

Office of Career Services Self Study, Spring 2006
Summary of The Office of Career Services Evaluation Report: OCS 2006-01
Office of Career Services
Michael Heuring, Director

(A Division of Student Affairs Assessment Report)

Introductory Summary

A self-study conducted by a panel of Career Services employees plus professional staff and/or Directors from three other University of Montana Student Affairs offices, and one student reviewed the entire operation of the Office of Career Services (OCS) to assess the overall compliance with professional standards as set forth by The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). The OCS at least minimally met 97% of the 213 standards that assessed twelve (12) program areas; fully meeting 176 of the 213 standards. For none of the twelve (12) program areas was the overall score less than 2.0 (Meets “Partially”). In four (4) important program areas, those relating to *Program Components*, *Employment Services*, *Organization*, and *Ethics*, the OCS received a “perfect” score of 3.0.

The overall conclusion of the Self Study Panel was that the Office of Career Services is a competent and effective unit well built around national standards, and is a program in which the University can justly take pride. This does not mean that program developments and improvements are not in order. Three percent (3%) of the relevant standards were not met, and are listed in the final section of the report which elucidates areas for action. Each of these “deficiencies” will be addressed during the coming year. A full report with more detail is available from The Office of Career Services.

The Office of Career Services

The goals of The Office of Career Services are reflected in the Mission Statement:

The mission of Career Services is to provide quality educational, career and life planning services to assist all students and alumni of the University achieve their personal and professional goals, both now and in the future. Toward this end, Career Services provides an array of services designed to support the academic mission of the University while also fostering the out-of-classroom development of the individual as it relates to the realistic setting and attainment of career and life goals.

Operational areas which implement the mission are: Career Counseling, Employer Relations, Testing Services, Student Employment, Credential Files, Alumni Mentoring, and Technical Support. These areas are explained in more detail in the full report (OCS Evaluation Report OCS-2006-01).

Purpose and Approach

The Office of Career Services undertook a self-study evaluation in the Spring Semester of 2006. The professional standards of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) [Appendix B], the primary professional association defining the work of Career Services Offices nationally, provided the criteria for assessing the overall operations of the OCS. There were eight specific goals guiding the study, which can be summarized as: understanding where and how the OCS meets professional standards, where and how it does not, and what changes and development would benefit the office in concurrently meeting standards and fulfilling its mission. They are specified fully in Appendix C of the more detailed report.

Procedures

A Self Study Panel was assembled by the OCS Director of persons who, in his perception, would contribute substantial expertise and perspective to the effort, and who were willing to commit the needed time and energy to the project. The Panel met for a total of seven (7) 90-minute meetings during the Spring Semester of 2006. The Career Services Director chaired the panel; which additionally included two career counselors, one student (who was at the time also interning in the OCS, two Student Affairs Directors from other programs, and one Program Coordinator from a third Student Affairs area.

The process was to assign a section from the NACE standards for attention at each meeting. Each panel member independently rated the OCS on these standards prior to the meeting based, in some combination, on: direct experience, consultation with the OCS and overall University web site(s), and a notebook of resources assembled by the OCS. At each meeting, any standard which did not have a consensus (1, 2, or 3) rating from the group was discussed until consensus on the rating was reached. Where useful information emerged from the discussion, the discussion issues were noted and recorded. [A complete summary of these comments is appended to the full report.]

Study Objectives

The specific goals of this study were to:

1. Better understand the current efficacy of our existing goals and mission statement in the context of the missions of both The University of Montana and The Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs.
2. Understand where the Office of Career Services can make improvements that will better serve students and enhance overall achievement of the mission of the OCS.
3. Better understand our professional standards.
4. Understand where we do not meet, and where we can better meet, NACE standards.
5. Understand what resources an outside evaluator would need to have available in order to effectively assess the OCS.
6. Assemble resources identified in number five (5) above both for the current “outside” panel members and for the use of future external evaluators.

7. Enhance our ability to document and demonstrate our professional competency and effectiveness to uninformed third parties.
8. Meet the requirement that we do an annual special research/evaluation study.

