

The Advancement of Career Counsellor Education in Canada

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Introduction to new research project

What skills and knowledge does a person need to practice in the field of career development? What type and extent of education or training best prepares someone to work in the field? These are questions that most professions can answer. The development of national and international documents outlining competencies required for work in the field have made inroads in answering the first question. But the question of how one is best educated to work in the field in Canada is less easily answered. Except in Québec, there is no clear educational pathway to enter or advance within the field of career development. There exists a wide array of options, from college diplomas to university certificates to Masters degrees in counselling psychology. More than fifteen career development programs have been developed over the last two decades. However, there remains little clarity of how or if these programs fit together or how one best enters or advances within the field.

It is for this reason that we partnered with CERIC, the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling, to initiate a research project, "The Advancement of Career Counsellor Education in Canada". This research project was conceived to begin a process to articulate the educational background that the profession sees as necessary for entry into or advancement within the field. Specifically, the purposes of this research are:

1) To gain an in-depth understanding, and to produce a detailed directory, of the current program offerings that are available for aspiring or practicing career counsellors.

The Directory of Career Counselling/Career Development Education Programs in Canada was produced as Phase I of this research

project and is available online at Contact Point at http://www.contact-point.ca/resources/Directory_ofEducation_Programs_2006.pdf. It profiles 37 programs at 28 institutions across Canada. Our criteria for inclusion in the Directory was: (a) any program, at any level, whose main focus is career counselling/career development; or (b) any program that offers students a minimum of two career development courses within a department where at least one faculty member is conducting research in the area of career development.

While the primary objective for this phase of our research project was to compile this Directory, we felt that it would be worthwhile to make additional inquiries regarding the history of each institution's program. One of the most interesting points revealed from these conversations is that it was the efforts of individuals and not educational/ governmental systems that have had the greatest impact on the development to date of career counselling/career development courses and programs in Canada. Within the university system, the evolution of courses often appears to depend on the teaching and research interests of just one or two professors. As a consequence, when a key faculty member leaves or retires, the courses in career counselling/development are at risk of disappearing. Similarly, within the college system, the development and maintenance of career counselling/career development programs has also been dependent on just one or two individuals. This is significant because it means it will be crucial to determine how to embed these courses and programs into the fabric of the academic institutions in which they exist so that they are not dependent strictly on individuals.

2) To better understand the career paths and educational backgrounds of those currently working in the field.

To do this, we conducted a nationwide web-based survey of career development practitioners in April and May of 2006, with the assistance of the Survey Research Centre at the University of Waterloo. Over 1,100 practitioners responded to the survey. An initial analysis of the data has revealed several noteworthy facts. Among them, the findings that 70% of respondents have worked in another field prior to entering the field of career development, that there are more than 25 different job titles being used by people working in the field, and that less than 50% of those working in the field identify primarily with the field of career development. Further results from this survey will be shared in an upcoming edition of the Canadian Journal of Career Development.

3) To begin a process to form a collective vision of Canadian career counselling education programs for the future.

To enable this, a think tank session involving career counsellor educators from across the country will be held later this year to enable an in-depth exploration of career counsellor education in Canada. This think tank session will involve discussions related to curriculum, educational pathways, and the professional identity of the field.

The field of career counselling is still young, and so it is no surprise that our educational pathways to and within the field remain unclear. While the programs that have been developed have certainly moved the field forward in Canada and have contributed to Canada's reputation as a world leader in the area of career development, we believe that this research project will support the development of a collective vision leading to an exemplary model of career development education in Canada.

This research project is funded by CERIC, the new Canadian Education

and Research Institute for Counselling. CERIC's mission is to encourage and provide education and research programs related to the development, analysis, and assessment of the current counselling and career development theories and practices in Canada.

About the researchers:

Sharon Kalbfleisch has worked as a career counsellor, social worker, educator, and trainer. As a Dean at Conestoga College in Kitchener, Ontario, she collaborated with a team to establish the post-degree/diploma Career Development Practitioner (CDP) certificate program. This program became the first online program in career development in Canada. She was also the architect of the joint programs formed between the Conestoga CDP program and the University of Waterloo, the University of Guelph, and Wilfrid Laurier University. She has worked in Canada, Singapore, New Zealand, England, and the United States.

Rebecca Burwell has an extensive background in career counselling that includes work in individual counselling, group facilitation, teaching, and writing within several different sectors, including private practice, community agencies, post-secondary institutions, and private companies. She is a lead instructor in the Career Development Practitioner Program at Conestoga College, and recently wrote the curriculum for two new courses at Conestoga College, titled "Career Development for Adolescents" and "Electronic Tools and Techniques in the Field of Career Development".