



# Career Coaching Influences on College & Career Readiness & Confidence

A Focus on JAG Secondary Students

December 2014

Dora Grote, Dr. Jerry Trusty, and Minjung Chae

Kuder, Inc.  
302 Visions Parkway  
Adel, IA 50003  
515.993.3005 (office)  
800.314.8972 (toll free)  
[www.kuder.com](http://www.kuder.com)

## About the Authors

**Dora Grote** is the director of training and professional services for Kuder. She oversees the company's delivery of real-time career and education planning support for students and adults through the Kuder<sup>®</sup> Coach<sup>™</sup> program and works with client organizations to develop and implement customized coaching programs. Dora manages the administration of Kuder's professional development courses and serves as an instructor for Kuder Career Advisor Training<sup>®</sup> and Kuder<sup>®</sup> Career Development Facilitator Training. In addition, she manages a team of international field trainers and organizes product training schedules. Dora is a certified Global Career Development Facilitator-Instructor (GCDFi) and Business Coach Consultant. She holds a bachelor's degree in business management, a master's degree in business, and is pursuing a doctorate in general psychology.

**Jerry Trusty, Ph.D.** is a professor of counselor education, counseling psychology, and rehabilitation services and coordinator of the secondary school counseling program at The Pennsylvania State University. He is also a member of the Kuder, Inc. research faculty. In this role, he conducts outcome research on the company's online education and career planning resources and develops customized needs assessments to evaluate key stakeholders' awareness, acceptance, and application of career program initiatives.

Dr. Trusty is the editor of *Career Development Quarterly*, the journal of the National Career Development Association and the premier journal in the area of career development and career counseling. His research and scholarly work has focused on school dropout prevention, adolescents' educational and career development, parents' influences on adolescents' educational and career development, achievement and opportunity gaps in schools, and quantitative research methods. Much of Dr. Trusty's research has focused on the career development of students experiencing opportunity gaps (e.g., Mexican American adolescents, African American students, students in lower socioeconomic status groups). In his recently published research, Dr. Trusty investigated the effects of students' experiences and behaviors in high school on college graduation versus non-graduation. These studies highlight the influence of intensive course-taking in high school on postsecondary educational success.

Dr. Trusty began his career as a secondary school counselor and as a dropout prevention coordinator for a school district. He became a counselor educator in 1992 after earning his doctorate from Mississippi State University. He served as a faculty member at the University of Alabama and Texas A&M University.

**Ms. Minjung Chae** is a doctoral candidate in counselor education and supervision at The Pennsylvania State University. Ms. Chae received her bachelor's degree from Seoul National University in South Korea and her master's degree from Seoul National University in South Korea. She has experience working as a researcher for the development of psychological tests, a counselor for the management of a training program for national counselors in South Korea, and a staff member in the CEDAR Clinic at The Pennsylvania State University. Ms. Chae is focused on researching counselor education in her doctoral program at The Pennsylvania State University.

## Summary

This study was designed to investigate the effectiveness of individualized and personalized career coaching sessions with a sample group of Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) secondary students in six high schools across Indiana. Of the 99 students who participated in career coaching in Indiana, 14 were randomly selected for in-depth interviews on their career coaching experience and on their experience using Indiana Career Explorer, powered by Kuder<sup>®</sup>. These interview transcripts contribute to the qualitative data in the study. Fifty-five students completed quantitative pretests and posttests through which they rated their levels of confidence in performing career development tasks contributing to the quantitative perspective.

**Keywords:** Coaching; career; college; college readiness, confidence; college planning.

## Introduction

The effects of limited career guidance can begin when individuals are young. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (2011) recommended the student to counselor ratio as 250:1. However, according to ASCA, the current national average ratio is 470:1. This ratio creates a significant gap in personalized career guidance for the student population, leaving a gap in career guidance in the state school systems. With a gap in career guidance, students lack the ability to make immediate choices about careers and classes while creating an even larger problem in making foundational lifelong learning and career choices (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Turong, 2011). Families spend more money on education because of student indecision in major selection. Students make poor career choices and become unhappy in their jobs, lowering job satisfaction and retention, ultimately leaving people with feelings of hopelessness and frustration in career and education choices (Niles, 2011; Trusty, 2008).

Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG), established in 1980, is a nonprofit youth development program dedicated to helping at-risk young people graduate from high school and make successful transitions to postsecondary education and meaningful employment. JAG has served over 1 million youth since its inception and is currently helping 47,000 young people in 800+ schools and other locations in 32 states to achieve academic, career, and life success.

