

Career Program Proposal

For high school students with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds

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Target Population and Setting

Vignette

Amina is a 16-year-old junior at a diverse suburban high school. She is a practicing Muslim who wears a hijab and comes from a close-knit family where cultural and religious traditions strongly influence daily life. Amina excels in science and expresses a strong interest in pursuing a career in medicine. However, she sometimes feels isolated when peers make insensitive comments about her hijab, and she worries about whether she will face discrimination in college or the workplace. Her parents support her education but hope she will also remain close to home after high school, creating tension between family expectations and her desire to attend a university with a strong pre-med program in another state. As an immigrant and first-generation college student, Amina also struggles with navigating systems that are unfamiliar to her family. While her parents deeply value education, they lack experience with U.S. college applications, financial aid, and career pathways, which places additional responsibility on Amina to research and advocate for herself. She worries about balancing her personal ambitions with cultural values and family expectations.

Activity 1: Advocacy in Action

- As a counselor or community advocate, how could you support Amina's transition into the workplace?
- What partnerships or advocacy actions could you take locally?

Target Population

The target population includes **students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds** in a high school setting. This group was chosen because cultural identity, religious values, and family expectations often intersect with academic and career decision-making in complex ways. These students may experience unique barriers such as discrimination, limited access to culturally relevant career resources, or pressure to prioritize family obligations over personal aspirations.

This focus aligns with the **Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2024) Career Counseling Standard 2.c.**, which emphasizes understanding “the unique needs and characteristics of multicultural and diverse populations with regard to career exploration, employment expectations, and socioeconomic issues.”

Our Group of Students

- This group consists of 6-10 high school juniors, aged 16-17.
- Most are first-generation aspiring college students.
- This group is diverse in culture, religion, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class.

Needs of this Group

- Culturally Responsive Support
- Self-Advocacy Skills
- First-generation Navigation Support

Career-Focused Theory Selected

- Mark Savickas' Career Construction Theory

Concern: Planning for the future	Control: Believing you have ownership of your own future
Curiosity: Engaging in exploration	Confidence: Feeling that choices and goals are possible

Table constructed using text from Luke & Gibbons (2022)

Why Career Construction Theory?

- CCT views career development as building a personal narrative. Students construct meaning by linking past experiences, present challenges, and future goals.
- CCT helps culturally diverse students like Amina integrate their religious, cultural, and family values into their career story while developing adaptability for future transitions.

Career Construction Theory Facets for Amina

Facets	Description
Construction	Amina is building her self-concept as a future doctor, connecting her strengths in science with her desire to help others.
Deconstruction	She must question and unpack limiting beliefs, such as fears of discrimination, or the idea that she cannot study out of state because of family expectations.
Reconstruction	Amina reframes challenges into opportunities: her identity as a Muslim, first-generation student becomes a source of resilience and unique perspective.
Co-Construction	With her counselor and family, she co-creates a narrative that honors cultural values while supporting her aspirations. Collaboration helps bridge gaps between her ambitions and her parents' hopes.
Action	Amina takes concrete steps: researching pre-med programs, practicing self-advocacy skills, and preparing to apply for scholarships/financial aid.

Program Goals

- Culturally Responsive Engagement
 - Students will practice self-advocacy by presenting a career plan to a parent, counselor, or mentor.
- Self-Advocacy Development
 - Students will demonstrate self-advocacy by articulating one academic or career goal and identifying one support resource (e.g., counselor, mentor, program) they can use to pursue it.
- First-Generation Navigation
 - Within the school year, students will attend at least one workshop on college/career readiness (e.g., financial aid, admissions, workplace rights).

Specific Program Elements

Length of the Program

Duration: 8 Sessions, once per week

Length: 40 minutes per session

Format: Counseling sessions (individual or small group)

Rationale for Duration, Length, and Format

- **Duration (8 sessions):** Eight sessions provide enough time for a developmental sequence that mirrors Savickas' Career Construction Theory (Construction → Deconstruction → Reconstruction → Co-construction → Action). Students can explore identity, confront barriers, build self-advocacy skills, and create a meaningful career plan without the program feeling overwhelming or unrealistic within a school calendar.
- **Length (40 minutes):** A 40-minute session aligns with half of a typical school class period or a typical counseling block, making the program feasible for integration into the school schedule. This length allows for meaningful discussion and activities while respecting time constraints.
- **Format (Counseling Sessions):** Using a counseling format ensures individualized support, cultural responsiveness, and relationship-building. Students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds often require tailored interventions, and counseling sessions allow space for personal storytelling, self-advocacy practice, and family engagement that might not occur in a large classroom workshop.

