

Using Myers-Briggs® Personality Type to Set Students on the Path to a Successful, Fulfilling Life



CASE STUDY AT A GLANCE

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Mount Mary College strives to create an environment that encourages the development of the whole person, ultimately providing students with the ability to enrich their communities. The college takes a deep interest in helping its students choose the career path that reflects their natural talents, interests, and passions.

CHALLENGE

Laura Nicolaisen, Director of Advising and Career Development, is responsible for helping Mount Mary's students connect with the academic major that suits them best. However, students' initial career paths are frequently based not on personal interest or compatibility but on factors such as the media, the economy, and society. Nicolaisen relies heavily on the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® instrument to give students a foundation for decision making that accounts for their preferences and inclinations, as well as a complete view of the kinds of careers available.

SOLUTION

The Myers-Briggs® assessment is administered through one-on-one sessions with an advisor or as part of classroom coursework in partnership with instructors. Advisement based on the Myers-Briggs tool also helps make students aware of the ins and outs of various careers and broadens their career outlook. Additionally, the assessment serves a retention function—leading students to career paths that suit their interests and aptitudes and, therefore, making them less likely to drop out and more likely to succeed.

RESULTS

The Myers-Briggs instrument plays a key role in the success of its students and contributes to Mount Mary's overall retention rate by helping guide students to the path that provides them with the greatest chance for fulfillment and success. Furthermore, the assessment helps the staff prepare students for workforce realities, as well as help identify personal problems that may stand in the way of academic and career achievement.

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW— MOUNT MARY COLLEGE

Mount Mary College, Wisconsin's first four-year college for women, is not satisfied with simply providing tutelage and awarding diplomas. Rather, the school strives to create an environment that encourages the development of the whole person and ultimately gives students the ability to enrich their communities. In an institution that makes social justice a major focus of its mission, the staff and faculty take particular pride in helping students who otherwise might not thrive at alternate schools. The college, therefore, takes a deep interest in helping its students choose the career path that reflects their natural talents, interests, and passions.

THE CHALLENGE: PUTTING STUDENTS ON THE RIGHT PATH

As Director of Advising and Career Development, Laura Nicolaisen is one of the key staff members responsible for helping Mount Mary students connect with the academic major that suits them best. Additionally, Nicolaisen's office works regularly with alumni to help determine career direction.

Whether formulating workshops, advising new students or students who have not yet declared a major, or managing the Career Office, one of her first tasks in the advisement process always involves helping students gain a more complete self-understanding. In particular, Nicolaisen seeks to give students a foundation for making career decisions that accounts for how their personality preferences and inclinations relate to various career options. Additionally, it is Nicolaisen's responsibility to give students the most complete view of the kinds of careers available so that they can make the best decisions regarding their future. In order to accomplish this, she relies heavily on the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® instrument.

SOLUTION

The Myers-Briggs® instrument, the world's most widely used personality assessment, is based on Carl Jung's personality type theory. According to type theory, each person has an innate, fundamental personality type that, while not controlling behavior, shapes and influences the way he or she understands the world, processes information, and socializes. The Myers-Briggs assessment

helps an individual determine which one of the sixteen personality types fits him or her best, which can then be used to derive an abundance of information, including factors directly related to academic and professional career direction such as preferences for learning, working, and communicating. Using supplementary tools such as *MBTI® Type Tables for Occupations*, which provides information on 250 occupations and the people who work in them, counselors can help students align their goals and preferences with their career choice.

USING THE MYERS-BRIGGS® ASSESSMENT TO GUIDE STUDENTS' CAREER PATH

At Mount Mary, the Myers-Briggs assessment is administered in a variety of ways. For example, faculty members can request that a representative from the Career Office give a presentation on career guidance, or an instructor may choose to include the assessment as part of an introductory session that provides information regarding the major/career.

Additionally, students frequently come to the academic advisement and career development offices seeking direction. Quite often these students have declared a major but are unsure as to whether they've made the right decision. In other cases, the students have not yet declared a major and are looking to the office to provide guidance and generate ideas. (As a matter of policy, the academic advisement office works closely with all "undeclared" students.) In all of these scenarios, Nicolaisen's first step is to give students a broader basis for self-understanding by having them take the Myers-Briggs assessment, which the school makes available to all students free of charge. In one-on-one advisement situations students typically take the assessment before their first meeting. Nicolaisen usually directs students to the online form of the Myer-Briggs assessment, which allows them to take the assessment on their own schedule.

