional insights into the structure and operations of U.S. career centers.

National Surveys of Student Affairs Officers

It is no small irony that little information about the status of career centers is available in the professional literature. One early study was reported by Reardon, Zunker, and Dyal (1979) who surveyed 458 chief student affairs officers in higher education institutions in the 50 states and territories drawn from the *Education Directory, 1975–1976* (1976). They reported responses from 302 institutions (66% response rate) with 152 (50%) having a separately budgeted office called a career center that had been created in the past three years ($N = 67$). Respondents noted the existence of a centralized program of services (83%), typically under the placement office (34%) or dean of student affairs (21%), but other reporting lines (45%) included the counseling center, academic deans, or registrar. Career centers in smaller schools were most often under a dean of academic or student affairs, and in middle-sized and larger schools it was the placement office or counseling center. Regarding the creation of a separately budgeted career center, 54% of the respondents supported this move and 46% did not. Respondents (33%) indicated that some group or committee was presently studying the scope and function of career education at their institution.

Vinson, Reardon, and Bertoch (2011) sought to replicate the Reardon et al. (1979) survey. This study examined some of the changes in career center delivery systems as reported by 98 chief student affairs officers and compared them to findings reported by Reardon and his colleagues. Vinson et al. identified several new areas of administration that had not been researched in previous studies. Limitations of this study included the low response rate (31%) and the time-extended

process of data collection, including significant difficulties in using an online survey system to collect data.

Survey results from Reardon et al. (1979) and Vinson et al. (2011) revealed that separately budgeted career services offices have increased from 51% to 84%. With respect to the management structure of college and university career centers, the number of institutions offering a centralized operation has remained about the same since 1979, but in this sample those offering a decentralized career center had dropped to zero, and those offering both centralized/decentralized operations was 14% (no previous comparison is available for the combined category). The most notable change in career center administrative control involved a shift away from reporting to a “placement office” (34% in 1979 to 1% in the current study). Similarly, there has been an increase in “student affairs” administrative control from 21% in 1979 to 71% in the current study.

Vinson et al. (2011) examined several new topics. First, an overwhelming majority (86%) of career centers were seen as very satisfactory or satisfactory by chief student affairs officers in providing services to students. Second, Vinson et al. conducted an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) which revealed inadequate fiscal and human resources as major hurdles to career center effectiveness. An analysis of 40 programs and services that could be provided by career centers revealed that more than half were provided by the majority of the centers and that most were in alignment with each other in terms of offerings. This suggests that a core cluster of services exists for career centers. The majority of institutions in the current study reported that career center staff members were not participating in professional or peer-reviewed activity (e.g., conference presentations, publishing research).

Three of the most important findings emerging from this study by Vinson et al. (2011) include the following: (a) an emerging consensus on the number and nature of core services that characterize a college or university career services office; (b) faculty are increasingly supportive of career services on the campus; and (c) career services have become established functions in the student affairs division of the institution.

NACE Reports

Other national surveys of career center programs and activities have been reported by the U.S.-based National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (<http://www.nacweb.org>), an association of postsecondary institutions and the recruiting and human resource offices of organizations. In 1998, a survey was mailed to all NACE college members and 578 (34%) usable responses were obtained (NACE, 1999). Respondents were equally representative of public and private institutions and 58% were from schools with 2,500 or fewer students. On average, career services offices received 90% of their budget from the institution, and 59% reported receiving 100%. The survey provided additional details on staffing patterns and the range of student services provided. For example, NACE reported staffing numbers for 12 full- and part-time positions in the career services office (e.g., associate director and assistant directors; career counselor; career librarian; information technologist; coordinators for internship-cooperative education, job development, placement, and recruitment; graduate assistant; student worker; and secretary or clerical worker).

