Review of FOCUS-2 an Online Career and Education Exploration Assessment Tool
By: Cindy Firestein
Bridgewater State College

General Information

Title: FOCUS-2 Online 2010: The Online Career and Education Planning System For Students in College & Universities

Author(s): Dr. Donald E. Super, Dr. Roger A. Myers, Dr. David Tiedeman, Dr. David Campbell, and Dr. Frank J. Minor

Publisher: Career Dimensions Inc., P.O. Box 998, Center Harbor, NH 03226

Date of publication: February 2010

General Type: FOCUS-2 is an online career and educational assessment tool primarily used to guide college and university students through the process of broadening their career horizons, analyze multiple career occupations, and helping students make decisions about major areas of study offered at their host institution. FOCUS-2 is administered through an online system that allows students to login any where and any time to complete assessment questions at their own pace.

FOCUS has been in use since 1990 and utilizes the Holland code. FOCUS evolved from the IBM Corporation’s “Career & Educational Planning System” which originally started the development of this project in 1968. FOCUS was revised to include new advantages and enhancements which began to be utilized in 2009 under the name of FOCUS-2.

Alternate Test Forms: Forms, groups to which applicable: FOCUS-2 is primarily utilized in colleges and universities. It has also been utilized by Technical institutes, Community and State Workforce & Youth Development agencies, and private career and life counseling firms. The tool is sole administered in English and in its online form.

Instrument Purpose and Use

Purpose(s) of the Instrument: FOCUS-2 assesses three primary sections for students and offers students’ additional resources for further exploration and assistance.

Career Readiness – Students assess their involvement in activities that support career and educational decision making in the following ways: Career and Educational Goals, Academic Strengths, Career Planning Status, Personal Development Needs

Self Assessment – Students assessment results are matched to occupations and major areas of study of at the host institution in the following ways: Work Interest Assessment, Leisure Interest Assessment, Skills Assessment, Personality Assessment, and Values Assessment.

Explore the Possibilities – Students select any major area of study offered at the host institution to explore occupations they could enter. Students are able to search occupations by name and by industry. FOCUS-2 also allows students to explore majors by reviewing the “What can I do with a major in... section of the assessment as well as compare two occupations side by side.
Students Personal Portfolio – FOCUS Portfolio Binder automatically saves students’ assessment results with their preferred occupations and major areas of study and comments by allowing students to review/update saved occupations, review/update their saved majors, and review as well as print their individual portfolio.

Recommended Tools and Websites – The host institution is able to insert links to important websites and announce upcoming events related to career fields and employment by utilizing the calendar of events feature or by connecting helpful links to FOCUS-2 for students.

Description of Instrument Scales and Items:

Career Planning Status: This section is based on theories defining a person’s “Career Planning Maturity” and “Readiness to Plan” which were developed by Professor Donald E. Super, Albert S. Thompson, Richard H. Linderman, Jean P. Jordaan, and Roger A. Myers.

Scales: Self Assessment is significant because it helps the student identify their desired occupations and major of study which are linked to their personal attributes. Career Exploration is significant because it allows the student to review occupations and majors that may appeal to them based on their score on the FOCUS-2. Career Planning Satisfaction measures Interests Assessment: FOCUS measures the self-reported career interest by using a nationally recognized standardized instrument using RIASEC scales developed by John Holland. The Holland code is utilized to match a student’s interest with possible occupations of interest.

Scoring Methods and Scoring Reporting:

Uses in Counseling: At the end of the twentieth century, the work of the counselor had changed in that computers were used by counselors to foster the career decision making of adolescents and adults (Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2001). FOCUS-2 was developed to help undergraduate undecided students explore and make decisions about their career goals and their major area of study. It is appropriate for individual career or academic counseling. By utilizing FOCUS-2 and similar computer-assisted career guidance system outcomes; counselors are assisting students with increase their career options, enhance self-knowledge, strengthen occupational knowledge, and gain direction and focus in their career and life path (Osborn, D, Peterson, G, Sampson, J, & Reardon, R., 2003).