Career Information System

Career OneStop

“This is a free resource for information on degree programs, specialty training opportunities, financial aid, certification and accreditation, and licensing for the various states. It also includes career information and links it to education and training plans.”
(NCDA, 2022).

Why Career OneStop?

- **Comprehensive & free:** Covers occupations, training/college, apprenticeships, wages, and local labor market info.
- **Student-friendly tools:** Interest and skills matchers, career videos, resume and interview guides.
- **Equity-oriented:** Plain-language pages, Spanish content on key tools, and state/local filters for realistic options.

Assessment Systems Used

Formal:

- Career Construction Interview

Question	Rationale
How can I be useful to you as you construct your career?	Clients are regarded as the sole experts on their lives. Clients need to communicate their goals and set the scene for counselling.
1. Whom did you admire or who were your three role models before you were six years old? Why?	Role models represent clients' self-concepts and central life goals.
2. What is your favourite (a) magazine, (b) TV programme, and (c) website? Why?	Indicates environments that fit clients' lifestyles and that clients prefer (preferred settings for enacting the self)
3. What is your favourite story – book or movie or book turned movie?	Reveals characters who faced the same challenge as the clients and shows how the characters solved the problem.
4. What are your three favourite mottoes or quotations?	Reveals clients' advice to themselves at this moment.
5. What is the first thing you remember about your life? What are your earliest recollections? I am interested in hearing three stories about things you recall happening to you before you were six years old.	Early memories reveal core problems clients face; preoccupations.

Table 1. Career Construction Interview (Savickas, 2011). (As cited by Marie, 2014).

Informal:

- Career OneStop's Work Values Assessment

- **Achievement.** Work that is results-oriented, that allows you to use your best abilities and gain a feeling of accomplishment.
- **Independence.** Jobs that allow you to use your own initiative and make decisions on your own.
- **Recognition.** Jobs with good prospects for advancement, prestige, and potential for leadership.
- **Relationships.** Jobs that reflect your personal ethics and that allow you to be of service to others. Workplaces with a friendly, non-competitive environment.
- **Support.** Workplaces with high levels of trust in leadership and a reputation for competent, considerate, and fair management.
- **Working Conditions.** Jobs that offer one or more of these: job security, to be busy all the time, work alone, have a variety of tasks, earn a fair salary.

Quick Break!

Activity 2: Who Am I?

- Who is **your** role model?
- What is **your** life motto/mantra?
- Try to remember way back... What influenced **your** career path?

Thank you for your participation.

These questions are just examples that mirror the formal assessment, the *Career Construction Interview*, where clients will explore how their stories shape identity and purpose.

Rationale for Formal Assessment

A Savickas & Hartung-based Career Construction Interview satisfies the following criteria:

- **Evidence-Based:** Cadaret & Hartung (2020) found Career Construction Interventions improved vocational identity and career adaptability in youth of color.
- **Culturally Responsive:** Encourages students to share stories that connect with culture, family, and experience to career goals.
- **Builds self-advocacy:** Students identify strengths, barriers, and supports through reflection and narrative.
- **Promotes adaptability:** Fosters concern, curiosity, and confidence for future planning.

Rationale for Informal Assessment

- Career OneStop's Work Values Assessment satisfies the following criteria:
- **Accessible & Free:** A U.S. Department of Labor tool that is research-based, free, and easy for students to use.
- **Clarifies motivation:** Helps students identify what matters most in a career.

How we will Promote Self-Advocacy

The program will:

- **Encourage narrative exploration** (i.e., CCT) so students can articulate how their cultural, religious, and family values shape their career goals.
- **Build self-efficacy** through experiences like mock interviews and goal-setting exercises.

How the Community will Advocate in the Workplace (1)

Establish Mentorship and Networking Programs

- Connect students and young professionals with mentors who share similar cultural or religious identities, promoting representation and belonging in career fields.
- Create partnerships with local organizations such as various religion-based business associations or intercultural coalitions to expand networking opportunities.

How the Community will Advocate in the Workplace (2)

Develop Community-Based Career Resources

- Partner with local libraries, mosques, and community centers to host career readiness events, job fairs, and resume clinics that are culturally sensitive and accessible.

How the Community will Advocate in the Workplace (3)

Promote Equity Through Policy and Education

- Work with community leaders and employers to address systemic barriers like discrimination, microaggressions, or bias in recruitment and promotion.
- Offer workplace seminars on unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, and cultural competency.

Funding, Recruitment, and Program Evaluation

Funding

- The program will pursue a partnership with the **Lehigh Valley Workforce Board (LVWB)**. The LVWB aligns with the program's mission by supporting youth career readiness, equitable workforce participation, and regional economic development.

