Career Counseling: Case Study

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My client for the case study was Jenny*, an international student at Citrus College. Her main career counseling issues included deciding on an area of study for her master’s degree, selecting a graduate school, and applying to graduate school. During our sessions, we debriefed the results from her Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) and during each session, I provided her with resources to assist her with her career counseling issues. During our last session, we talked about the next steps for Jenny regarding her application process to graduate school.

During our first session, Jenny seemed excited to meet me and was very engaging. I began the session by introducing myself and discussing the guidelines of my assignment. I asked Jenny if she had any goals for our sessions, and she responded that she would appreciate help in deciding if she should pursue a Master’s degree in Business Administration (MBA) or a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN). I found it interesting that she wanted to pursue two strikingly different fields. I needed to learn more about Jenny’s background and to see if internal or external pressures were encouraging her to consider an MBA or MSN. To help me understand Jenny’s situation, I asked questions to learn more about her, worked with Jenny to complete the Career Wheel, and developed a “pro and con” list with Jenny.

I learned that she had recently completed the LVN program at Citrus College and was waiting to find out if she passed her LVN licensing exam. Additionally, she was taking prerequisites at Citrus College needed to pursue her Master of Science in Nursing (MSN). I was a little perplexed by her desire to pursue an MBA when she spent the last year of her life studying in a rigorous and competitive nursing program. When I first met Jenny I thought she was in Marcia’s achievement stage, but at the first session she appeared to be in the moratorium
stage since she had a “sense of ambivalence and uncertainty” about her life (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010) and was exploring her options without making a decision. At this point, I did not know if parental influence influenced her indecisiveness, which is common with individuals in the moratorium stage (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

Jenny had earned a bachelor’s degree in Business in China and then moved to the United States alone to complete a master’s degree in Information Technology in Boston, Massachusetts. She stopped the information technology program because she found the material boring and uninteresting. At that time, her friend from China was taking classes at Citrus College for the nursing program, and she encouraged Jenny to move to California to pursue nursing. It took one-year for Jenny to complete the LVN program, which consisted of both classes and clinical rotations. She enjoyed her nursing program and loved helping people through her clinical work, but she was questioning if she wanted to continue to pursue nursing.

I felt that the Career Wheel and “pros and cons” list could possibly help Jenny to decide which career would be a right fit for her. For her interests, Jenny talked about watching dramas on television, reading books, walking, talking with friends, cooking, and washing dishes. Jenny identified her ability to work with people and communicate with others as some of her skills, and she mentioned her math and nursing skills. I pointed out to Jenny that she could use all her skills in nursing, but she could still use her team and communication skills in the business field.

When I asked about her personality, Jenny described herself as straight-forward, shy, and self-disciplined person with a short-temper. Jenny valued making money, friendly co-workers, safety, and learning about the field. During this part of the conversation, I pointed out that both the business and medical fields would help satisfy these values.
Regarding geography, Jenny did not want to live in a cold place, and she preferred the United States, particularly an area that had good public transportation. She explained that her ideal work environment would allow her to work alone and give opportunities to work with others as a team. She also valued safety in an environment. I shared with Jenny that both the business and nursing fields could help satisfy her needs in a working environment. Jenny described her nursing, science, and math skills and her “good sense of humor” as strengths. I asked Jenny at this point whether she had a stronger preference for nursing or business, she declared that she preferred nursing, but she was uncertain and remained in the moratorium stage.

To help clarify her preference for a career, I decided to create a “pro and con” list with Jenny about pursuing a business or nursing career. Jenny believed that the benefits of working in the business field were using her knowledge from her bachelor’s degree and talking with others. She described how a medical MBA programs would help her combine both of her passions for medicine and business. She valued the salary range and enjoyed learning about business although she disliked the competitiveness of finding a job.

