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A Conceptual Paper on Developing Decision-making Skills for Employability of Collegiate Student-Athletes: Towards the Development of a Career Decision-making Program

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Abstract: Literature commonly denotes that collegiate student-athletes have specific career-related needs warranting attention from counseling practitioners. In particular, student-athletes lag in their career development process because they have less time to devote to career preparation activities as compared to their non-athlete peers and because they have not developed the decision-making skills that will give them the confidence to be actively engaged in their career development process. They are also confronted with identity foreclosure and athletic identity issues that limited them from maximizing learning opportunities where they can develop career decision-making skills. This may pose problems in terms of their employability as graduates in the future. The career decision-making program that is being proposed in this conceptual paper aims to assist the student-athletes in developing the decision-making skills needed in setting their career directions while in college, in managing the personal barriers in career decision-making, and in preparing themselves to be employable and work-ready once their collegiate athletic career has ended. The program intends to utilize a widely used framework in formulating school counseling programs called the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success Model (2014). Specific mindset and behavior standards focus on developing the students' decision-making skill to ensure college success and career readiness. The intended program out of this conceptual paper will employ module development, use of psychoeducation sessions, career counseling, career education, career exposure and other career-related activities as the intended methods in the implementation of the program.

Key Words: Collegiate student-athletes; decision-making skills; employability; career decision-making program; ASCA



1. INTRODUCTION

Similar with other college students, student-athletes are expected to develop the skills needed for adulthood as well as to strengthen their identities. They are working to develop age-specific student competencies while at the same time dealing with the challenges and expectations they face as varsity players that represent the school in major athletic tournaments. Balancing the student role and the athlete role may lead to additional challenges, issues and needs that are unique to this group (Settles, Sellers & Damas as cited in Williams, 2010). Not only that they have to be concerned about having good Grade Point Averages as athletic scholars, be able to maintain eligibility to play for the university and receive a degree, they are confronted as well with the big challenge of preparing themselves for life after college as well as life after competitive sports. This only shows that athletic and academic tasks are not the only responsibilities that student-athletes must manage; they are also faced with the challenges of setting their career direction and developing other basic and essential skills apart from their athletic skills that every college graduate should have in order to be employable. With the growing importance attached to graduate employability nowadays, student-athletes have to maximize every learning opportunity that will allow them to be work-ready soon after college. However, this won't come easy for this special population whose time and energy in college is very much spent on year-round athletic trainings and tournaments and not too much on career development activities which are available for college students. Though academic programs will strongly promote the development of skills and attributes together with the technical know-how, it may still be not sufficient for a graduate to be work-ready and fully able to face the unpredictable and challenging work environment. The manpower demand of the industry right now is no longer limited to hiring only those who are with academic competence but preference is also given to those whose generic skills are adequately developed (Reddanz, 2017). Generic skills commonly relate to

non-technical skills and capabilities or the soft and transferable skills that may make an individual secure work, become an asset to his or her employer, and take the skills from one job role to another at any stage of one's career (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). Simply put, being employable denotes being equipped with basic transferable skills necessary for getting, keeping and doing well on a job. There seems to be a common idea in the literature that a person who has good higher order thinking skills which include making sound and logical decisions are those preferred by employers. They seem to expect graduates to have the capacity to make decisions independently and at the same time find different ways of working and thinking creatively. Literature further implies that equipping students with decision making skill can strengthen their career adaptability (Coetzee, et al., 2015) and open greater employment opportunities (Jackson & Wilton, 2017) when they graduate. Moreover, given that the process of career development involves arriving at informed choices, it is then a must for students to learn and develop the skill to make decisions. In reality, good decision-making skills do not appear suddenly on the day students are ready to leave school. They require time and a well-placed program for these skills to be formed, be assimilated, and be practiced by students thus it's more advisable to engage them early on in their studies with programs that will ensure meeting the criteria in their targeted profession (Gysbers, 2007). It is then imperative that any career development program should target on the formation of this specific skill from the students' entry to the university until they graduate. Early acquisition of the skills for decision-making is critical if students wish to succeed in highly competitive graduate labor markets (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). Researchers Dymnicki, et al. (2013) emphasized that decision-making skills become increasingly important as adolescents navigate new settings such as college and the workplace while being independent from their parents. They further implied that possession of the skill will swiftly enable undergraduate students to



