

Ivy Tech Career Development: An Evaluation

Madison Delks

Indiana University

Abstract

For my final project I chose to evaluate the Lafayette Ivy Tech Career Development Program. I had two main goals in evaluating this program: the first, was for me to see if the Career Development Program was providing all of the necessary development tools needed for students to be prepared for their future careers; the second, was for me to gain in-depth knowledge of the career development services so I can recommend those services to students. I used the book written by Susan M. Johnston *The Career Adventure: Your Guide to Personal Assessment, Career Exploration, and Decision Making* as the guideline for knowing what services need to be offered by a career development program to successfully prepare students for their careers. To evaluate the Career Development Program, I essentially immersed myself into the program- by attending events, interviewing career development staff, and going through all of the steps a student might go through during their own career preparation process.

Content

Before I start expounding upon my questions and answers I found for this final project, I would like to take a paragraph to point out the main objectives of the Lafayette Career Development Program. These are the listed objectives of the Career Development Program which are found on the Ivy Tech Career Development website <https://www.ivytech.edu/career-development/15779.html>:

- Career exploration, advising and planning through a variety of assessments and tools
- Professional document preparation that includes resume, cover-letters, LinkedIn profile and portfolio
- Interview preparation
- Networking opportunities that includes faculty, career fairs and on-campus recruiting
- Employment research that includes job market trends, graduate survey statistics and resource guides
- Professional development opportunities that includes soft-skill development, classroom presentations, HireIvy and other career management tools
- Work-based experiences that include internships, externships, co-ops and much more

From the website, it looks like the Career Development Program offers all of the necessary services for students; but I wanted to delve deeper into the services offered and experience them for myself.

For my project, I focused in on a portion of the Interactive Model: Evaluation. My evaluation, is an informal evaluation of the Career Development Program as a whole (not each individual program offered). At the beginning of my project, I was hoping to do a systematic program evaluation, but I quickly realized that was not feasible and instead did an informal evaluation of the program through attending events, interviewing career development staff, and going through all of the steps a student might go through during their own career preparation process. Caffarella (2002) states that “The heart of program evaluation is judging the value or

worth of education and training programs” (p. 227). Evaluating the Career Development Program was an enjoyable and eye opening experience. Collecting evaluation data was the bulk of my evaluation process. The following paragraphs are filled with my questions and research that I found in my *collecting evaluation data* stage. The different techniques used to collect this data were: observations, interviews, and product review.

I started with a few basic questions to first understand the history and current state of the Career Development Program. I wanted to know who runs the program and if they have had formal career development training, what kind of qualitative and quantitative data has been kept on the program, and if the program has been marketed after another program. I found that the program is run by one academic advisor, one part time employee, and one marketing director. Each of those people have *many* other responsibilities within the college and Career Development is not their primary job. Ivy Tech used to have a full time staff member dedicated to the Career Development Program; however, that person and that position are no longer at the college. The previously stated people have all been helping with the program for only one year and none of them have had formal training with career development or career services. According to Caffarella (2002), the capability of the instructor is an important part of program planning. Whoever is in charge of a program needs to have the knowledge and skill to carry out that program successfully (p. 179). Having a thriving career development program in a secondary institution is such a huge need and I think Ivy Tech should have *at least* one full time staff member dedicated to the program.

The Career Development program is *not* modeled after another program, however, I do think Ivy Tech should consider “going across the river” and checking out Purdue’s Career Development program. I used their services when I was a student and found it to be incredibly

helpful! When I asked if the advisor had ever visited other career development programs, she said “no,” but she thought it was a great idea for her to check out Purdue’s Career Development Program. While researching the history of the Ivy Tech Career Development Program, I quickly found that the program does not really have any quantitative data from any of its services. Yes, some of the career development services that are internet based have quantitative data, but none of the in-person services have any quantitative data. There are no surveys that have been done, no student record keeping, no pre-tests or post-tests, no data.

This class has helped me realize the importance of having some form of data that proves a program is worth keeping. When I was interviewing the advisor over the program, it worried me that there was not any type of data being kept, no survey’s being done, and no way to assess the effectiveness of the program. Isaacson and Brown (2000) say that “the aim of [program evaluation] is to establish worth, effectiveness, and efficiency” (p.242). A program needs to be evaluated, and needs to be continually improved upon; the Career Development Program at Ivy Tech *must* start using evaluation tools to figure out its effectiveness, worth, and efficiency. The only type of evaluation that had been done, was a survey for employers for their feedback on one of the program’s services. Evaluation needs to be a part of the beginning, middle, and end of all programs. A program must strive to involve all parties in evaluation (KU Work Group, 2015). The Career Development Program needs to get feedback from: students, faculty, staff, and employers. Because there was not any data to go off of, I chose to start looking into- who uses the programs’ services, how it is marketed to students, if the students understand how the program works, and what services are offered. Examining the services offered was the main part of my “product review” evaluation technique.