Funding Strategy:

- **Apply for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Grants:** These funds specifically support programs that help young people, ages 14–24, develop employability skills, explore career pathways, and overcome barriers to employment. (U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, n.d.)
- **School/Agency Budget Allocation:** Advocate for funding through the existing counseling department or student support services budget by aligning the program with ASCA's career development domain and CACREP's multicultural competencies.

Program Recruitment

- **Teacher & Family Referrals:** Encourage teachers and families to recommend students who may benefit, especially first-generation, immigrant, or religious minority students.
- **Information Sessions:** Host brief “Career Exploration & Self-Advocacy” info sessions or school-wide presentations to introduce the program’s purpose and benefits.
- This approach aligns with **Rutledge and Mayes (2024)**, who emphasized that minoritized youth often experience limited access to career exploration opportunities and benefit from intentional, relationship-based recruitment that affirms their cultural identity and strengths. Creating inclusive spaces that celebrate diversity and highlight representation is essential for building engagement and fostering self-efficacy among students who might otherwise feel overlooked.

What the School-wide Recruitment Presentation could look like

- **[Program Introduction]**
“Our school counseling department is launching a new Career-Focused Counseling Program designed to help students explore their interests, values, and future goals. This program includes one-on-one and small-group sessions where you’ll discover career pathways, connect with mentors, and build real skills like resume writing and interview prep.”
- **[Special Invitation]**
“If you’re going to be the first in your family to attend college, this program is *especially for you*. We’ll help you navigate applications, financial aid, and college life so you can feel confident taking that next step. We know it’s not always easy being the first, but you won’t have to do it alone.”
- **[Inclusive Encouragement]**
“This opportunity is open to *all students*, especially those who want to learn how to advocate for themselves, plan their futures, and explore careers that match their passions and cultural values.”

Assessing our Goals

Quantitative: Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS)

Appendix 2. Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory – International Version 2.0

Name _____ Age _____ Circle one: Male or Female

Different people use different strength to build their careers. No one is good at everything, each of us emphasizes some strengths more than others. Please rate how strongly you have developed each of the following abilities using the scale below.

- 5 = Strongest
4 = Very Strong
3 = Strong
2 = Somewhat strong
1 = Not strong

STRENGTHS

	5	4	3	2	1
Thinking about what my future will be like	—	—	—	—	—
Realizing that today's choices shape my future	—	—	—	—	—
Preparing for the future	—	—	—	—	—
Becoming aware of the educational and vocational choices that I must make	—	—	—	—	—
Planning how to achieve my goals	—	—	—	—	—
Concerned about my career	—	—	—	—	—
Keeping upbeat	—	—	—	—	—
Making decisions by myself	—	—	—	—	—
Taking responsibility for my actions	—	—	—	—	—
Sticking up for my beliefs	—	—	—	—	—
Counting on myself	—	—	—	—	—
Doing what's right for me	—	—	—	—	—
Exploring my surroundings	—	—	—	—	—
Looking for opportunities to grow as a person	—	—	—	—	—
Investigating options before making a choice	—	—	—	—	—
Observing different ways of doing things	—	—	—	—	—
Probing deeply into questions I have	—	—	—	—	—
Becoming curious about new opportunities	—	—	—	—	—
Performing tasks efficiently	—	—	—	—	—
Taking care to do things well	—	—	—	—	—
Learning new skills	—	—	—	—	—
Working up to my ability	—	—	—	—	—
Overcoming obstacles	—	—	—	—	—
Solving problems	—	—	—	—	—

Qualitative:

Student Reflections

+

Focus Groups



Figure: CAAS Inventory (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012)

Quantitative Assessment - CAAS

Use in the Program:

- Administered **before and after** the 8-session counseling program to measure growth in adaptability and self-advocacy.
- Helps counselors identify students who may need additional support in specific areas (e.g., confidence or control).

Rationale:

- Using the CAAS aligns with **Savickas' Career Construction Theory**, which views adaptability as a core component of successful life and career design. It is especially relevant for first-generation and culturally diverse students, as it highlights growth in agency and resilience — key self-advocacy skills for navigating systemic and personal barriers.

Qualitative Assessment – Student Reflections + Focus Groups

Use in the Program:

- At the end of the final session, students complete a short written reflection about what they learned about themselves, their career goals, and how they plan to advocate for their future.
- Small group discussions will be held after the program to gather student feedback on their experiences, perceived growth, and suggestions for improvement.

Rationale:

- Encourages **self-awareness and metacognition**, allowing students to articulate growth in identity, confidence, and self-advocacy — key goals of Career Construction Theory.
- Provides **qualitative insight** into the program's impact, helping counselors understand how students from diverse backgrounds experienced the process and where additional support is needed.

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