Administration Information

Administration Time: It takes approximately 3 to 4 hours for most students to complete their FOCUS-2 assessment in its entirety. However, FOCUS-2 is distributed over 3 or 4 sessions which may be spaced over a period of days or weeks.

Required Training: Most counselors can administer FOCUS-2 after reading over the technical manual, shadowing other counselors interpreting FOCUS-2 in session, reviewing the tutorial designed for students which is supplied by Career Dimensions Inc., as well as reviewing FOCUS-2 overview PowerPoint for counselors.

Administration Ease: FOCUS-2 is easily administered online. Reports are immediately accessible to students and counselors once a section is completed. Graphs, charts, and suggested majors as well as occupations are also available for immediate review.
Administration Costs: The price of FOCUS -2 is based on the total enrollment size of the college or university. Administrative account, all technical, customer support, and services are included in the overall price. Prices start at $885 for a single year or less of usage. The pricing of FOCUS -2 will provide a college or university with usage of FOCUS-2 for all students including full time, part time, alumni, co-branding, customizing, self registration, support materials and administrative functions.

Instrument Manuals and Other Resources: Power point resources, a technical report, customer service team provided by Career Dimensions Inc., support materials, administration functions and online resources are available to all institutions to purchase the right to utilize FOCUS-2.

Technical Considerations/Instrument Properties

Normative Sample: FOCUS-2 used two sample groups consisting of 2-year and 4-year college and university students as well as working adults. The sample size for the students consisted of 2,788. The sample size for the working adults consisted of 2,469 participants.

Validity: Content Validity and Construct Validity were assessed for all sets of items. To determine the content validity the assessment items were examined by utilizing “face validity”, reviewing the different models and methods as well as item-scale correlations. Construct validity was recognized by evaluating the different results of the factor analysis across the 3 different samples.

Reliability: FOCUS-2 has the Alpha coefficient for internal reliability performed. Test-retest was also performed on FOCUS-2 to ensure stability.

Cross-Cultural fairness: In the research of this assessment, the reliability and validity were tested using samples of individuals who are working adults or students enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year college or university. The samples used were not well defined so it is unknown if this test has been tested with individuals who come from different genders, diverse cultural backgrounds or populations.

Applicability of Instrument to Broader Contexts and Populations

Over all Strengths and Weakness of Instrument

Strengths: FOCUS-2 has several strengths. Students can utilize FOCUS-2 on any PC or MAC anywhere and any time. The host institution is able to link the majors it offers to FOCUS-2 occupations to better assist students in selecting a major. Occupational videos, links to professional organizations, and graphic Holland code comparisons are also among the valuable resources students are exposed to after completing the FOCUS-2 assessment. Students can reuse FOCUS-2 repeatedly as needed during years enrolled in college. Reports are automatically calculated and graphed, along with a computer-generated, interpretation of the student’s profile which is compiled into a portfolio for the student and instantly available for the Counselor. Counselors can easily generate reports to describe their students, in a confidential website data base, and sort as desired. Results are saved for future use which allows students to compare their results from their freshman year to their senior year with a Counselor from their host institution. Report summaries of the students’ results are always available online. Schools that utilize FOCUS-2 and need technical or customer support have instant access to assistance when needed. Additional resources such as PowerPoint presentations, a user friendly manual, and posters are also available as valuable resources for utilizing FOCUS-2.

Weakesses: An occupation may be suggested for one assessment but does not appear again with another assessment, so the means of integrating information across the assessment dimension is not
made clear. There is very little published information about FOCUS, and no previous evaluative studies were found, (Betz & Borgen, 2009).

There are several weaknesses of FOCUS-2. Non traditional students who are not computer savvy may experience difficulty utilizing an online assessment tool. The host institution must purchase the rights to utilize this tool for their students. Many counselors expressed concern about dehumanization of the counseling process by utilizing computers and online systems for career planning, (Harris-Bolsbey & Sampson, 2001). FOCUS-2 is only available in English which is a major issue for multicultural or international students who may have English as their second language.

Evaluation

Aids to user: The results of the FOCUS-2 may be useful in counseling students who are undecided about their major and/or career path. Results are important to review with the student during an individual counseling session.
References