The Career Development Program has services that are beneficial for *every* student who attends Ivy Tech (I will discuss those services in depth in the next paragraphs). Ivy Tech has both traditional and non-traditional students and both take advantage of the services of the Career Development office, however, the *number* of people who take advantage of the services is quite small. There is not any quantitative data for how many people are using the in person services; but from talking with the staff members involved and attending events I found that not many people are using the great services the Career Development Program offers. Program participation is *necessary* for a program to survive. Merriam (2007), addresses the barriers that might deter students from participation: lack of interest, time, and money; motivations, beliefs, and behaviors; and family origin, class, race, etc (p.77). There could be a variety of reasons participation is low. I was talking to one of Ivy Tech employee's about our Career Development Program and they said "What Career Development Program?" The person said it half-jokingly, but I got their point: the program is currently not flourishing, but it *is* improving. After I was half way through my project, I found out that the marketing students at Ivy Tech set out to remove some of those barriers.

For their final projects this year, the Marketing 101 students are analyzing the marketing strategies of the Career Development Program and suggesting improvements. The Career Development Program is currently being marketed in a variety of ways- emails, flyers, college televisions, college websites, and word of mouth; yet, none of those strategies are helping boost their numbers. I've talked with some of the marketing students and they said that students are just not aware of how the services work and don't know *where* to get help. One of the biggest needs for the Career Development Program is an office; right now the program is being run out of the advisor's office. The best thing, from a marketing standpoint, for the program would be

for the Career Development Program to have its own *visible* office. Students are much more likely to enter an office that is visible and is clearly marked *CAREER DEVELOPMENT*.

The most valuable question I asked during this project was this: does the program provide all of the services it claims to provide? I wanted to know if the students had all of the services needed to be effectively helped by the Career Development Program. There are a variety of different services provided by the Career Development Program, I will give an overview of the services, keeping in mind that I am evaluating the services as a whole and not extensively evaluating each service. Using Johnston's book as the foundation, I assessed all of the services students need from a Career Development Program. There are three main areas of focus of a career development program: Self-Assessment (motivations, values, skills, personality, interests); Career Exploration (Internet research, career experiences, networking); and The Job Campaign (resumes, cover letters, interviewing) (Johnston, 2006).

Student's needs vary on where they are in their career journey. During my research, I worked through the Career Development services like I was a student who needed *all* of the services. The first stage, self-assessment, and second stage, career exploration, are worked through in a couple of ways. First, students can meet with an academic advisor who will talk with them about motivations, skills, and interests. From there, they are advised to explore a website called Indiana Career Explorer. This is an incredibly helpful website which allows students to take career assessment tests, explore majors, examine career paths, create and keep track of their resume and cover letters, and helps them keep track of their personal networking. This internet resource is helpful, especially if it is paired with a follow up meeting with an advisor. Gordon (2006) does warn that "Some students may not be ready to receive information from a computer, need interpretation of tests and inventories, need help with identifying personal

values, and need motivational and emotional support for continuing with career planning” (p. 101). Meeting with an advisor to discuss findings is necessary part of this process. Without this important piece, students may not get what they need out of this particular Career Development service. The Career Development Program more heavily caters to the third area needed in a career development program: the job campaign.

There are more in-person career development services that are devoted to “the job campaign” stage of the career process. The Career Development Program has workshops, fairs, and in-person help available for students. Resume and cover letter help are just two of those many services. Resumes and cover letters need to accurately and professionally convey a student’s experiences, skills, education, achievements, goals and passions. Johnston (2006) states, “The goal of your resume is to make the connection between yourself and the employer’s vision of the skills needed to fill the job” (p. 116). The Career Development Program helps with this task in two ways: hosting resume workshops and having open office hours to have items critiqued. However, these events and services are not well attended. The workshop I went to, which was marketed to *all* students, had only ONE student show up. The Lafayette Ivy Tech has around 6,000 students; yet only one student came to the workshop. While exploring this assessment stage, I found myself asking more questions than I originally stated in my project proposal. I wanted to know why very few students take advantage of these resume services. I talked with the Career Development staff and they did not have an answer for me. I still haven’t quite figured it out...the only thing I can think of is that students at that particular time were not thinking about their future needs of having a good resume and cover letter.

The other service that the Career Development Program offers is something called: HireIvy. HireIvy is an online tool where students can post their resume, search for jobs, and look

for internships. This is also where employers can specifically search for Ivy Tech students to fill their companies' positions. Many of the Ivy Tech students have used HireIvy to search for job opening at some point during their job search or for a class that required them to use HireIvy. Students' resumes have to be approved before they can be uploaded to the site and I found myself asking a lot of questions (ones not in my original proposal) on how this website worked. I wanted to know who monitored HireIvy, how students were notified of new jobs being posted, and what was happening to all the resumes that were just sitting out there in the HireIvy cyberspace. I found that the part time Career Development worker monitors the site and she reviews all of the resumes before they can be posted. However, when she reviews them she typically finds many problems with students' resumes; she always emails students and tells them they can come into Ivy Tech to discuss the problems in person, but she has only had hand-full of students who do come in. After an allotted amount of emails/time, she posts the resumes to HireIvy even though they may need some work. I personally think they should just be thrown out instead of being posted.