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effectively manage their vocational choices and make informed career choices both during and after their studies. It is in this light that this concept paper which focuses on the decision-making skills of collegiate student-athletes is being forwarded. Student-athletes need to be given venues (e.g. career program) that will help them maximize learning the skill to make sound career decisions despite the limitations surrounding them. What most student-athletes do not realize is that their sport participation and their being part of a sport team is already a valuable source of learning opportunities to develop good decision making skill which will already warrant the attention of employers and will eventually be useful in surviving a challenging workplace. The career program which this concept paper intends to formulate will promote awareness and insights that their condition as having double roles should not be a limitation for them to develop transferable job skills. It will likewise promote behavior change that will allow student-athletes to practice sound and responsible decision-making not just in the aspect of their career life but also in coping with their personal, academic and athletic concerns. The program will engage the student-athletes in a systematic process of making informed and responsible decisions early on in college hopefully training them to manage more difficult and challenging situations effectively when they are in the workplace setting already. Moreover, the program will invest on self and career exploration activities and will also target on equipping student-athletes with the skill on how to identify the decision that has to be made, how to creatively generate alternative solutions and anticipate consequences of each, and evaluate and learn from one's decision through group psychoeducation sessions. Exposure to different career education activities and career counseling sessions addressing their difficulties in making career decisions will also form part of the program. The program intends to utilize a commonly used framework in formulating school counseling programs called the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Mindsets and Behaviors for Students Success

(2014). It presents three broad domains: academic development, career development and social/emotional development which promote mindsets and behaviors that enhance the learning process and create a culture of college and career readiness for all students. To aid in the area of career development, ASCA model promotes the formation of learning strategies, self-management skills, and social skills that will guide career decision-making programs in helping students understand the connection between school and the world of work and plan for and make a successful transition from school to postsecondary education and/or the world of work and from job to job across the life span (ASCA, 2014). Specific mindset and behavior standards in the model focus on developing the students' decision-making skill to ensure college success and career readiness.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Collegiate Student-Athletes and Their Career Development

Career development encompasses all activities that develop the student's knowledge, skills and capabilities to plan, make informed choices and manage their careers and career changes. Activities include those that promote self-exploration in terms of personal skills, abilities and interests; career exploration which includes having the skill to identify potential pathways and the requirements for pursuing them (Rice, Gillis, Leahy and Polesel, 2015). More significantly, career development is a lifelong process of learning, decision-making, networking and successfully managing transitions through the development of skills that support employability and being resilient in the face of career change (Hutchinson, 2013 as cited in Rice, et al., 2015). Literature generally implies that a good career development program potentially minimizes poor career choices and inappropriate work role and may possibly ensure career success and satisfaction. It can also develop the capacity or confidence of individuals to



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navigate successfully the transitions between education and work (Del Corso, 2013).

It has been observed in the literature that collegiate student-athletes frequently lag in career development; they progress more slowly in this aspect than their non-athlete peers (Shurts and Shoffner, 2004). Research generally suggests that participation in collegiate sports contributes a lot to the physical and personal development of an individual. However, it has also been shown that this participation can lead to difficulties for the student student-athlete especially in their career development process. Opportunities to explore career options may be more limited for student-athletes because of training and competition schedules. The rigorous time demands, lack of clear role models, and narrow range of life experiences are but a few of the reasons cited for the student-athletes' slow career development (Sorensen, 2013). Results of the study made by Espina (2014) among student-athletes of a prestigious university reported that the commonly expressed vocational need of this population is to be equipped with relevant career information both in terms of course options (i.e. major) while in college and the career opportunities for them after graduation. Perhaps the amount of time they devote to training and competition often win out over career preparation leaving student-athletes unprepared for life after sport. They also expressed concern about their inability to set clear career goals and the lack of specific career plans other than to shift to another program. However, maintaining a target Grade Point Average to qualify for shifting courses is another source of struggle for them given the double roles that they have to fulfill as student-athletes. A number expressed the need to develop other competencies or skills in addition to their athletic skills. The results clearly indicates that collegiate student-athletes have a strong need to acquire the career information necessary for planning and goal-setting, explore their career options outside of their sport and develop the skills necessary for employment.