## Pilot Study

Indiana participated in a pilot coaching study using the Kuder<sup>®</sup> Coach<sup>™</sup> program that included six high schools, specifically students in the JAG program. These locations selected individuals to participate in a research study designed to demonstrate the effect of coaching on college and career confidence, hope, and maturity. Ninety-nine male and female students participated in one to two career coaching sessions that lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes over a three- or four-week period. The JAG specialists supported scheduling of coaching sessions and led the pretest and posttest for each of the six locations.

Overall, coaching provided an effective model for influencing participants in improving college readiness and confidence in major and program selection. Through participant pre-selected interviews, participants shared that coaching improved their ability to narrow down occupational choices, compare colleges, identify costs, and find scholarships and financial aid. This led to increased self-confidence, efficacy, and concept.

## Aims of the Study

The aim of this study was to interpret the influence of career coaching on students' college and career readiness, confidence, hope, and maturity with students who were involved in JAG programs in Indiana at six high schools across the state. Students were required to register and complete online assessments using the Indiana Career Explorer (a customized version of the Kuder® Career Planning System™ (KCPS) as well as participate in two virtual coaching sessions held over the phone with a trained career coach.

## Literature Review

One major perspective from the literature review about career coaching is the defining difference between career counseling and career coaching. Although there are similarities, there is debate about a valid competency model for coaches because career coaches do not require licensing or relative education (Hatala & Hisey, 2011). While counselors require licensing and counseling education, career coaches may have varied backgrounds and experience, which in some regard, allows them to be flexible and knowledgeable about “real-life” experiences (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003; Hatala & Hisey, 2011). Career development as a whole includes counselors and coaches; however, counselors typically work within school systems while coaches are usually in private business and consist of individuals with previous career experiences opening a practice or establishing processes for coaching within an established business (Hatala & Hisey, 2011). Brown and Trusty (2005) identified the growing demands of school counselors. Counselors may need additional support systems to provide services to their established populations. In addition, it is necessary to ascertain that counselors have strict rules, regulations, and competencies to counsel, while coaches, if not appropriately certified, do not have the same competency model (Hatala & Hisey, 2011).

Hatala and Hisey (2011) and Chung and Gfroerer (2003) postulated the importance and recommendations for career coaching specific competency models and ethical standards. Chung and Gfroerer (2003) demonstrated that coaching provides a flexible framework for supporting and mentoring clientele in career skills, such as confidence and self-efficacy. Chung and Gfroerer (2003) discussed the career development facilitator (CDF) that serves as globally recognized certification for non-counseling career guidance professionals.

## Qualitative Results

### Sample

A sample of 123 students was invited to take part in the study and 99 participated in coaching, out of which 73 completed both sessions of coaching. The sample was selected at each location based upon their involvement in the JAG program in their respective high schools. Students were asked to consent to participate in the study and a post-coaching interview prior to meeting with a coach. Students who were under 18 were required to have an assent form signed by their parent or guardian prior to meeting with a coach. Students were requested to be part of an interview process as part of the pre-assessment before the coaching session began to ensure the interviews were conducted with a varied population of individuals who were not prompted by a perceived “successful” coaching experience and to gain insights from various perspectives. The interviews were conducted with 14 participants including seven females and seven males, and six juniors and eight seniors between the ages of 16 to 18. For direct quotes, the gender will be identified but names have been changed to protect the students' identities.

### Data collection method

Upon completing coaching, if the participant indicated interest in being interviewed, an interview session was scheduled with a member of the Kuder team who did not have involvement in coaching or with the students prior to the interviews. Each participant was asked six questions with clarifying and follow-up

questions appropriate to gaining additional information, if necessary. Each interview was recorded with permission from the participant and his or her parent or guardian, and afterward transcribed into a text document for data analysis purposes.

The questions included:

- “Describe your experience using the Indiana Career Explorer.”
- “Describe your experience working with a coach.”
- “How would you describe your confidence level in making career choices?”
- “How would you describe your experience with coaching?”
- “Please describe how personal decisions were influenced by your coaching experience.”
- “How has coaching influenced your ability to make short and long-term career decisions?”

### Data analysis methods

All the interview transcripts were coded using NVivo 10 in the style of a grounded theory approach to data analysis. The coding approach included investigator data triangulation from two researchers to discover a common coding system and consistency in order to assess a deeper meaning in the data. This supports the validity of the findings and a broader and deeper understanding of how the investigators viewed the outcomes.