The Career Development Program also hosts many career and education fairs throughout the semester. These fairs are typically well attended by local employers and colleges, but are not very well attended by students. Employer involvement is quite high at Ivy Tech, local employers want to hire our students. Moreover, student involvement is growing each time a fair is hosted, but it is a slow process. The Career Development Program is trying to improve the fairs each time they have them and the next fair will be split up into two days so it captures students who are there on only Monday/Wednesday/Friday or Tuesday/Thursday. I am interested to see how it goes! The Career Development Program is constantly trying to build a solid base of support. They are targeting faculty, students, and employers. When planning programs it is essential to

have a solid base of support. The Career Development Program is most lacking student support. If a program is meaningful and helpful, students will help promote the program; the Career Development Program just needs to first get the students to attend so they can determine its usefulness (Caffarella, 2002, p. 85).

Other services provided by the Career Development Program include: LinkedIn workshops, employer panels, and interview workshops. I really liked the Interview Stream online resource; this resource can be used on one's own or in a workshop setting. This tool allows students to practice interviewing skills by videoing themselves answering random interview questions. The more a student practices, the more prepared they will be for interviewing. Johnston also advises students to have a list of questions ready to ask interviewers and this website can help students prepare those types of questions (Johnston, 2006, p 158).

The Career Development Program has done a great job of getting local employers support, they just need to work on getting student involvement up. There are areas where the Career Development Program is succeeding and areas where it is lacking. I think that in the next few years, the Career Development Program will grow and thrive. I appreciate the Career Developments staffs' willingness to listen to suggestions offered by me and the Marketing 101 students. After evaluating the Career Development Program, I have determined that the program *does* offers all the services students need to work through the career process. Caffarella (2002) points out that sometimes in hard-to-quantify programs it is best to ask participants whether the program is of worth and value (p. 260). The few students and staff I have talked to have all said that the Career Development program, when utilized, is of great value. I have personally been an active participant in the Career Development Program in the past few months and I *do* believe this program is a helpful and great tool for students to be using.

Program evaluation is meant to help a program grow, change, and improve. I have been talking with Career Development staff and will carry out the next steps of the Interactive Model-Making Recommendations and Communicating Results in my own time. This paper would be a book if I worked through that step of the Interactive Model! My evaluation of this program was meant to make sure the program was offering all of the necessary career development tools needed for the students I come in contact with every day. I have answered all of my final project original questions, but I do feel like I have unanswered questions, which I will discuss in more detail in the process sections.

Process

Interviewing Career Development staff, attending events, and exploring all of the services offered by the Career Development Program comprehensively satisfied my goal of evaluating the program. All of my activities were in direct response to the questions I asked in my project proposal. Interviewing staff helped me see the staff side of the program and actively taking part in the services helped me understand the incredible help students can find through the services offered. My original plan, laid out in my project proposal, worked well; however, due to “real world” circumstances I felt like my project took a turn when I realized there was no data for the program. I was really hoping there would be quantitative data that included: student attendance counts, student surveys, post-test and pre-tests, and even internal program evaluations done over the years. I was hoping to be able to focus in on some of the statistics and data on the Career Development Program at Ivy Tech, but since that was nonexistent I focused on the more experiential side of the program. If I would have had more time, much more time, I would have loved to have attended *all* the events and evaluated the program in a more scientific way. I would

have started implementing all of the previously stated tests to have a more data driven evaluation.

The part of this final project that went really well, was the interviewing of staff. Interviewing the staff gave me the resources I needed to fully examine the program and from there I was able to access the services students use for this program. Interviewing the staff was also my “goldmine.” I learned about the inside workings of the Career Development Program and the staff have openly welcomed me to help/attend career development programs in the future. They have also readily asked for my input. I want the Career Development Program to succeed at Ivy Tech, it is an invaluable program for our students...we just have to help the students realize it.

Reflection

I did accomplish all of my learning goals and objectives stated in my project proposal. I wanted to know the Career Development Program from the inside out and I feel like I accomplished that task. I have always had a passion for career development; but I have not had the opportunity to explore the Career Development Program at Ivy Tech since I started working there. This project was the perfect opportunity for me to interact with the career development staff and expand my knowledge of our college services. The unplanned learning that occurred during this project comes in the form of a question: If a program is the most amazing and helpful program in the world, but no one attends...is it really that amazing and helpful? I found the Career Development Program at Ivy Tech, to be a great program when utilized, but students *have* to attend, otherwise it is not helpful. When I attended that one workshop and only one student showed up, I learned that even the most marketed programs may not do well; there has to be a need.

This project has opened my eyes to the joys and the difficulties of program planning. I have gotten to get behind the scenes and learn how the Career Development Program works and have found myself wanting to help with this program in the future. As an adult learner and Ivy Tech staff member, this project has made me excited to attend and market the Career Development Program to the students I come in contact with every day. I want students to take advantage of the services provided by the program and I want them to be well educated, marketable, and capable human beings. From now on, I will be showing students how the Career Development Program works and I will be recommending the online and in-person services the program offers. I am so glad I had the opportunity to explore this program because I now know this program helps teach students the skills necessary to obtain a rewarding career... they just have to take advantage of the Career Development Program.

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