The Myers-Briggs assessment elicits many different reactions from students, typically in the form of positive career direction. For example, sometimes the results confirm a student's desire to go into a particular field or what they already suspected about their preferences and career options. In many cases, however, the results of the assessment help the student determine a new direction.

According to Nicolaisen, students' initial career paths are frequently based not on personal interest or compatibility but on factors such as the media, the economy, and even society. For example, sometimes parents try to steer students into a particular major because it leads to a solid career or for other reasons. In some cases students base decisions on faulty notions about a certain career. For example, many nursing students have a desire to help people but don't necessarily understand the amount of science coursework required in the pre-nursing major.

Nicolaisen recalls a woman who wanted to go into crime scene investigation (CSI) work but through the advisement process learned that the realities of the career were quite different from how the job is presented on TV. According to Nicolaisen, advisement using the Myers-Briggs

"We're not a research school—we're here to teach the students. With the Myers-Briggs assessment, we can help guide students to the major that most effectively captures their interest and provides the intellectual stimulation and opportunities for growth they need to truly shine."

*—Laura Nicolaisen,
Director of Advising and Career Development*

assessment helps make students and alumni aware of the ins and outs of various careers, giving them a realistic view of their demands and benefits. Additionally, it often serves to broaden students' career outlook. According to Nicolaisen, students frequently enter her office with fairly limited notions of the careers available—and often these notions are skewed by TV and other media distortions or overall lack of exposure to the day-to-day realities of a given career.

"Using the Myers-Briggs assessment and other methods, we have students pick out five to ten careers, and then fully research those options," said Nicolaisen. "The students usually find that there are more viable choices than they were aware of."

And even for students whose direction is confirmed by the Myers-Briggs assessment, it can be a source of new ideas. For example, a student may be on a path to a particular profession in health care but then learn about a related health care career that more fully suits his or her personality preferences.

THE MYERS-BRIGGS® ASSESSMENT AS A RETENTION TOOL

Aside from the individual benefit to the students, Nicolaisen also sees a direct benefit to the school from the use of the Myer-Briggs assessment. "It could be considered a retention tool," said Nicolaisen. "In my opinion, students who have selected the career path for which they are well-suited are less likely to drop out, and tend to perform better than they otherwise might."

One student who came into her office was unenthusiastic about her then current academic path. Using the Myers-Briggs assessment as a platform for exploration, the two began looking at other options, ultimately leading the student to switch from her previous major to one in the behavioral sciences. She now works in the campus technology center and has expressed that she is very happy with her new direction.

In other cases insight gained through use of the Myers-Briggs assessment helps keep students from leaving the school when the major they chose initially is unavailable, by exposing them to new options that also appeal to their personality preferences. For example, often when students are not accepted into the pre-nursing program—a fairly frequent occurrence—Nicolaisen can work with them to find a new major that, based on their preferences, they will find equally fulfilling.

OTHER BENEFITS OF USING THE MYERS-BRIGGS® ASSESSMENT

Sometimes the Myers-Briggs assessment is administered for purposes that have nothing to do with career choice. For example, several class instructors have their students take the assessment as part of a lesson on how to get along with people in the workplace. In such cases, the assessment opens their eyes to how their underlying personality can affect their communication, learning, and other aspects of their life, and how an understanding of those preferences can help them bridge personal differences and avoid otherwise destructive miscommunications.

Additionally, Nicolaisen points out, as a tool that facilitates personal exploration, the Myers-Briggs instrument provides indirect benefits for both the school and students. As the student base at Mount Mary is 40 percent “nontraditional”—that is, older than the typical students entering college straight from high school (and often balancing a family and full-time job)—students frequently face a wide range of problems, including those related to family and marriage. Sometimes the process of reviewing the results of the Myers-Briggs assessment opens up discussion about other factors in a student’s personal life that are affecting his or her academic career. “In many cases the students come with tremendous challenges and have difficulty envisioning their own success,” said Nicolaisen.

Consequently, being aware of students’ situations and doing everything they can to help them succeed is imbedded in the school’s culture. When serious issues are discovered, Nicolaisen has referred students to Mount Mary’s counseling office so that they can get the support they need and continue to work toward successful graduation.

RESULTS

For Mount Mary College, the success of its students is paramount to its mission. The Myers-Briggs instrument plays a key role in accomplishing that mission and also contributes to the school’s overall retention rate by helping guide students to the path that provides the best chance for fulfillment and success. Furthermore, the assessment helps the staff prepare students for workforce realities as well as identify personal problems that may stand in the way of achieving their career goals.

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