Summary of Primary Findings

The Office of Career Services complies with 97% of the 213 standards relating to the twelve professional program areas. Remedial actions deemed necessary to bring the OCS fully into compliance in the six (6) sub-sections where compliance is absent, questionable or “outdated” are listed as numbers one (1) through five (5) in the “Recommendations Based on Findings” section which concludes this report abstract. Anecdotally, members of the review panel from outside the OCS reported perceiving that the OCS was competent and effective in its operations based on the reviews. As pointed out in the introduction, the OCS scored 2.0 or higher [with 2.0 being “meets (at least) partially” and 3.0 being “meets or exceeds”] on every program area and achieved a “perfect” score of 3.0 in four (4) of the twelve (12) program areas.

Detail of Primary Findings

1. The Career Services Mission Statement shows the OCS clearly contributing to important aspects of the Missions of both Student Affairs and The University of Montana
2. Five primary areas for development were identified in relation to six standards identified in items one through five in the next section. (Two of the items relate to strategic planning, so there are six ratings which miss the mark, but only five action statements resulting.)
3. A much more thorough understanding of the Standards was gained from the self study. This understanding is not limited to The Office of Career Services, but includes three other Student Affairs areas as well. While one panel member was a faculty member for ten years and could bring a faculty perspective to the discussions, in retrospect, the panel regrets not including current faculty members on the panel both as per the expertise they would have brought and the understandings they would have gained.
4. We have identified five areas for attention. These derive from six unmet standards as elucidated in number two above (and in the next section), and as well as another 36 specific places (identified in the full length report) where the office could profitably improve its offerings.
5. “Outside” panel members were quite helpful in allowing us to identify the resources that would be needed by “external evaluators” who might visit in the future to perform a comprehensive program review. A resource book is under development.
6. OCS ability to document and demonstrate our assets to third parties is stronger.

Information Sources Leading to Conclusions

Evidence in support of conclusions is found in the documentation assembled for the panel’s review, on the web site, and in the personal experience of the panel members with the operations of the OCS.

Recommendations

1. Implement a formal ongoing strategic planning process.
2. Explore the value of a formal needs assessment (vs. the current “spot survey” and informal processes) with our student and employer constituents. If such is subsequently seen to be of value, OCS will develop and implement same. If not, OCS will better specify by what other less formal avenues student needs are to be determined and how these perceived needs guide program planning, development, and implementation. (e.g. by “paper trailing” meetings dealing with such issues.)
3. Explore bringing all major campus career activities under one umbrella.
4. Make efforts to bring designations for, and salaries of, professional counseling staff up to regional and national standards.
5. Investigate what follow-up studies, other than the annual employment and salary study (Graduate Survey), might be valuable and cost-effective.
6. Identify additional actions that could be realistically undertaken in response to standards items which received a “2” rating (“partially meets”) rather than a “3” rating (fully meets) after OCS has addressed the above five items.

Conclusion

An extensive, comprehensive, and valuable review of the OCS has been completed. It has informed OCS broadly in the area of compliance with NACE standards. Primary and secondary areas for attention are well known. Actions are in process or in the process of planning to address each of the primary deficiencies that were revealed. After a program development cycle (estimated to be one year) the next step is to bring in a paid external evaluator to assess our programs to see what additional insights a “third party professional(s)” not associated with The University of Montana may be able to offer. A more extensive report from this effort can be obtained from the OCS. Ask for: *Office of Career Services Self Study, Spring 2006* (Evaluation report designation is: OCS 2006-01).

Self Study Panel Members

The following persons contributed to the findings in, and written reporting of, this study.

Michael Heuring, M.S., Director, Office of Career Services and Committee Chair

Jorrun Liston, Director, Griz Card Center

Lee Clark, Associate Director, University Center

Rowan Conrad, Ph.D., Career Counselor, Office of Career Services

Laurie Fisher, M.A., Career Counselor, Office of Career Services

Mona Mondava, Program Coordinator, Office of Foreign Student and Scholar Services

Annelies Pedersen, M.A. student, School of Education, and Intern, Office of Career Services