



# Implementing Virtual Career Counseling and Advising at a Major University

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*With college students using the Internet to meet a variety of professional and personal needs, college campuses are seeking ways to enhance their student services by using emerging technologies. In this case study, the authors discuss the implementation of online career advising and planning services via synchronous chat sessions. Given the constraints concerning vendor selection, procurement issues, software implementation, and limited budgets, it was critical for the career counseling team to find a robust, secure, and affordable software platform to meet their needs. It was important that this software and service appeal to students as they sought personal career development. The team considered existing practice standards to guide the implementation of this innovative student service. With these elements in place, the authors discuss the process of launching an online career planning and advising program and the resulting challenges that emerged. [Article copies are available for purchase from InfoSci-on-Demand.com]*

*Keywords: Online Behavior, Online Relationships, Social Support, Virtual Organization*

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## ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Anonymous South University (ASU) is a major metropolitan research university serving over 28,000 students. As one of the fastest growing universities in the State, and the second largest component in the University System, ASU has experienced tremendous expansions in student enrollment, research funding, and faculty recruitment over the past decade. Accordingly, the university plays a major role in the regional economy, producing over US\$800 million in annual business activity (ASU Public Affairs Office, 2008). Moreover, ASU employs more than 6,500 individuals and invests over US\$200 million annually in employee salaries. The university is designated as an Hispanic Serving Institution and is a national leader in utilizing historically

underrepresented businesses (HUBs), investing over \$17 million in HUBs annually. With a focus on research, teaching, and community involvement and transformation, the university strives to provide opportunities to individuals and communities from underrepresented backgrounds while becoming a first choice for all students across the state and nation.

## **Student Services**

To oversee this sizeable workforce composed of a mix of academic professionals, trade workers, and student support staff, the university is led by a president and six vice-presidents who direct specific components of the university. Student services focusing on personal development, career, and lifestyle planning are under the auspices of the Vice President for Student Affairs. As such, several departments and programs fall within the purview of this office, including financial aid, student health and counseling, judicial affairs, and career services.

## **Office of Career Services**

Given that choosing a major, preparing for a career, and entering the workforce are significant life tasks, the Office of Career Services offers a menu of programs and services for students as they navigate these professional and educational milestones. The mission of the Office of Career Services is to assist students and alumni in identifying and developing the skills necessary to pursue their lifelong career goals. To meet this mission, Career Services employs a cadre of career counseling professionals (see Figure 1) who meet with students on an individual basis, in small groups, during designated classroom presentations, and at university-sponsored events. The focus of these interactions is to provide tailored career guidance for students as they embark on self-discovery, goal setting, and skill acquisition during their time at the university and after graduation. Specifically, career counselors teach students the basics of job searching, résumé writing, and interviewing. Career counselors also work with students as they assess their personality type, their interests, and their personal reasons for choosing particular majors and career paths. Finally, career counselors assist students who struggle with ambivalence about making career and educational decisions by meeting with them in individual sessions focused on in-depth counseling work.

The Office of Career Services is headed by a director who oversees two associate directors focusing on areas related to student services and employer services. The Student Services Team comprises 11 career counselors, front desk personnel, a professional development program manager, and a marketing specialist. Outreach to the university community is a strong component of Career Services, as they regularly organize job fairs, present lectures in many courses, and host special events to connect students, alumni, and employers. As such, the Career Services Office has made extensive use of technology, offering online career assessments, an online job bank, podcasts, instructional modules, and an online career library (see Figures 2 and 3). Prior to implementing these interactive online services, all of the personal career counseling and advising activities had been provided in face-to-face settings. While the office provided a wealth of online information, no interactive career planning with students had ever been provided via the Internet.

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