## Findings and Discussion

Three themes became apparent from the review of interviews: Indiana Career Explorer (Kuder Career Planning System), Experiences, Overall Experiences with Career Coaching, and College and Career Planning Confidence. These themes contain subthemes to clarify responses and experiences. Each theme and its respective responses will be described separately with direct quotations from interviews.

### Theme 1 – The Indiana Career Explorer

As part of the overall coaching process, the students and adults were encouraged to utilize the Indiana Career Explorer (a customized version of the Kuder Career Planning System). This system includes three career assessments as well as resources on educational, financial, and job searching skills. Students shared varied responses from the question “Describe your experience using the Indiana Career Explorer.” Eleven students shared positive experiences with the web-based system itself including responses like that of Jeremy, who shared that the assessments helped narrow down the types of careers by his interests:

*“I am one of those people that still don’t know quite for sure what type of career I want to go into; I now know it will be an engineering career... the surveys helped me find which one might be the best.”*

Jackson also shared that the assessments helped him explore careers he did not know were available and narrowed down his interests:

*“It was a useful tool for looking things for people like myself who don’t know what they are doing after high school or what they want to major in. It was helpful to know where those jobs were or there were many I didn’t know even existed.”*

After taking the assessment, Earl gained a different perspective of himself and new career possibilities:

*“Just taking the quizzes helped to mend those tendencies that I have, and just some of the leadership skills that I have, and it just kind of gave me a new perspective on myself.”*

Nine students shared that the online assessments helped them narrow down their career interests and identify fields of fit for each of them. Two students did not have knowledge about the Indiana Career Explorer when asked by the interviewer. One student acknowledged technical problems and did not relay any experience.

## Theme 2 – Overall Experiences with Career Coaching

### Subtheme 1 – Satisfaction

All participants expressed their satisfaction with their overall experiences with career coaching by saying that they wanted to recommend it to others. For example, Nathan mentioned that his counselor wanted to suggest coaching,

*“Even when I talked to my counselor about it, I told him the name of Kuder coaching and told him it was really helpful ... I think he wants to suggest [it] to kids he is counseling now.”*

The reasons why the participants wanted to recommend it to others varied. Monique described coaching as a partnership:

*“It’s like having someone there by your side, step-by-step, and someone you can ask questions to and answer them, and someone who is interested in what you have to do to go to school and do what you want with your life.”*

Jeremy mentioned that his parents agreed that coaching helped him with valuable information and he wished he had been able to work with a coach sooner:

*“I think it is valuable information that I wish I had sooner. And I’m sure it helped a lot of others; like my parents agree that the program and coaching helped a lot, and would’ve helped a lot more if I had it sooner.”*

Jackson shared that coaching helped students identify skills and passions to a job:

*“I would [recommend coaching] for people who don’t have a clue of what they want to do or what to do. For most people it is how to apply my skills and passion to a job, workplace, or career.”*

Beth shared that the benefit came from asking questions and setting goals.

*“They [people] could ask questions and the Kuder Coach could help them set long-term goals and short-term goals to help them get ready for and help them find colleges, make sure it is the right college for them.”*

Earl mentioned that career coaching is as necessary as sports coaching. He identified an analogy that building a career is like building sports teams; it takes a team, talent, and coaches to ensure success:

*“You need coaching because you can’t do it by yourself. You’re building a team and you need coaches to ensure certain things for you and give you tips. It’s like basketball or football, it’s a team sport. When you’re building a great player like LeBron James that becomes an awesome player ... I mean, he put in the hard work and had the talent but he had great coaches at every level.”*

One participant emphasized his satisfaction with coaching experience by saying that he told its benefit to his counselor. Nathan said,

*“Yeah, even when I talked to my counselor about it, I told him the name of Kuder coaching and told him it was really helpful and whatnot and I think he wants to suggest it to kids he’s counseling now.”*

Finally, one student identified how coaching helped them find a starting point. Monica described her satisfaction,

*“There are a lot of kids out there still unsure about what they want to do or if they do know, a lot of kids don’t know where to start. I think that’s how it helps. [It helps them start] career-wise ... schools, scholarships, money, where to go, and you know what you want to do. Some kids don’t think they have any options and some [are] unsure if they even want to go to college.”*

Overall, interviewees related their satisfaction with the career coaching experience. Based on their statements, the coaching experience would be useful for high school students, especially those who need support with choosing an occupation and college, setting short- and long-term goals, and building a partnership for success.

