

Office of Career Services External Program Review
University of La Verne
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by
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On November 11, 2011 Dr. Darryl Stevens assisted the Career Services Program Review Committee by completing an external review of the program and its functions. He was invited to serve as the external reviewer because of his long background as both a researcher and practitioner in career development services. He met with the review committee, including: Paula Verdugo, Director of Career Services; Juan Regalado, Assistant Dean, Student Affairs & Director of Student Housing & Residential Education; Dr. Janis Dietz, Faculty Advisor, College of Business and Public Management, and Beth Elmore, Senior Director of Alumni Relations & Special Events. He also met with Christine Kourinian, Career Counselor, Title V Graduate Success Center. He was provided with extensive materials prior to his site visit, including surveys, department goals, collaborative institutional research results, and benchmark data provided by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

Five areas were evaluated as part of the external review process, including:

1. Departmental and program goals and objectives.
2. Program Capacity (facilities, resources, and staff).
3. Assessment methodology and processes.
4. Overall Health of the department.
5. Action Recommendations.

I. Departmental Goals and Objectives

This area was evaluated based primarily on the goals set forth in the “administrative review” documentation sent prior to arriving at the university and secondarily by the mission and aims as drawn from the Career Services website.

A. The primary goals included with the administrative review were:

1. *Assist individuals in developing self-knowledge related to career choice by identifying, assessing and understanding their competencies, interests, values and personal characteristics.*
2. *Assist individuals in obtaining occupational and graduate academic program information that supports their career planning, development and goals.*
3. *Assist individuals in developing effective candidate presentation skills, greater understanding of the fit between their competencies and occupational requirements as well as providing guidance/resources to aid in their effective job search.*

B. The primary goals listed on the Career Services website are articulated as mission and vision statements:

1. *Who We Serve: In order to maximize our resources, time and expertise, we require that all clients who use Career Services are enrolled students or alumni. If you have withdrawn, are academically dismissed, are not enrolled, and do not have a degree posted at the University of La Verne, you will not be able to utilize Career Services' resources.*
2. *Career Services Mission Statement: Career Services, part of the Division of Student Affairs, partners with students and alumni to help them develop, implement, and evaluate their career plans. Our mission is to provide guidance and resources to support career decisions, develop job search strategies, and pursue experiential opportunities and employment.*
3. *Career Services Vision Statement: Career Services achieves excellence in service by committing to provide first-rate career services to every University of La Verne student and alumna/alumnus. We offer industry specific, individualized and supportive career counseling and resources to meet our clients' diverse and changing needs. Our ability to do so depends on our view of our administrative, classified, undergraduate and graduate student staff as professionals. We hold each to a high level of professionalism and support his or her education and development. We value each staff member's unique contributions. We further strive to promote faculty involvement in the career development process through collaborative relationships, classroom presentations, and in building employer, community and campus partnerships to create career opportunities. We pride ourselves on being integral to the educational experience and promoting student retention and life-long learning at the university.*

IA. Has the program clearly articulated its goals and objectives?

1. *Recommendation: It is the feeling of the external reviewer that the goals as articulated in the administrative review provide a concise and clear expectation on the part of the client students. These goals are both achievable and "industry standard," creating an important reason for their also appearing prominently on the Career Services Website.*
2. *Recommendation: As is often the case with both mission statements and vision statements, they are philosophical and abstract in their scope. This is particularly true of the vision statement. The important goals of faculty involvement and promoting student retention are lost in the statement. The external reviewer recommends that these statements be redacted for concision or replaced by the three goals from the administrative review.*

IB. Are the goals achievable and appropriate?

