Career Counseling Competencies
Revised Version, 1997

Introduction to Career Counseling Competency Statements

These competency statements are for those professionals interested and trained in the field of career counseling. For the purpose of these statements, career counseling is defined as the process of assisting individuals in the development of a life-career with focus on the definition of the worker role and how that role interacts with other life roles.

NCDA's Career Counseling Competencies are intended to represent minimum competencies for those professionals at or above the Master's degree level of education. These competencies are reviewed on an ongoing basis by the NCDA Professional Standards Committee, the NCDA Board, and other relevant associations.

Professional competency statements provide guidance for the minimum competencies necessary to perform effectively a particular occupation or job within a particular field. Professional career counselors (Master's degree or higher) or persons in career development positions must demonstrate the knowledge and skills for a specialty in career counseling that the generalist counselor might not possess. Skills and knowledge are represented by designated competency areas, which have been developed by professional career counselors and counselor educators. The Career Counseling Competency Statements can serve as a guide for career counseling training programs or as a checklist for persons wanting to acquire or to enhance their skills in career counseling.

Minimum Competencies

In order to work as a professional engaged in Career Counseling, the individual must demonstrate minimum competencies in eleven designated areas. These eleven areas are: Career Development Theory, Individual and Group Counseling Skills, Individual/Group Assessment, Information/Resources, Program Management and Implementation, Consultation, Diverse Populations, Supervision, Ethical/Legal Issues, Research/Evaluation, and Technology. These areas are briefly defined as follows:

- **Career Development Theory:** Theory base and knowledge considered essential for professionals engaging in career counseling and development.

- **Individual and Group Counseling Skills:** Individual and group counseling competencies considered essential for effective career counseling.

- **Individual/Group Assessment:** Individual/group assessment skills considered essential for professionals engaging in career counseling.

- **Information/Resources:** Information/resource base and knowledge essential for professionals engaging in career counseling.

- **Program Promotion, Management and Implementation:** Skills necessary to develop, plan, implement, and manage comprehensive career development programs in a variety of settings.

- **Coaching, Consultation, and Performance Improvement:** Knowledge and skills considered essential in enabling individuals and organizations to impact effectively upon the career counseling and development process.

- **Diverse Populations:** Knowledge and skills considered essential in providing career counseling and development processes to diverse populations.

- **Supervision:** Knowledge and skills considered essential in critically evaluating counselor performance, maintaining and improving professional skills, and seeking assistance for others when needed in career counseling.

- **Ethical/Legal Issues:** Information base and knowledge essential for the ethical and legal practice of career counseling.

- **Research/Evaluation:** Knowledge and skills considered essential in understanding and conducting research and evaluation in career counseling and development.

- **Technology:** Knowledge and skills considered essential in using technology to assist individuals with career planning.

Professional Preparation

The competency statements were developed to serve as guidelines for persons interested in career development occupations. They are intended for persons training at the Master's level or higher with a specialty in career counseling. However, this intention does not prevent other types of career development professionals from using the competencies as guidelines for their own training. The competency statements provide counselor educators, supervisors, and other interested groups with guidelines for the minimum training required for counselors interested in the career counseling specialty. The statements might also serve as guidelines for professional counselors who seek in-service training to qualify as career counselors.

Ethical Responsibilities

Career development professionals must only perform activities for which they "possess or have access to the necessary skills and resources for giving the kind of help that is needed" (see NCDA and ACA Ethical Standards). If a professional does not have the appropriate training or resources for the type of career concern presented, an appropriate referral must be made. No person should attempt to use skills (within these competency statements) for which he/she has not been trained. For additional ethical guidelines, refer to the NCDA Ethical Standards for Career Counselors.

Career Counseling Competencies and Performance Indicators

Career Development Theory

Theory base and knowledge considered essential for professionals engaging in career counseling and development. Demonstration of knowledge of:

1. Counseling theories and associated techniques.

2. Theories and models of career development.

3. Individual differences related to gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and physical and mental capacities.

