

## Harnessing the Power of Information Literacy for Career Preparation: Empowering Informed Career Choices and Decisions of College Students

### Introduction

The West Chester University (WCU) Libraries, in collaboration with the Twardowski Career Development Center and the School of Business at WCU, will partner with Indiana University - Bloomington, Western Michigan University, and Delaware County Community College. We are seeking \$249,999 in Implementation Project funding to develop a career information literacy curriculum and learning module for college students. Grounded in the protean career theory and life design mindset, this learning module will engage students in a series of self-directed exercises and research activities for career exploration. Through this process, students will identify career paths and goals that are aligned with their intrinsic values and their own definition of success and a fulfilled life. They will create a personalized roadmap with resources and opportunities for achieving career success. This project will foster college students' career information literacy, career research competency, and self-efficacy in early-stage career exploration, planning, and decision-making. The project is aligned with the **NLG-L Goal 1 Objective 1.1** in developing a replicable library program, models, and tools to support learning, workforce development, and literacy in the context of career development.

### Project Justification

A career is not just a means of earning a living; it plays a significant role in shaping one's life, providing a sense of purpose, fulfillment, and personal growth ([Hall, Yip, & Doiron, 2018](#)). Although colleges and universities aim to foster students' career competencies and make them career-ready, there is a notable gap in preparing students to navigate the complex terrain of career opportunities and make informed career choices and decisions ([Hora, 2023](#); [NACE, 2021](#)). The lack of knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy for career exploration often results in uncertainty, indecisiveness, and missed opportunities during formative years of career development and often leads to a heightened level of anxiety among college students in their career-planning and decision-making process ([Gordon & Steele, 2015](#); [Pisarik, Rowell, & Thompson, 2017](#); [Shin & Lee, 2019](#)). These challenges affect all students but **disproportionately** impact students who have **limited family resources or social capital**, such as first-generation students, students of color, and those from low-income and immigrant families. Although career centers serve as the primary campus resource for career guidance, they often face significant resource constraints, increased pressure to provide personalized guidance to all students, and challenges in serving historically marginalized students ([Hiration, 2023](#)). Faculty members also face various barriers to providing sufficient career assistance to students. A recent survey conducted by the WCU Career Center with faculty (N=233) revealed obstacles, including a lack of time (83%), limited specific training in career preparation (37%), and inadequate knowledge of career options (27%) (WCU, 2023). These challenges impact all institutions, but they are more pronounced in **less selective, broad-access, and resource-limited institutions**.

This project intends to transform the ways that libraries serve the nation through a **substantive and learning-centered collaboration model** between libraries, colleges, and career centers, capturing the value of library services in supporting college students' early-stage career exploration ([Walter & Eodice, 2005](#); [Wilhelm, 2021](#)). This project will develop a comprehensive career information literacy curriculum and learning module, engaging students in a series of exercises and activities to identify career paths aligned with their intrinsic values. These goals will be accomplished by guiding students in the use of reputable career information sources, scholarly literature, and library databases. Further, students will learn to apply information literacy skills and research strategies to identify career resources and opportunities, aiding them in creating a roadmap for career success. This project will demonstrate libraries' pivotal role in addressing college **curriculum gaps** in career development, facilitating a **personalized** career exploration approach on **a large scale** and empowering students' **self-direction** and **efficacy** in career exploration. Moreover, by promoting career information literacy, and preparing all students for lifelong career competency and self-efficacy, the project will contribute to **reducing equity disparities** among college students in their career exploration and help fulfill higher education's promise of **social and economic mobility** and **equity for all**.

### Project Workplan

The project will be grounded in the **protean career theory**, developed by Dr. Douglas Hall, Professor of Management at Boston University ([Hall, 1976](#)). Protean career theory views a career as a series of learning cycles that involves the exercise of self-direction and an intrinsic values orientation in the pursuit of psychological success ([Hall, 2003](#)). This project will also incorporate the **life design mindset**, which includes elements such as curiosity, bias to action (e.g., prototyping), reframing, awareness, and radical collaboration. The mindset was developed by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans ([2018](#)) through their Designing Your Life Course at Stanford University and detailed in their book [Designing Your Life: How](#)

[to Build a Well-lived Joyful Life](#). The partnering institutions will create a learning module prototype for business majors and will make recommendations for adapting it to other disciplines and customizing and integrating at other institutions.