1. *Recommendation: As indicated above, goals from the administrative review were clearly articulated and were also achievable and appropriate within the normal range of students seen at a university career center. We will discuss in detail below some concerns that make it difficult for Career Services to achieve these goals. While concerns include staffing and facilities, the larger issue is the charge that Career Services has to include all alumni, non-traditional students, and regional campus students in the scope of their services.*

2. *Recommendation:* The goal of faculty involvement is a high priority at any university campus. Likewise, it is often a goal that is unfulfilled, not because of a lack of outreach, but because of a lack of institutional will. The external reviewer believes without strong, persistent support from senior academic administration, the goal will remain unfulfilled.
3. *Recommendation:* The achievability of goals is based on current staffing patterns that include a director, assistant director, administrative assistant, and one temporary, grant-funded counselor. Should the grant lapse on the career counselor position without the commitment from administration to provide funding, the loss will be immeasurable.

II. Program Capacity

This area was evaluated by reference to the administrative review provided and a “tour” of the facilities and interviews with the staff present on the day of the site visit. The staff currently consists of a director, an assistant director, a grant-funded counselor position that is shared with another unit, and a part-time administrative position. Graduate student interns have made up the balance of staff for several years.

The facilities are in an office area in which the walls are constructed from glass giving the area a large and spacious feel. However, the fact is that the glass walls prohibit privacy and most of the space is used by the learning center. On the day the external reviewer arrived, he noted that the office itself is so poorly marked that he walked by it twice before realizing where it was located. Upon entering the area, the noise and activity from the Learning Center created an unusual distraction and it was surmised that some students might be put off by the activity and lack of privacy and leave before even requesting services, this, of course, providing that they would have been able to find the offices in the first place. (As a side note, none of the offices in the Student Center were clearly marked and one of the students asked about it said, “I can’t ever figure out what’s in this building.”)

The external reviewer was quite surprised to learn that the already small staff members are required to see all alumni as well as students from RCA’s and those in the CAPA program. (Note: the reviewer was a member of the La Verne faculty from 1997 to 1999 and is quite familiar with both CAPA and the regional campus system.)

IIA. Does the program have adequate facilities, equipment, resources and support services?

1. *Recommendation:* Quite simply, the facilities, while new and shiny are not adequate for an effective career counseling center. If the center remains in its current, poorly marked location, most students will not find the time to visit. It is the experience of most university career centers that students seldom go out of their way for even highly necessary student services. That said, space is valuable and its shortage universal on all campuses across the country. Attempts to be made to:
 - a) create better signage
 - b) make a more distinct and separate space for the career center
 - c) dampen the impact of noise from other units occupying the space
 - d) provide privacy for offices by using “frosted” glass or blinds
2. *Recommendation:* While equipment and resources were not articulated as specific concerns, more career centers are moving to use resources such as Skype or Go To Meeting to provide the ability for students to “see” counselors or interview with

employers from a distance. These technologies require up to date hardware and work best when there is a room dedicated for these purposes. The same technologies allow for mock interview practice as well.

3. Recommendation: It is increasingly rare for career centers to service alumni without charging a fee. The employers that approach career centers on campus have internal constraints on who they can recruit. While there are nuanced differences from company to company, generally speaking, corporate human resources separate their university recruiting from their regular recruiting. A “college recruiter” is typically not allowed to recruit anyone who has been graduated for more than three months. If college recruiters realize that a campus routinely includes alumni in their pool, they tend to drop the campus as a target campus. Likewise, alumni present a whole range of different problems from traditional, on-campus students. Most of the resources, programs, workshops, etc. available for career center staff are focused on the needs of the first-time employee. Not only does this cause consternation for the professional staff, but the dissatisfaction on the part of alumni may be seen in a later lack of commitment to the institution. We **STRONGLY** encourage the administration to reconsider allowing free lifetime career services, unless there is a willingness to support it with an additional salary line.
4. Recommendation: Service to the RCA’s is an unnecessary drain on resources at Career Services. Driving to a regional campus is both time-consuming and costly. It is our recommendation that RCA’s assume the responsibility for providing career services providers for resume workshops, interview skills practice, and job search techniques. It is our belief that local providers who are more familiar with the local job market will be of far more benefit to the RCA students.