4. Theoretical models for career development and associated counseling and information-delivery techniques and resources.

5. Human growth and development throughout the life span.

6. Role relationships which facilitate life-work planning.

7. Information, techniques, and models related to career planning and placement

Individual and Group Counseling Skills

Individual and group counseling competencies considered essential to effective career counseling. Demonstration of ability to:

1. Establish and maintain productive personal relationships with individuals.

2. Establish and maintain a productive group climate.

3. Collaborate with clients in identifying personal goals.

4. Identify and select techniques appropriate to client or group goals and client needs, psychological states, and developmental tasks.

5. Identify and understand clients' personal characteristics related to career.

6. Identify and understand social contextual conditions affecting clients' careers.

7. Identify and understand familial, subcultural and cultural structures and functions as they are related to clients' careers.

8. Identify and understand clients' career decision-making processes.

9. Identify and understand clients' attitudes toward work and workers.

10. Identify and understand clients' biases toward work and workers based on gender, race, and cultural stereotypes.

11. Challenge and encourage clients to take action to prepare for and initiate role transitions by:

  - locating sources of relevant information and experience,

  - obtaining and interpreting information and experiences, and acquiring skills needed to make role transitions.

12. Assist the client to acquire a set of employability and job search skills.

13. Support and challenge clients to examine life-work roles, including the balance of work, leisure, family, and community in their careers.

Individual/Group Assessment

Individual/group assessment skills considered essential for professionals engaging in career counseling. Demonstration of ability to:

1. Assess personal characteristics such as aptitude, achievement, interests, values, and personality traits.

2. Assess leisure interests, learning style, life roles, self-concept, career maturity, vocational identity, career indecision, work environment preference (e.g., work satisfaction), and other related life style/development issues.

3. Assess conditions of the work environment (such as tasks, expectations, norms, and qualities of the physical and social settings).

4. Evaluate and select valid and reliable instruments appropriate to the client's gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and physical and mental capacities.

5. Use computer-delivered assessment measures effectively and appropriately.

6. Select assessment techniques appropriate for group administration and those appropriate for individual administration.

7. Administer, score, and report findings from career assessment instruments appropriately.

8. Interpret data from assessment instruments and present the results to clients and to others.

9. Assist the client and others designated by the client to interpret data from assessment instruments.

10. Write an accurate report of assessment results.

Information/Resources

Information/resource base and knowledge essential for professionals engaging in career counseling. Demonstration of knowledge of:

1. Education, training, and employment trends; labor market information and resources that provide information about job tasks, functions, salaries, requirements and future outlooks related to broad occupational fields and individual occupations.

2. Resources and skills that clients utilize in life-work planning and management.

3. Community/professional resources available to assist clients in career planning, including job search.

4. Changing roles of women and men and the implications that this has for education, family, and leisure.

5. Methods of good use of computer-based career information delivery systems (CIDS) and computer-assisted career guidance systems (CACGS) to assist with career planning.

Program Promotion, Management, and Implementation

Knowledge and skills necessary to develop, plan, implement, and manage comprehensive career development programs in a variety of settings. Demonstration of knowledge of:

1. Designs that can be used in the organization of career development programs.

2. Needs assessment and evaluation techniques and practices.

3. Organizational theories, including diagnosis, behavior, planning, organizational communication, and management useful in implementing and administering career development programs.

4. Methods of forecasting, budgeting, planning, costing, policy analysis, resource allocation, and quality control.

5. Leadership theories and approaches for evaluation and feedback, organizational change, decision-making, and conflict resolution.

6. Professional standards and criteria for career development programs.

7. Societal trends and state and federal legislation that influence the development and implementation of career development programs.