Most student-athletes are concerned about the termination of their athletic careers after college; at

times it is likened to fear of losing a significant relationship (Espina, 2014). They may have identified themselves too much in their athlete roles eventually causing them to have an unclear vision of the availability of more career options other than playing their sports (Williams, 2010). This condition is commonly described in literature as identity foreclosure or the state in which the athlete rigidly commits to a role without considering or exploring alternatives (Shurts and Shoffner, 2004). They have become so dedicated to their sport that they missed out on a lot of learning opportunities where they could have found a different role outside of their sport. The tendency to be socially isolated from the rest of the student population might have contributed to their failure to explore other roles outside of being an athlete. These individuals lived, ate, studied, and interacted almost exclusively with their fellow student-athletes. In addition, the failure to explore other roles was associated with lower self-efficacy in career decision-making skills as it promotes dependency to others in making important decisions rather than acting in an autonomous manner (Cabrita, Rosado, Leite, Serpa and Sousa, 2014). In the end, these unprepared athletes become prone to experiencing negative thoughts and emotions when their peers have entered the workforce and they are left without any athletic involvement or a career to immediately pursue after graduation (Espina, 2014). In addition to identity foreclosure, researchers have also examined the role of athletic identity in career development. Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder (1993 as cited in Shurts and Shoffner, 2004) defined athletic identity as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role". Although literature suggests that a strong athletic identity may slow down career development (Lally and Kerr, 2013), results of a study show that athletes with higher athletic identity have higher levels of career-decision-making self-efficacy and higher levels of optimism regarding the future and are more likely to choose a sport-related profession in the future (Cabrita, et al., 2014). Indeed, the career concerns of collegiate student-athletes merit



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a relevant career development program that will facilitate the formation of necessary skills and behaviors in making informed career decisions. They have to be provided with a variety of learning experiences that can widen their perspectives on their identity and the opportunities to become employable graduates in the future. Sorensen (2013) asserted that in order to prepare student-athletes for life beyond collegiate athletic competition, educational support program for them should include life skills training and career development. A university in Florida mandates all freshmen athletes to register in a two-hour credit orientation course, which introduces them to the career planning process while a university in Texas conducts "Career Days" for student-athletes, which invite companies who share with student-athletes the required skills to come and work in their organization (Sorensen, 2013). Literature suggests that a comprehensive approach to career development incorporates each of these elements – information, career counseling; career education; and work-related learning. The first two elements pertain to being aware of individual career needs as well as difficulties in making career decisions and exploring the potential career pathways through the help of career counselors. Career education, on the hand, focuses more on activities that foster self and career exploration, and career management. The third element, work-related learning, promotes the development of employability skills through learning about the world of work and having the exposure or experience in an area of work interest (Rice, et al., 2015). In using career counseling as an intervention or tool, Krumboltz, in his Learning Theory of Career Counseling (1996 as cited in Shurts and Shoffner, 2004) suggested a number of more specific cognitive and behavioral interventions for promoting career learning opportunities and to help student-athletes find successful and meaningful employment. These include widely used techniques like cognitive restructuring, cognitive rehearsal, role-playing, desensitization, and many others. Counselors may also use inventories that may aid in self exploration in the area of one's interests, values, personality

and beliefs. He further suggested that counselors following an LTCC perspective might try to help student-athletes in exploring areas that are less common to the group which may trigger formation of new hobbies, program of study, and the likes and may bring them greater satisfaction in their career and beyond (Shurts and Shoffner, 2004). Indeed, more than helping the students to make choices about immediate career decisions in college (e.g. subject and course choice), career development services in schools should also emphasize and develop lifelong skills in planning and decision-making that will support career management and employability across the lifetime.

2.2 Employability and Decision-making Skills

Indeed, one of the most important goals of a career development program is to be able to produce readily employable graduates who can deal with inevitable transitions at any point in their careers. In relation, Guichard (2001 as cited in Pitan & Atiku, 2017) believes that career development programs aim to enable young people to acquire a range of general employability and adaptability skills so that they can adapt to changes most especially in the world of work. Wickramasinghe and Perera (2010) posited that employability is attainable through the implementation of career development interventions which includes "understanding the world of work, acquiring the skills, knowledge and attributes that are valued by employers, developing capability for career decision-making, acquiring skills in personal marketing, acquiring skills in job search, connecting students at all stages of study with employers". Literature commonly refers to employability as the ability to gain and maintain employment and to manage employment transitions (Reddan, 2017; Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). It is also the capacity of an individual to possess and exhibit the skills, knowledge, and attitudes not only to secure a first job but also to remain employable throughout life (Watts, 2006). Other definitions of employability emphasize on skills and dispositions that might make an individual attractive to potential



employers and those actions and attitudes that enable workers to get along with their fellow workers (Bridgstock, 2009). Commonly cited employability skills in the literature include people-related and team-related skills, conceptual thinking and problem solving skills (i.e. decision-making skills), goal setting and management skills, knowledge of the business world and skills related to innovation and change (Rocha, 2012 as cited in Del Corso, 2013).