**Project Personnel:** **Grace Liu** (PI), Associate Professor, Business Librarian, West Chester University (WCU); **Dr. Jennifer Bozeman** (Co-PI), Associate Professor, Department of Management, WCU; **Ilana Stonebraker** (Subaward Co-PI), Head, Business/ SPEA Library, Associate Librarian, Indiana University – Bloomington; **LuMarie Guth** (Subaward Co-PI), Associate Professor, Business Librarian at Western Michigan University; and **Louise Feldmann** (Subaward Co-PI), Assistant Professor, Reference and Instruction Librarian at Delaware County Community College will lead the effort in curriculum and learning module development and pilot test the model at four institutions. Advisory board members include **Judith Opdahl**, Business & Economics Librarian at California State University San Marco; **Jen Long**, Director of Twardowski Career Development Center at WCU; **Dr. Jon Briscoe**, Professor of Management at Northern Illinois University; **Gene Rhee**, Executive Director, Mohr Career Services at University of Oregon; **Dr. John Craig**, Interim Dean of University College, Associate Professor in Interdisciplinary Studies at WCU; and **Dr. Timothy Jussaume**, Director of Honors College at WCU. The project team also includes staff members from WCU Twardowski Career Development Center and the Office of Digital Learning & Innovation, one graduate assistant, and one undergraduate student assistant.

**Timeline & Activities:** **First Year (August 2024- July 2025):** 1) literature review; IRB proposal; focus group studies with 24 business students and follow-up surveys at four institutions; 2) develop curriculum outline with partners and advisors; 3) engage six students in participatory curriculum design; 4) develop learning content, research activities, resource guides, video scripts; 5) formative assessment. **Second Year (August 2025-July 2026):** 1) develop and refine videos and learning module with input from advisors, partners, and participatory students; 2) build project website; 3) formative assessment. **Third Year (August 2026 - July 2027):** 1) Pilot test the learning module at four institutions; 2) develop recommendations for adaptation by other disciplines; 3) develop recommendations for customization and integration at other institutions; 4) conduct summative assessment; 5) develop plans for tracking long-term impact. **After the project completion,** 1) promote the learning module and collaboration model nation-wide; 2) continue improve the learning module based on built-in student feedback surveys; 3) assess the long-term project impact.

### Diversity Plan

The project will benefit all students but will have the **greatest impact** on students with **limited family resources or social capital**, such as first-generation students, students of color, students from low-income families, or immigrant families. By promoting equitable opportunities for students' career exploration and decisions, this project contributes to fulfilling higher education's promise of **social and economic mobility** and **promoting equity for all**. The project brings together a diverse group of members, partners, and advisors with varied backgrounds and expertise, representing institutions that span from Carnegie Classification **R1, R2, M1, to two-year associate's colleges**. Employing universal design principles, the project will produce deliverables that are accessible and inclusive for students of all abilities and backgrounds.

### Project Results

The **short-term, direct result** of the project is to cultivate students' protean career orientation and develop lifelong awareness, adaptability, and agency for their career development ([Hall, Yip, & Doiron, 2018](#)). Studies found that clearly defined career goals will also positively impact students' motivation, engagement, retention, and contribute to overall academic success and job satisfaction ([Alniacik, et al., 2012](#); [Graciani Hidajat et al., 2020](#); [Hull-Blanks et al., 2005](#)). The project will develop plans to track its **long-term impact** on students' motivation, academic performance, retention rates, and job placements. The project deliverables include: 1) a comprehensive career information literacy curriculum and learning module (focused on business disciplines); 2) recommendations for adapting the learning module to other disciplines; 3) recommendations for customizing and integrating the learning module at other institutions; 4) an open-access website to share all learning materials with the public. These efforts will ensure that the project deliverables can be easily **adapted, integrated, and utilized** by other institutions.

Through **project webinars, publications, and conference presentations**, we will **widely disseminate** the project results to academic librarians, business faculty, and career professionals. We will utilize a robust dissemination network built upon a prior IMLS-awarded national forum grant project led by the PI, which engaged thousands of academic librarians. We will also promote the project's results through channels such as the Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS) at RUSA, the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), the American Library Association (ALA), the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the Academy of Management, and National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

**Budget Summary:** The total budget is \$249,999, including (1) \$104,321 Salaries and Wages; (2) \$13,906 Fringe Benefits; (3) \$14,629 Supplies & Materials; (4) \$47,000 Subawards and Contracts; and (5) \$70,144 Indirect Costs.