Nagle and Bohovich (2000) examined career center office structure, range of services, and technology applications in a survey of 1,747 NACE members and obtained 927 (53%) usable responses. Most respondents (90%) reported a centralized service (i.e., they were the sole provider of career services at their institution), and 10% were in

decentralized offices. They indicated that 65% were in student affairs, 14% in academic affairs, 5% under the president's office, and 3% under enrollment management. The largest percentage of respondents (39%) indicated that their office was known as "career services," while "career development" was the second most common name. Nagle and Bohovich summarized survey results from 1975, 1981, 1987, 1991, 1993, 1997, and 2000 regarding 20 of the most common career center services offered.

A later NACE survey (Nagle, 2001) examined facilities, financing, and staffing in a mailed survey to 1,734 members which produced 654 (38%) usable responses. As in earlier surveys, 44% rated their location as "very accessible," and 90% of the operating budget was provided by their institution. Respondents indicated that the biggest challenges included engaging students before their senior year and dealing with dwindling resources.

The most recent survey, *NACE 2009–10 Career Services Benchmarking Survey for Four-Year Colleges and Universities* (NACE, 2010), was sent to 1,389 member schools and 557 (40%) usable responses were obtained. Almost 88% had primarily centralized offices with little difference according to institution size. About 63% were in student affairs while 22% were in academic affairs and 15% were in other administrative arrangements. About 45% had the name "career services," slightly more than in 2000, while 17% used "career center" and 13% used "career development."

The NACE respondents indicated that career counseling by appointment had declined in the past year, but drop-in services had increased by 25%. Smaller schools were more likely to provide academic counseling through career services than larger schools, but larger schools were more likely to provide a for-credit career course.

Results showed that 55% of schools with 20,000+ students offered such courses, but schools with fewer than 10,000 rarely did. Overall, 32% of the respondents offered a credit career course. In summary, the benchmarking survey of NACE schools revealed an increased demand for services to students and alumni, but this work was accomplished with fewer resources. The largest decreases in resources occurred in large public sector schools such as state land grant colleges. As institutions consider the status of their career services against this survey data, another important tool for measuring the quality and quantity of career center services and programs can be found in the NACE *Professional Standards*.

NACE Standards

NACE (2009b) produces a publication, *Professional Standards for College and University Career Services*, which outlines fundamental requirements for U.S. career centers and the larger institution's responsibility for providing comprehensive services. The Standards address a range of topics including the importance of a mission statement, necessary budget, staffing and facilities, as well as program assessment. Additionally, core career services, consistent with the comprehensive model discussed earlier, are outlined under the Program Components. An outline of the NACE Standards is shown in Table 1.

NACE (2009a) also produces a *Professional Standards Evaluation Workbook* that enables U.S. career services to rate the quality of offices and supporting programs and services using the NACE Standards. Moreover, career services offices may request an external review using career development professionals to evaluate their offices using the *Professional Standards* and *Evaluation Workbook*. These NACE Standards provide an ideal that career centers can aspire to reach.

Table 1. NACE Standards Outline

Introduction & Preamble	
I.	Mission
II.	Program Components
	Career advising/counseling
	Career information
	Employment services
	Graduate school services
	Experiential education and career exploration
III.	Program Management
IV.	Organization
V.	Human Resources
	Leadership by career services managers
	Professional positions
	Pre-professional positions
	Student employee and volunteer positions
	Support staff and technical positions
VI.	Financial Resources
VII.	Facilities and Equipment
VIII.	Technology
IX.	Campus and External Relations
X.	Employer Relations and Recruitment Services
XI.	Legal Responsibilities
XII.	Equal Opportunity, Access, Affirmative Action, and Diversity
XIII.	Ethics
XIV.	Program Evaluation, Assessment, and Research

A Comprehensive Model

In this section, we provide a “case study” of how the authors’ career center has benchmarked itself against national standards, while at the

same time following a unique path that is a product of both its history and its innovative spirit. Florida State University's (FSU) career center (<http://www.career.fsu.edu>) has been recognized by its peers as a national leader among such centers. Visitors from more than 40 countries have visited since 1986 to learn more about its work. The center can be understood in terms of the four programmatic dimensions described in Figure 1: (a) involvement in career development; (b) involvement in experiential education; (c) locus of placement services; and (d) locus of funding (Vernick et al., 2000).