According to Jenny, being able to use her knowledge and skills from her nursing program and fulfilling her passions for the nursing field, helping people, and learning were key benefits of nursing. I commented how she could combine her interests in nursing and business by becoming a hospital administrator. She liked the fast-paced environment of nursing and that there is high demand for nurses. She disliked working with patients in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and holidays shifts. After making a pro and con list, Jenny still seemed unsure of her preference for nursing and still seemed in the moratorium stage. I suggested for homework that she talk with a current nurse or someone she knows in the business field to provide more information about
those occupations and to help her with her decision. Additionally, I asked her to complete the MBTI assessment and Strong-Interest Inventory online before our next session.

At the beginning of our second session, Jenny shared with me that she passed her LVN licensing exam and had solidified her career decision to continue nursing and pursue a MSN degree. I realized that her previous doubts about nursing were contributed to her feelings of uncertainty regarding the licensing exam. Her brief period in the moratorium stage was prompted by her anxiety and uneasiness about the results of her licensing exam. Jenny was no longer questioning her path, but proud and set on her career direction. She was in the achievement stage, which is defined as “knowing what one wants and making plans to attain an occupational goal” (Sharf, 2010).

During our second session, I debriefed Jenny’s Strong Interest Inventory results with her, provided her with some resources, and talked with her about applying to MSN programs. The Strong Interest Inventory (SII) measures interests based on Holland’s Theory. John Holland described six work environments through his work: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. He also described the personalities of people who matched these environments. He believed that people and their environments were not purely one type, but a combination of three types (Sharf, 2010).

I asked Jenny to complete the “party game” before I gave Jenny her official results. The way she ordered the 3 themes matched the order of the results found on her SII results. She was pleased to see that her preferences matched the official results. Her top three themes were Investigative, Conventional, and Enterprising and her theme code was (ICE). I described each SII theme with her, and Jenny thought her code reflected her interests well.
Her top theme, Investigative, confirms her interests in science, medicine, research, and analytical thinking, and her values of independence and learning that one finds in the nursing profession. Jenny agreed with the results regarding the Conventional theme since she likes work activities that involve organizing, setting up procedures, and keeping records. She also has the ability to work with numbers and values accuracy and efficiency, which are needed for the nursing profession. Jenny confirmed that the Enterprising theme reflects her interests in business and politics and the ability to persuade people. The SII profile included a section on personal style scales, and Jenny stated that the style preferences accurately portrayed her work style, preferred learning environment, leadership style, risk-taking preference, and team orientation. Reviewing Jenny’s SII results with her during the session reinforced her understanding of her interests and her desire to enter the nursing profession.

In addition to discussing the SII profile, I provided Jenny with other resources. I introduced her to the O*Net online, the Occupational Outlook Handbook’s website, and the California Career Zone website. I told her that she can use O*Net and the Occupational Outlook Handbook website to find information about the different types of nurse practitioners. I found that these resources could help my client advance her knowledge about the world of work in her career area of interest. I knew that Jenny enjoyed taking assessments to learn about herself, so I thought she would like the California Career Zone with their free assessments. Additionally, the assessments can help her improve her self-understanding of her values, interests, skills, and personality traits that are integral in trait and factor theory and work adjustment theory.

Lastly, we talked about the application process for MSN programs. Jenny was thinking about applying to Azusa Pacific University (APU) and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). I asked her why she wanted to apply to APU and UCLA. She responded that both APU
and UCLA have good reputations and that was very important to her. Due to the competitive nature of the application process, I encouraged her to apply to other schools; however, she was unaware of any other MSN programs in Southern California. We used the internet as a resource to look for potential programs. We found MSN programs at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), and California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA). I encouraged Jenny to review the different philosophies of each MSN program and to look over the prerequisites before our next session. Additionally, I suggested that she contact the programs to verify if they would accept her bachelor’s degree from China.

During the third session, I asked Jenny about her homework and if she had contacted any of the nursing programs. Jenny took the initiative to contact APU and seemed very excited about this prospective school. Jenny asked me about how to request a letter of recommendation and how to write a personal statement. In China, schools do not ask for letter of recommendations or personal statements. When Jenny needed a letter of recommendation when she was applying to graduate school in Boston, Jenny wrote the letter for her professor and he signed it. This is the common practice among professors and students in China. Jenny knew that this process was not the cultural norm in the United States, but she did not know how to request the recommendation, so I advised her on the process.