2.3 Decision-making Skills and Career Success

College students are at a transitional stage of life where they are expected to make responsible choices to ensure adjustment in school and achieve academic and career success. Elias, Parker, Kash, Weissberg and O'Brien (2007) suggested that in order for adolescents to make decisions comfortably, they have to immerse themselves regularly into the process of decision making which includes accurately defining the decision to be made, generating possible alternatives, anticipating the consequences of each and evaluating and learning from one's decision. Wolff (2012) believes that decision-making during adolescence is relevant to their capacity for critical thinking, abstract and systematic reasoning which provides adolescents with the ability to imagine future outcomes, allowing them to determine the consequences of their actions. Literature has repeatedly pointed out that a graduate's good decision-making skill is one skill that is deemed very essential in ensuring employability and career success. The results of Coetzee, et al.'s (2015) study positively indicated that lifelong learning capacities such as decision-making, problem solving and interactive skills contributed the most to the participants' career confidence, career curiosity and career control. One research finding yielded that decision making skills is positively associated with higher levels of career adaptability (Del Corso, 2013). Piton and Atiku's (2017) findings showed that decision making capabilities have a positive influence on undergraduate students' employability. Findings further suggest that universities need to provide opportunities where

students can develop the ability to make informed decisions and can take responsibilities in making decisions. For some researchers, being competent in making decisions allows one to discover meaningful and sustainable career pathways (Ceschi, Constantini, Phillips & Sartori, 2016). On the other hand, the inability to acquire this skill will always place a decision maker into a state of anxiety and career uncertainty which is associated with long term feelings of incompetence among new graduates. Anxiety relating to decisions may cause individuals to be less committed and dissatisfied with their career (Daniels, Clifton & Perry, Mandzuk & Hall, 2006 as cited in Jackson & Wilton, 2017).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

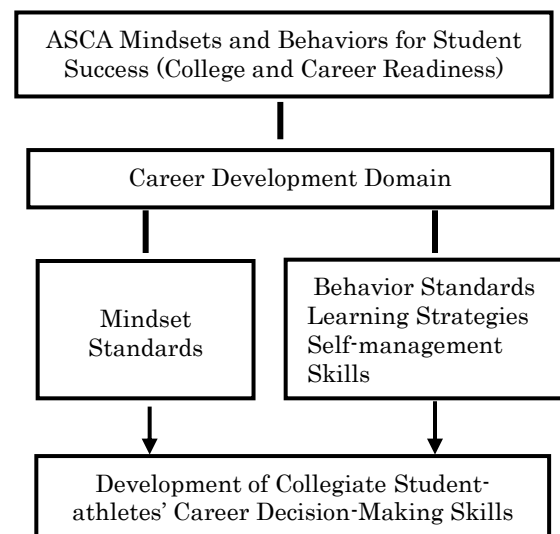


Figure 1 ASCA Framework for the Career Decision-making Program among Collegiate Student-athletes

This conceptual paper which is geared towards proposing a career decision-making program that is focused on the development of the decision-making skills of collegiate student-athletes to aid in their career development process aligns



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itself to the standards of American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success Model (2014). Being the standards widely used in the formulation of school counseling programs since it was first published in 1997 as the ASCA National Standards for Students, the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success model has been developed based on a review of research, college- and career-readiness documents and the best practices of organizations focusing on student achievement and academic performance. The model describes the knowledge, skills and attitudes students need to achieve academic success, college and career readiness and social/emotional development. It has three broad domains: academic development, career development and social/emotional development. These domains promote mindsets and behaviors that enhance the learning process and create a culture of college and career readiness for all students. Career Development domain presents standards that will guide program developers in helping students understand the connection between school and the world of work and secondly, to plan for and make a successful transition from school to postsecondary education and/or the world of work and from job to job across the life span. The three domains produced thirty five (35) mindset and behavior standards that identify and prioritize the specific attitudes, knowledge and skills students should be able to demonstrate as a result of a program. Mindset Standards relates to the psycho-social attitudes or beliefs students have about themselves in relation to academic work while Behavior Standards include behaviors commonly associated with the student's effort to learn and engagement to the learning process. The behaviors are grouped into three subcategories namely learning strategies, self-management skills, and social skills. For the purpose of the career decision-making program that will be developed, the following Mindset Standards will be targeted to facilitate the development of decision-making skills among student-athletes. 1) Understanding that post-secondary education and life-long learning are necessary for long-term career success; 2) Belief in