The FSU career center is involved in all facets of career development services including counseling, advising, assessment, and the provision of information supporting career decision-making. Second, the center is fully engaged in providing experiential education activities, including internships, cooperative education, part-time jobs, and related experiences, while also sharing responsibilities for these areas with other campus offices or academic programs. In the third continuum dimension, placement and employer relations, FSU provides primarily centralized services via its main facility. It collaborates with the College of Engineering to provide services within that College's campus facility. Similar to the example described earlier under this dimension, FSU has professional programs (e.g., law, MBA) that provide a range of career services, primarily focused on employment, as part of their student programming. Finally, the fourth area involves funding, which, as noted, can be based on self-generated charges and fees for services and fundraising or full support from the home institution. FSU's career center is supported primarily by the institution with outside funds used to supplement and enhance services.

This center has been informally described as a "teaching career center" (Saunders, Reardon, & Lenz, 1999) because of its provision of instruction at the undergraduate and postgraduate level and the

theoretical and applied research undertaken by staff regarding career interventions and behavior. The full integration of teaching, research, and service, hallmarks of colleges and universities in the U.S., can provide synergy for sustaining a career center in turbulent economic times of change. This section has provided an example of how one U.S. career center, based in a large research university, has evolved to provide a range of comprehensive services. We now turn our attention to the future and discuss what trends are likely to impact the design and delivery of career services for future generations of students and practitioners.

Current Trends and Future Developments

In the dynamic global economy, where “everything affects everything,” no career center can afford to ignore trends and factors that can have a potential impact on services. Remembering that U.S. career centers began during a time of massive social and economic change a century ago, and considering evidence of the ongoing growth of career centers in colleges and universities, there are reasons to be optimistic about this work in the future in spite of challenges.

The Economy, Labor Market and the Global Recession

The U.S. economy is still struggling with a very difficult economic situation and the aftermath may last for generations. Peck (2010) argues that the era of high joblessness will have an impact for generations and change social institutions in the U.S. If true, this scenario will dramatically impact career services in postsecondary institutions seeking to help current graduates and alumni find employment. Virtually all U.S. career centers face the challenges of reduced employer recruitment activity and reduced job opportunities for college graduates. Furthermore, as noted in Figure 1, many career centers rely on employer fees such as registration costs to participate in job fairs. Reduced employer job fair

registration income coupled with reduced institutional funding during the recession will cause financial challenges for many U.S. career centers.

Finding Top Talent

Organizations will increasingly use college career services offices to locate the most promising talent to lead their organizations (Margolis, 2010). This can present ethical challenges to career centers to deliver the top talent to an employer, especially if institutional fundraising is a priority. Rayman (1993) and others have reminded career centers to maintain the focus on providing a comprehensive career development program to all students at the institution, not only the most talented.

Social Networking and the Internet

Web 2.0 social networking sites are expanding at an extremely rapid rate across the globe (Osborn, Dikel, & Sampson, in press). These Websites (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter) provide tools for career development and employment. College and university career centers are presently learning how to harness the power of these sites in support of their traditional career programs and services. The tension between privacy and sharing information about jobs and employment will become more pointed in the future (Lyons, 2010). Individuals using Websites in job hunting may find their personal information increasingly being used for market research purposes by companies owning these Websites. Career services offices will have opportunities to provide leadership in helping persons use these Websites in informed ways that protect personal privacy.

Cost-effective Services

All U.S. colleges and universities are facing budget reductions from traditional funding sources and the need to develop new funding

mechanisms. The notion of evidence-based practice is one way to respond to this pressure and it is not a topic frequently covered in the career literature. Career centers will need to conceptualize their mission in terms of broader outcomes than simply job placement and include such measurable outcomes as employer visits, employability skills training, social networking contacts, career assessments, and job interview appointments.