Additionally, Jenny did not know how to write a personal statement. I explained the importance of personal statements and the general format. I also gave her tips about writing an effective personal statement. Regarding APU’s application, Jenny did not know how to approach the personal statement of faith. I helped Jenny brainstorm ways to address the question, and she seemed very pleased to share her spiritual journey with me. I suggested that Jenny write
a draft of her personal statement before our next session so I could review it, but she was in the
middle of finals and wanted to wait since she would not be applying to graduate school until next
fall. Jenny also asked me how to write a resume, and I told her that I would bring resources about
cover letters and resumes to our next session and explain how to write both in depth.

During the third session, I discussed Jenny’s MBTI results with her. The MBTI
assessment is based on the Myers-Briggs Type Theory. The MBTI does not measure interests or
skills, but preferences for individuals regarding how they gain energy, process information, make
decisions, and orient themselves to the outer world. The Myers Briggs instrument consists of
four dichotomies: Extraversion (E) vs. Introversion (I), Sensing (S) vs. Intuition (N), Thinking
(T) vs. Feeling (F), and Judging (J) vs. Perceiving (P).

Before I gave Jenny her official MBTI results, I asked her to complete the self-
assessment form. Jenny’s results of her self-assessment were the same as her official MBTI
results: ISTJ. I went through her MBTI type with her by discussing each of her preferences.
First, I explained to Jenny that introverts prefer to pay attention to their internal world and get
their energy from spending time alone whereas extroverts get their energy from being around
people and prefer to pay attention to the outer world of people and things. She agreed that she
was an introvert and confirmed that she becomes energized from being alone.

I told Jenny that preferring sensing means that she likes to process information through
her five senses, whereas someone with an intuition preference would rather think about the big
picture and possibilities. Jenny enthusiastically agreed that the sensing preference described her
well. I described that someone with a thinking preference, like Jenny, prefers to make decisions
based on the logic of the situation, whereas someone with a feeling preference tends to make
decisions based on personal values. Jenny confirmed that the thinking preference described her
logical nature. Lastly, I talked about the judging and perceiving preferences with Jenny. I stated
that the Judging preference means that she prefers an organized approach to life and does not
prefer spontaneity like someone with a perceiving preference. The MBTI results helped to
validate what Jenny already knew about her own personality.

In our last session, I discussed resume and cover letter writing with Jenny to help her
with her graduate school applications and her future job search. I used the Scripps College’s
Resource Guide to teach Jenny about resume and cover letter writing. Afterwards, I gave her
printed copies of the Resource Guide’s section on resume and cover letters and other sample
resumes. I also provided her with website links for other Career Services resource guides. I
suggested that Jenny create a resume before our next session so I could review it, but Jenny
responded that she was confident with making a resume and would like to email me with any
questions.

To bring closure, we discussed her next steps in the application process and her main goal
of getting accepted into UCLA or APU. In order to reach her goal, Jenny has to create well-
rounded and completed applications. Her immediate next steps to obtain her goal include
contacting her nursing professors for letters of recommendation, starting to work on her personal
statement and resume, and performing well in her prerequisite courses. Jenny decided to end our
sessions at the end of the fourth session because she felt prepared to start the application process
and confident about her next steps, but she stressed that she wanted to remain in contact through
email.

When counseling Jenny, I found that Dawis and Lofquist’s work adjustment theory,
which is very similar to trait and factor theory, was most applicable to her. Work adjustment
theory is concerned with the individual’s satisfaction with their work. To help ensure
satisfaction, an individual needs to assess their abilities, values, personality, and interests and match them with an occupation (Sharf, 2010). Through completing the Career Wheel, we were able to assess Jenny’s abilities, values, personality, and interests that are so pertinent to work adjustment theory. The MBTI, the self-assessment MBTI, the party game, and the Strong Interest Inventory served as additional tools to assess Jenny’s personality, interests, and strengths. During the first couple of sessions, we were able to see how abilities, values, personality, and interests matched the nursing career and reinforced Jenny’s thinking that nursing would be a satisfying career for her.
References