## **Subtheme 2 – Effectiveness**

Participants reported that the coaching experience was effective for the following reasons: 1) Self-awareness; 2) Focus and encouragement; 3) decision making; and 4) concrete guidance regarding career.

### **1) Self-Awareness**

Some participants reported that they have increased their own self-awareness. One participant mentioned that he could understand his strengths and weaknesses. Ben said,

*“... The way I would describe it is it helped me figure out where I was in my life and what I need to do to get to my goals [and it] helped me figure it out by pointing out where my strengths and weaknesses are.”*

Another participant answered that she came to recognize her personal tendency and has tried to behave differently. Samantha said,

*“I actually try harder, I don't just give up. Like, I'm really bad at math and normally I would just give up without trying. But, I'm actually trying now and I don't just quit when I get something wrong or don't do it right.”*

Another participant reported that his self-awareness made him understand his interest regarding career. Stan said,

*“The experience working with a coach was a great experience, with my session she told me more about myself and ... why I may do better in certain subjects, why I want to pursue a career in teaching and stuff like that ... it made me feel better about who I am and kind of made me know why I am and why I want to do what I do and just the reason for everything.”*

### **2) Focus and Encouragement**

Participants reported that they made gains in focus and felt encouraged by working with a coach. Samantha shared that she felt being coached helped her try harder and write down her goals.

*“I actually try harder, I don't just give up. Like, I'm really bad at math and normally I would just give up without trying. But, I'm actually trying now and I don't just quit when I get*

*something wrong or don't do it right. Keeping me updated on everything really helped me stay on track. She had me write down a bucket list and all of that."*

After talking with a coach, Monique shared that she felt encouraged that the coach believed in her and guided her in the process of doing what she wants for a career:

*"It was kind of like talking to a best friend and she was there to talk to me about what I wanted to do, and she seemed like she believed in me and she was really nice. Her confidence in me stood out. She didn't talk down at me, but she just guided me into the process of doing what I love."*

Earl shared that he became more conscious of himself and felt reassurance from working with a coach:

*"I would just say more conscious. I mean, you know, the coaching sessions kind of gave me some reassurance."*

Beth shared that the discussion with the coach helped her narrow down a list of colleges.

*"It helped me for my short-term goals. Helped me focus down to getting the basis of the occupations, helped me to focus on colleges that I wanted to go to."*

Finally, Jackson described how coaching kept him focused on information he needed to find.

*"Yeah, it helped; it kept me focused and showed me new things that I didn't know or didn't know how to find."*

Similarly, other participant mentioned he could relieve the stress about searching for college. Stan said,

*"Certainly, with high school everyone is busy working on school and everything. You really don't have time to think about the future, in the back of your mind, but with this program, it helps you get on track ... and you might be stressed about your search for college; it really helps you calm down, look at it simple and be at ease about it all."*

### 3) Decision Making

Several participants shared that the effectiveness of the coaching was demonstrated through support in making decisions about occupations, majors, and action steps. Monique shared how she learned the importance of starting college research in her junior year versus waiting until later:

*"I think that [coaching helped] make short-term decisions because I mean I'm a junior, and I guess it kind of tells me that I need to start now. It tells me that you should always be prepared and not being hurt by doing stuff now to help where you want to go later."*

Beth identified that coaching supported her occupational choices by searching them more thoroughly in Indiana Career Explorer and the Internet.

*"I have been back on to the [Indiana Career Explorer] and looked at my number one occupation, but also looked deeper into my top five choices, and looked at all the benefits and looked them up on google and if I it ever popped up to a college, I asked some questions about it."*



Stephanie also identified how her decisions with occupational searching were improved through the coaching experience.

*"Yeah, she asked me exactly what career field I wanted to do. I said, um, I'm not really sure. She helped me better understand the different ones and the things you have to do for the number of years of schooling and things like that. When I look at jobs and when I look at schools and stuff ... I just think about how she helped me better understand what I wanted to do and knowing that certain career fields and schools that I want to attend."*

After coaching, Earl described his additional research and confirmation of decisions:

*"Her overall personal guidance helped me with my personal decisions. I don't think it took anything away or anything. It had a whole lot of value to it. I'm looking at more colleges. I'm just trying to study the transfer programs and I've just been researching more things in my potential career field. I've just been researching different salaries, different wages, and the outlook for the states that I probably would want to do with that specific career path. That's what's changed."*

