

Psychology Majors' Transferable Skills and Career Readiness

Jeffrey Goodman, Ph.D. | Department of Psychology | University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

INTRODUCTION

Compared to their college-educated peers, Psychology Majors (PMs) in the US and Canada experience greater uncertainty in the career planning and search process.

PMs tend to fall in the lower-tier salary range for college graduates, although this may be due to the specific occupational choices that psychology graduates make (Rajecki & Borden, 2011).

Employers have been found to care more about transferable skills than an applicant's undergraduate course of study (Hart Research Associates, 2013; National Associate of Colleges and Employers, 2014).

- This emphasis on transferable skills among employers is consistent with the Liberal Arts focus of most undergraduate Psychology programs - to prepare students for a variety of possible careers rather than a specific career (Landrum, Davis, & Landrum, 2010).
- However, PMs have been found to have at least somewhat inaccurate beliefs about which skills employers rate as valuable (Haskell et al., 2012; Miller & Carducci, 2015), or may be unaware of how to develop and subsequently describe their skills to potential employers (Strohmetz et al., 2015).

The present study evaluated the effectiveness of a brief (4 class) careers and graduate school module in a Senior Capstone Course for increasing senior PM's understanding of career and graduate school opportunities, knowledge of skills desired by employers and student's level of skill acquisition, and self-efficacy in the career and graduate school application process.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

Thirty senior PMs participated in this study. Students in the target Capstone course (n=18) completed pre- and post-measures. Twelve senior students not in the course completed only post-measures.

The sample consisted of 21 Women/9 Men; was 80% White (10% Asian; 5% Latinx; and 5% Two or More Races); and was 93.3% Straight (6.7% LGBTQ).

Participants' post-graduation plans involved graduate school (36.7%); entering the workforce (36.7%), and working for a year before applying to graduate school (26.6%).

PROCEDURE

Prior to the relevant course module, students in the Capstone course completed pre-tests of their transferable skills and careers knowledge; skill acquisition and career/grad school application knowledge and self-efficacy.

As part of the relevant course module, Capstone students completed transferable skills activities, self-evaluated their Psychology skill acquisition, created and reviewed application materials, researched careers using Appleby's (2015) Online Career Exploration Tool, and engaged in mock interviews for their chosen career or graduate program.

At the end of the semester, Capstone students completed a post-test, while comparison students completed the same measures.

MEASURES

Careers and Transferable Skills Survey: Participants were asked to generate lists of up to 15 of each of the following (without the assistance of readings or media):

- Jobs/Careers with a Psychology BA/BS
- Jobs/Careers with an MA/MS or Ph.D. in Psych or related fields
- Skills that Psychology Majors with a BA/BS bring to the workplace
- Skills that Employers Desire in College Graduate Hires

Academic Skills Inventory-Revised (ASI-R; Perry Foust & Elikor, 2013): Participants completed this 317-item checklist as an assessment of their self-efficacy and acquisition of 10 skills. Yes/No and write-in responses result in a maximum score equal to the number of items in each subscale. The subset of items related to the following scales are most relevant to the current project:

- General Career Preparation (11 Items)
- Graduate School Track (17 Items)
- Work Force Track (16 Items)
- Goal Setting (3 Items)

Search and Application Skills Survey (Goodman, 2017): Eight-items evaluated students' confidence in their ability to identify and apply to relevant jobs and graduate programs (e.g., create a resume/cover letter; look for positions; evaluate strengths/weaknesses in terms of job qualifications).

RESULTS

Careers and Transferable Skills Survey

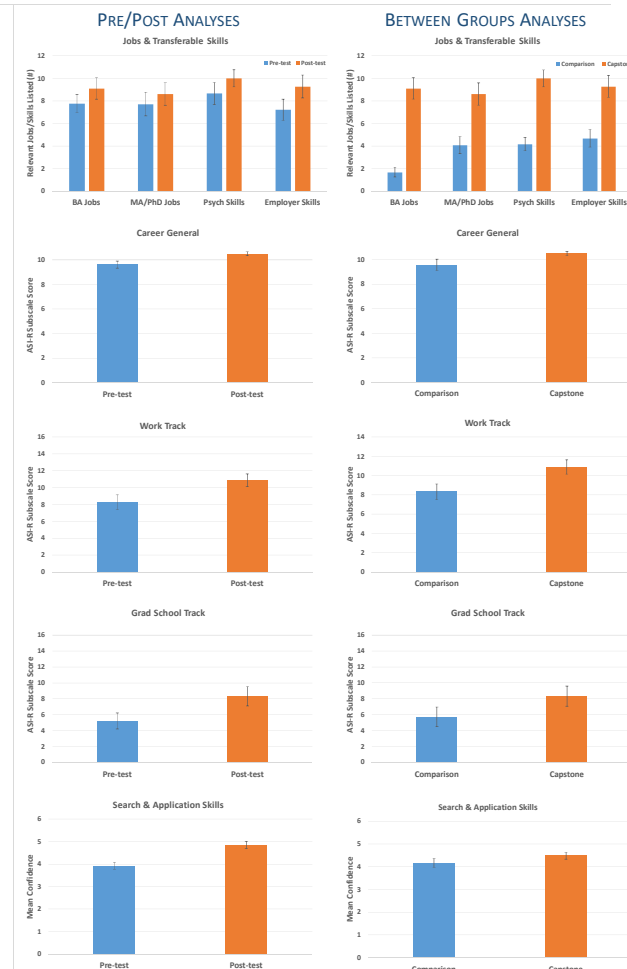
- Across the semester, Capstone students displayed a marginal increase in their *knowledge of BA careers* ($Z = -1.91, p = .056, r = .45$) and a significant increase in their knowledge of *skills employers desire* in new hires ($Z = -2.43, p = .015, r = .57$).
- Compared to the comparison group, Capstone students displayed significantly greater *knowledge of BA careers* ($U = 7.5, p = .001, r = .78$), *MA/Ph.D. careers* ($U = 39.5, p = .004, r = .53$), *skills of PMs* ($U = 8.0, p = .001, r = .78$), and *skills employers desire* ($U = 40.0, p = .004, r = .53$) at the end of the semester.

Academic Skills Inventory-Revised

- Across the semester, Capstone students displayed significant increases in their *general career* ($Z = -2.86, p = .001, r = .67$), *work track* ($Z = -3.14, p = .002, r = .74$), and *grad school track* ($Z = -2.62, p = .009, r = .62$) skills/efficacy.
- Compared to the comparison group, Capstone students displayed significantly greater knowledge in their *general career* ($U = 65.5, p = .05, r = .36$) and *work track* ($U = 56.5, p = .028, r = .40$) skills/efficacy at the end of the semester.

Search and Application Skills Survey

- Across the semester, Capstone students displayed significant increases in their *job search and grad school application skills* ($Z = -3.73, p = .001, r = .88$) confidence.
- Compared to the comparison group, Capstone students displayed significantly greater *job search and grad school application skills* confidence ($U = 45.0, p = .007, r = .49$) at the end of the semester.



CONCLUSION

Capstone students appeared to realize a number of gains in job/career and graduate school application knowledge and skills as a result of participating in a brief careers module. These findings suggest a possible benefit of incorporating career and graduate school information in final-semester courses.

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