Academic Advising

Most U.S. colleges and universities employ professional academic advisors to assist students in selecting programs of study, developing an academic plan, selecting courses, and supporting student progress toward timely graduation. Academic advising continues to emerge as a profession and is expanding its mission to include “developmental advising services” that often include career planning assistance. U.S. career centers will need to continue to forge partnerships with academic advising services, while clarifying the unique contributions of each department in supporting students’ educational and career development (Lenz, McCaig, & Carr, 2010).

Staff Credentials and Expertise

Career services leadership and staffing will occupy increased attention in the future. Should a center’s director be a professional in career services with appropriate academic degrees and credentials in career development, or should the director be someone with business experience in management and human resources? Comprehensive U.S. career centers will likely include persons with expertise in both areas.

Decentralized, Academic College-based Career Services

Many academic disciplines in the U.S. wish to provide career services specific to their respective fields. These services can include

virtually all career programs such as career advising, career information resources, internship and job recruiting/employment. Career centers will need to ensure that they communicate and collaborate with faculty and staff in academic units to guarantee that they are providing career services that address the needs of all students.

Responding to Trends and Challenges

In order to ensure future programmatic viability and to succeed, university career centers will engage all of the above trends in forging partnerships with academic advising, academic colleges, and technology-based employment systems. In addition, U.S. career centers will add value to their centers by creating and offering university-wide systems and programs. For example, career planning classes for credit offered through career centers will be available to support career guidance of students in all majors. University-wide technology-based systems that assist students in creating résumés, e-portfolios, and accessing internship and employment listings will be developed and implemented by career centers. In some cases, a career program will be customized to meet the needs of selected academic colleges and will be identified with a respective department, but it will be based on a university-wide system led by the career center.

To ensure future excellence, U.S. career centers must use their knowledge of career development theory, professional expertise, and standards for ethical and professional conduct in order to be recognized as the leading expert in the delivery of career programs and services at their institution. A vision statement that future career centers might consider, regardless of geographic location, is offered below:

A vision for excellence focuses on a comprehensive, centralized, innovative career services office that is understood, used, and respected as a leader at national and international levels by students, alumni,

employers, university faculty/administrators, and other career development professionals. The term “comprehensive” refers to a balanced array of programs that includes career development counseling and programming, experiential education, and centralized employer relations/recruitment services. Programs will include a blend of traditional personalized services coupled with innovative technology-based applications that serve the career needs of all students ranging from freshmen through graduate students representing all academic disciplines including vocationally oriented programs as well as the liberal arts. Career planning services will assist students pursuing part-time employment, internships, and full-time professional employment as well as preparation for admission to graduate/professional school.

The office will offer seamless university-wide systems supporting student career development. For example, students in all majors will create résumés and access career opportunities that support part-time jobs, internships and full-time employment through one university-wide system. This centralized office is not the sole provider of career programs because this is unrealistic at large universities with many academic programs. Rather, the centralized career services office will be the university leader in partnering with and offering its research expertise and systems to other departments wishing to provide career services to their students and alumni.

A vision statement such as the one above provides a benchmarking point that institutions can use in forging a path to success within their unique institutional and environmental context.

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美國職業生涯中心的現況和未來發展

在美國，職業生涯中心發軔於 20 世紀初，先於社區為本的組織內發展，及後轉至教育機構內。本文概述這些職業生涯中心的發展歷史、現有規模和功能，並探討科技和全球化經濟如何影響其未來運作。文章簡介美國大學與僱主協會的研究結果和其他報告，並描述一所大學綜合職業生涯中心的概況。最後，本文提出一項遠見聲明，以作未來職業生涯中心的參考。

關鍵詞：美國大學與僱主協會；職業生涯中心；職業生涯服務；大學；佛羅里達州立大學