

# At One Liberal Arts College Career Center, the MBTI® Step II™ and *Strong* Instruments Help Guide Students' Choices

## Assessments Help Undergrads Understand “Who They Are, What They Want to Do, and How to Get There”



### CASE STUDY AT A GLANCE

#### COMPANY OVERVIEW

Colorado College, founded in 1874 and located in Colorado Springs, Colorado, enrolls nearly 2,000 undergraduate students. Consistently ranked among the top 30 liberal arts colleges in the United States, the institution focuses on preparing well-rounded, creative, analytical individuals for productive lives and satisfying careers.

#### CHALLENGE

The college's Career Center counsels students starting as early as their first year and continuing until graduation and beyond. The Career Center's mission is to help students align their personal and academic strengths and interests with a course of study and career choice—which often involves opening their eyes to a new view of themselves, their expectations, and the expectations of others.

#### SOLUTION

By using CPP's *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® Step II™ and *Strong Interest Inventory* instruments, Career Center counselors bring Colorado College students to a truer understanding of themselves—their personality and inclinations, their interests and strengths.

#### RESULTS

By knowing themselves better, undergraduates are able to make more thoughtful and authentic choices about their classes, majors, and career preparation in general. As a result, their college years are more productive and enjoyable, and their chosen career is far more likely to turn out to be the “right path” for them.

Ranked among the top 30 liberal arts colleges in the United States, Colorado College (or “CC,” as it's called) enrolls nearly 2,000 undergraduates in a distinctive educational program dedicated to “intellectual de-velopment, creative expression, and personal growth.” Under the college's unique Block Plan, students take one class at a time, and professors teach one class at a time, in blocks of three and a half weeks. Some classes go for one block, others for two. In any case, classes are small and the students' engagement with the subject matter is intense. As a result, the college tends to attract superior students with a range of passionate interests.

The college's Career Center offers many programs and services to help students learn about various careers as well as locate—and land—jobs and internships. But for many students, none of its services is more enlightening, and potentially life changing, than the psychological assessments the center offers: CPP's *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® Step II™ and *Strong Interest Inventory*® instruments.

#### ALL IN GOOD TIME

“CC students tend to have lots of interests,” explains career counselor Darlene Garcia of the Career Center, “and they take courses in lots of different subjects.” “Which is wonderful,” she adds. “That's what a ‘liberal arts’ education should be. At the same time, it's important over the course of their time here to prepare for the work they want to do and the life they want to have. Our job at the Career Center is to help them figure out who they are, what they want to do, and how to get there.”

Although the Career Center works with students at all levels, including many first-year students, the assessments aren't often used until their sophomore year, when they're faced with declaring a major. “There's already too much pressure on today's students to decide what they want to do,” she says. “Pushing them into career and life decisions too early just doesn't make sense.” For example, she deals with many pre-med students “loaded with angst,” as she puts it. “All their life they've planned on becoming a doctor. When they find they're not strong in the sciences, or they simply don't like the pre-med course of study, it's like they've fallen off a cliff.”

Every year, the Career Center experiences a rush of students seeking guidance just before Thanksgiving or the winter holidays—and sometimes after. “That's when they

have to go home and tell their family they've changed their plans, they're interested in new things, they don't know what they want," says Garcia. "Many are confused, and many have to deal with their parents' disappointment—or the fear of it."

For these students and many others, assessments help open their eyes to why they're not happy. They come out with a new understanding of themselves and a new sense of direction. "When you understand *why* you don't want to go in a certain direction, it can turn a negative into a positive," Garcia says. "Instead of feeling you've lost your way, you realize you've found it."

### "DOES THIS SOUND LIKE YOU?"

Garcia has extensive experience with assessments and clear convictions about how to use them. When she started on her master's degree in counseling, as she tells it, "I was not really a 'testing' type. I had taken a test when I was in high school, and the results indicated I was well suited for a career as a funeral director. So I dutifully took a college course in that area, and it was a horrible experience. But then I learned about MBTI assessments in a counseling class and started using them during an internship," she recalls. "I saw how effective they are, especially with college students."