using abilities to their fullest to achieve high-quality results and outcomes; 3) Positive attitude toward work and learning. Likewise, the following Behavior Standards that will contribute to the development of decision-making skills of student-athletes will guide the program developer in the strategies and activities that will be relevant and meaningful for the population being served and the attainment of the program's goals. Learning Strategies: Demonstrate critical-thinking skills to make informed decisions, Demonstrate creativity, Identify long- and short-term academic, career and social/ emotional goals, Actively engage in challenging coursework, Gather evidence and consider multiple perspectives to make informed decisions, Participate in enrichment and extracurricular activities. Self-management Skills: Demonstrate perseverance to achieve long- and short-term goals, Demonstrate ability to overcome barriers to learning, Demonstrate ability to manage transitions and ability to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities. Social Skills: Create relationships with adults that support success, Demonstrate ethical decision making and social responsibility, Use effective collaboration and cooperation skills

4. METHODOLOGY

The figure below illustrates the framework that will be followed in the formulation and implementation of the program being proposed by this conceptual paper. The program's content and flow will be directed towards addressing the primary concern of the student-athletes which is the lack of decision-making skills especially in the aspect of career. It will target on developing learning outcomes that will strongly indicate the participants' career readiness and positive behavior change. The initial phase of the program development will target on developing modules that will cover self-exploration, career exploration, career goal-setting and career planning. Personal barriers or difficulties being experienced by participants in developing decision-making skills and in making career-related and other life decisions in general will also be given focus by the



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program through the conduct of individual career counseling sessions with those who need it. The modules that will be developed will be delivered through group psychoeducation sessions facilitated by counselors. The program will also engage the student-athletes in other career education and career events in the university such as job fairs, career talks, company visits, internships, volunteer programs, workshops and seminars (e.g. resume writing, job interview simulations) that will increase their awareness on relevant career information and industry needs which are necessary for decision-making. Career mentoring may also be done on areas such as how to articulate their employability capabilities and how to package themselves to their prospective employers. Over-all, the program will ensure that learning outcomes are achieved and that student-athletes will have active engagement in their career development process thus promoting confidence to make sound career decisions in college and beyond.

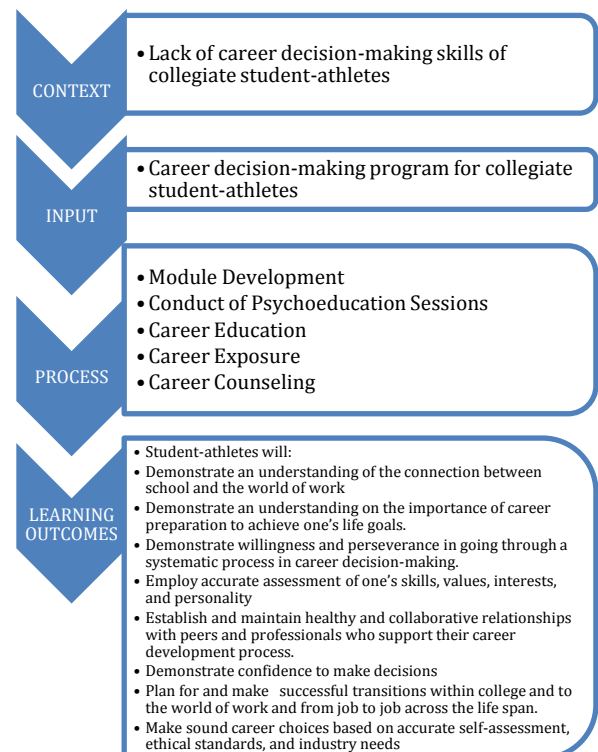


Figure 2 Framework for the career decision-making program implementation

5.IMPLICATIONS TO COUNSELING

1. The ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success Framework can be a reliable reference for counseling practitioners in developing programs that will target on academic, career, and social/emotional development of students.
2. The career decision-making program being will not only cater to the unique needs and career concerns of collegiate student-athletes but may also become relevant and useful to other college students who are experiencing problems with career indecision.
3. The career program will highly contribute to the

employability agenda of the university in ensuring that its graduates will have a smooth integration and transition into professional life.

4. The career program will aid in addressing adjustment problems and mental health concerns that student-athletes might face as they struggle to set their career direction in the right path. This will help counseling practitioners to design proper interventions and provide appropriate assistance to this population.

5. Practitioners will have a wider awareness and understanding of the unique lifestyle, needs, concerns and needed support of collegiate student-athletes.



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