IIB. Is the staff well-qualified to perform their duties?

The staff, led by Paula Verdugo, are clearly at the top of their game. Paula is well-known and well-networked throughout the Southern California area. The staff takes advantage of all professional development opportunities in the region. As a side note, one of the difficulties faced by Career Services is the fact that after one or two years of service, career counselors tend to leave for higher paying jobs at nearby schools. It is a tribute to Paula’s hard work and close supervision that counselors who begin their careers at La Verne are able to easily “move up” professionally. The downside, of course, is the lack of continuity for both the unit and the students.

1. Recommendation: The Career Services staff members are well-qualified both academically and from a professional practice perspective. If the current Title V position is allowed to lapse after the cessation of the grant, the ability of the remaining staff and interns to handle the caseload will be greatly compromised.
2. Recommendation: Currently, the staff is underpaid by about 10% when compared to the national average. The average in California, however, is about 10% higher than the national average for an entry-level counselor and about 15% higher for a center director. The external review process acknowledges the current difficult financial situation, but because program continuity is vitally important, we urge the administration to begin moving salaries to be more in line with national, if not California standards.

III. Method and procedures to assess program or department effectiveness.

Has the program clearly articulated and applied its methods and procedures for assessing its goals, objectives, and their effectiveness?

The external reviewer was quite impressed with the scope and detail of assessment for the program. Career Services used broad student surveys, exit evaluations for workshops, seminars, and presentations, self-assessment, and the detailing of actual utilization whether for individual appointments or workshop/event attendance. Added to this were several institutional research surveys that questioned students on issues beyond career services. These metrics included the students' assessment of what they had learned in the career development process. As is the case on many campuses, career services is seen by students as highly important and those that use the services are pleased with the outcome and feel better prepared for the rigors of finding employment.

Recommendation: The Career Services staff has created an assessment scenario that is rigorous and complete. No changes are recommended other than to remain committed to the assessment process.

IV. Overall health of the program.

Strengths:

Well-trained and organized staff

- Excellent on-line and web-based resources
- Flexible approach to providing services and finding resources
- Commitment to students
- Positive response from student attending events
- Creative use of social media to reach out to students
- Excellent networking skills have created a great regional reputation among peers

Limitations:

- Reliance on interns to fill "staffing holes"
- Wages below national average, well below regional average
- Facilities difficult to find and highly distracting, allowing limited privacy
- Mandate to provide lifetime service to alumni
- Mandate to provide services to RCA's
- Impending cessation of grant-funded position
- Difficulties engaging faculty in career development process

V. Action Items.

The external reviewer was not provided with specific action items from the internal review. As a result, following are recommended action items for the Career Services Center.

1. Reassess the viability of providing lifetime career development services for alumni. While some campuses still claim to do this, the fact is that it is more a marketing ploy than an actuality. The University of Southern California does provide such services, but the alumni association provides funding to the career center to cover the salary and benefits for an assistant director. No campus in the University of California does this

any longer. Each campus charges alumni who wish to receive services. UCLA, for instance, only allows alumni access to the jobs database (\$60/year) and access to online resume critique (\$60/occurrence). Further, it has been the experience of most career centers that charging even a modest fee, deters unmotivated clients from presenting for services, freeing staff to work with currently enrolled students.

2. Make changes in the facility arrangements for Career Services as stipulated above. In particular, better signage, create barriers to baffle sound and distractions from adjoining areas, and modify glass walls to create more privacy in staff offices.
3. Commit to permanent funding for a career counselor. The current Title V position performs an invaluable service for first generation graduate students that cannot be replicated should the position disappear.
4. Re-evaluate the utilization of Career Services staff at RCA's. Using local professionals will increase both the quality and value of the services to students.
5. Establish career development as a central focus for the campus, by encouraging faculty/career services partnerships that give occasional access to classes for the purpose of outreach and education.