At the same time, she believes strongly that "without proper interpretation, tests can be more damaging than helpful because people tend to take them only at face value." She continues, "Knowing what type you are, according to the MBTI tool or any other assessment, is the beginning of the process, not the end. Many careers draw on the same set of interests and personal strengths."

So, while assessments are vitally important to her work at the Career Center, Garcia is very careful about when and how she uses them. "I take care to introduce students to the idea of assessments before administering them," she says. "And I always explain the theory before I present the results."

In fact, she uses the MBTI Step II and *Strong Interest Inventory* instruments in CPP's combined college edition because she found the MBTI tool alone did not resonate with CC students. "The results weren't clear enough," she says, "and the students tended to challenge them."

With its more nuanced, textured picture of type and behavior, which takes into account how each person expresses his or her type in a unique way, the Step II assessment enables CC students to integrate their results in their view of themselves, says Garcia. "It allows me to challenge them to think about *why* they are the way they are, and they become truly engaged in the whole process."

She uses handouts—including one that explains the scales used in the assessment and one that shows the sixteen MBTI types in relation to each other ("Our students are very contextual")—and detailed four-page descriptions of each type. "When we go over their results, I have them read the description of their type from the Step II instrument

while they're here in my office," she explains. "Then I ask them, 'Does this sound like you?' I want to be sure they're OK with the Step II results before going on to discuss the *Strong*, because that opens them up to consider their career interests and options in a whole new light."

On the basis of the Step II and *Strong* results, students are prepared to consider the real-world aspects of career planning: Can I get work doing what I want to do? If not, how else can I use my strengths and "follow my bliss" and make a career? In any case, how do I get from here to there?

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*"In college-age people, the MBTI Step II and Strong assessments can bring about a two-year jump in maturity and confidence in two weeks. I see it all the time."*

—Darlene Garcia,  
Career Counselor

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### TWO YEARS IN TWO WEEKS

Across the wide spectrum of students Garcia sees at the Colorado College Career Center, the MBTI Step II and *Strong* assessments promote a wide spectrum of outcomes.

For those pre-meds and others who aren't comfortable or satisfied with their course of study, the assessments enable them to understand *why* they're unhappy or falling short of their expectations. In addition to assuaging their anxiety, the insights they gain help many students resolve conflicts with their parents and others. "I tell them, 'It's up to you whether you share what you've learned about yourself with your parents, family, and others,'" says Garcia. "Most respond, 'Yes! Now they'll see me for who I really am and what I want.'"

"Many of them find a new way not just of looking at themselves, but of describing themselves," she continues. "They learn to say 'I'm exploring' or 'I'm working with a counselor.' That can make all the difference with their parents as well as themselves."

She hears from parents frequently, and they know what the assessment experience is worth to them as well as to their children—how much it can save in terms of the cost of inappropriate classes, books, and fees, in addition to student discouragement, confusion, and lack of focus.

Garcia recalls what one parent said after his child went through the assessments process: "This was a transformation." She adds, "That was not only true, but typical. In

college-age people, the MBTI Step II and *Strong* assessments can bring about a two-year jump in career maturity and confidence in two weeks. I see it all the time.”

At Colorado College, career counseling is not a requirement, and Garcia is the first to admit that not everyone takes advantage of it. “Some students simply have a love of learning, and learning is their goal,” she says. “They’re untroubled by career goals while they’re here, and that’s great.” For those who come to the Career Center, however, Garcia has a clear mission. “I want them to learn who they are, what’s important to them, what they want to do, and where they want to do it, while they’re here,” she says.

“I tell them this: ‘If you start now, you’ll see the pattern ahead of you instead of having to look back. You’ll avoid a lot of mistakes. And you won’t be coming back to me when you’re in your forties!’”

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