    Demonstration of ability to:

8. Implement individual and group programs in career development for specified populations.

9. Train others about the appropriate use of computer-based systems for career information and planning.

10. Plan, organize, and manage a comprehensive career resource center.

11. Implement career development programs in collaboration with others.

12. Identify and evaluate staff competencies.

13. Mount a marketing and public relations campaign in behalf of career development activities and services.

Coaching, Consultation, and Performance Improvement

Knowledge and skills considered essential in relating to individuals and organizations that impact the career counseling and development process. Demonstration of ability to:

1. Use consultation theories, strategies, and models.

2. Establish and maintain a productive consultative relationship with people who can influence a client's career.

3. Help the general public and legislators to understand the importance of career counseling, career development, and life-work planning.

4. Impact public policy as it relates to career development and workforce planning.

5. Analyze future organizational needs and current level of employee skills and develop performance improvement training.

6. Mentor and coach employees.

Diverse Populations

Knowledge and skills considered essential in relating to diverse populations that impact career counseling and development processes. Demonstration of ability to:

1. Identify development models and multicultural counseling competencies.

2. Identify developmental needs unique to various diverse populations, including those of different gender, sexual orientation, ethnic group, race, and physical or mental capacity.

3. Define career development programs to accommodate needs unique to various diverse populations.

4. Find appropriate methods or resources to communicate with limited-English-proficient individuals.

5. Identify alternative approaches to meet career planning needs for individuals of various diverse populations.

6. Identify community resources and establish linkages to assist clients with specific needs.

7. Assist other staff members, professionals, and community members in understanding the unique needs/characteristics of diverse populations with regard to career exploration, employment expectations, and economic/social issues.

8. Advocate for the career development and employment of diverse populations.

9. Design and deliver career development programs and materials to hard-to-reach populations.

Supervision

Knowledge and skills considered essential in critically evaluating counselor or career development facilitator performance, maintaining and improving professional skills. Demonstration of:

1. Ability to recognize own limitations as a career counselor and to seek supervision or refer clients when appropriate.

2. Ability to utilize supervision on a regular basis to maintain and improve counselor skills.

3. Ability to consult with supervisors and colleagues regarding client and counseling issues and issues related to one's own professional development as a career counselor.

4. Knowledge of supervision models and theories.

5. Ability to provide effective supervision to career counselors and career development facilitators at different levels of experience.

6. Ability to provide effective supervision to career development facilitators at different levels of experience by:

   • knowledge of their roles, competencies, and ethical standards

   • determining their competence in each of the areas included in their certification

   • further training them in competencies, including interpretation of assessment instruments

   • monitoring and mentoring their activities in support of the professional career counselor; and scheduling regular consultations for the purpose of reviewing their activities

Ethical/Legal Issues

Information base and knowledge essential for the ethical and legal practice of career counseling. Demonstration of knowledge of:

1. Adherence to ethical codes and standards relevant to the profession of career counseling (e.g. NBCC, NCDA, and ACA).

2. Current ethical and legal issues which affect the practice of career counseling with all populations.

3. Current ethical/legal issues with regard to the use of computer-assisted career guidance systems.

4. Ethical standards relating to consultation issues.

5. State and federal statutes relating to client confidentiality.

Research/Evaluation

Knowledge and skills considered essential in understanding and conducting research and evaluation in career counseling and development. Demonstration of ability to:

1. Write a research proposal.

2. Use types of research and research designs appropriate to career counseling and development research.

3. Convey research findings related to the effectiveness of career counseling programs.

4. Design, conduct, and use the results of evaluation programs.

5. Design evaluation programs which take into account the need of various diverse populations, including persons of both genders, differing sexual orientations, different ethnic and racial backgrounds, and differing physical and mental capacities.

6. Apply appropriate statistical procedures to career development research.

Technology

Knowledge and skills considered essential in using technology to assist individuals with career planning. Demonstration of knowledge of:

1. Various computer-based guidance and information systems as well as services available on the Internet.

2. Standards by which such systems and services are evaluated (e.g. NCDA and ACSCI).

3. Ways in which to use computer-based systems and Internet services to assist individuals with career planning that are consistent with ethical standards.

4. Characteristics of clients which make them profit more or less from use of technology-driven systems.

5. Methods to evaluate and select a system to meet local needs.

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