#### 4) Concrete Guidance Regarding Career

A majority of participants related that the concrete guidance regarding career was helpful. Many of them responded that the guidance during coaching was beneficial. Participants responded that the coach offered help in finding financial aid. For example, Monique said,

*"I think it was that she was always here to ask questions ... and she helped me on finding programs online that I could go to get scholarships around the area and I think that really boosted my confidence because I was actually really worried about it."*

Jeremy shared the coach additional questions to help him define details:

*"She was always describing in great detail the things and asked good questions for me to answer. She asked like how much do these colleges cost in the long run? What are the locations of these schools? What are the things that you would need?"*

Earl shared that he appreciated the advice he received about transferring credits and contact information to help him be successful in his communication with colleges:

*"Well, the overall experience from the tips, from the conversations, it was pretty good. And if I had to do it again, I would do it again. I mean, I have no complaints. I think everything was perfect. In the email, she gave me different emails that I could use to contact Ball State about their plans and their programs - as far as communication goes. So, I mean, the overall coaching experience was really awesome. I think it's something that every kid should have the opportunity to have."*

Furthermore, participants described the supportive direction coaching provides, as Jackson shared,

*"It gave me things to think about rather than just sitting around wondering, gave me directions, and something to look forward to. What I wanted to do, how I can apply what I want to do to what type of job I would enjoy and would not enjoy very much. Made me think about myself and how I think."*

Students also said that they received resources for achieving goals, selecting colleges, and learning about careers. Monica said,

*"[The coach] has a lot of information that I can't really get at home, and just a lot of experience leading me in the right direction. Different scholarships. Just telling me that there's free money out there and showing me step by step how to get there. I don't usually know where to start first on my own. What steps to go career-wise. We also did some comparisons of salaries and stuff like that. When I find out what I want to do and what kind of field it is it shows me the percentage of unemployment and stuff like that. Just in case I want to you know second guess or, you know, I don't want to hop on something too soon."*

As an important element of concrete career guidance, students were able to create concrete career and academic plans. Some participants mentioned that the coaching experience helped for them to set the career plans. One participant reported that the coaching experience helped for him to start to think about the process of career decision. Jeremy said,

*"Well, because I'm a senior, the short-term decisions I make in this year have a big impact for me. Because of coaching I'm able to think through the process of what I can use in the future and what my career is going to be."*

One participant reported that the coaching experience helped her to set the short-term goals such as trying to improve GPA. Maya said,

*"Going back to my GPA, that helped me make a short-term decision so I know I need to get that up before the end of the year is out, talking about my GPA and talking about some things I need to do to make it higher or where it needs to be."*

Another participant described that he started to think about more concrete career plans. For example, Ben said,

*"It ... influenced me in a way that I need to get down to business now and to start planning for the road ahead now, looking at different colleges, and start job shadowing other people."*

To summarize, a majority of participants reported that the coaching experience was effective because it helped them with self-awareness, focus and encouragement, decision-making, and concrete guidance regarding career. These findings carry implications for further research and development of career coaching programs. That is, by knowing how career coaching is effective for participants, the program can be consistently innovated through resources to help with concrete guidance, decision-making, and focus and encouragement. Considering the developmental status of high school students, they need to understand themselves better and deal with the feeling of being confused and even overwhelmed. Also, they are in need of setting career plans and receiving more concrete guidance.

### **Subtheme 3 – College and Career Planning Confidence**

According to Niles (2011), career adaptability and realistic attitude support individuals in challenges that arise throughout one's career. Increased confidence supports self-concept and career maturity, hope, and confidence. Thirteen out of the 14 students interviewed indicated an improvement in confidence. The individual who did not report an increase in confidence shared that he was still trying to decide his path and his college and career planning confidence were still up in the air. Although the students who did report a boost in confidence shared perspective such as Samantha's:

*“... when I think I'm only a senior, I've never even thought about completing college applications until [now]. I've thought about filling out completing college applications but I had never actually did one. So her talking through everything and what to say really helped.”*

While Monica responded her confidence improved,

*“Probably step-taking. Usually, you know, before I get into anything I like to know more about it, like research. About being prepared and stuff.”*

In addition, participants shared,

*“I always seem to have some sort of issue when it comes to making decisions. So I normally have to have someone help me out and talk to me about what I should and shouldn't do and make the big ones good decisions. She told me to try and not just give up when I can't get something right. The talking through it really made me more confident.”*

After realizing that personal experiences lead to increased confidence, Beth responded,

*“I think it helped me [be] more confident in choosing my career.”*

In addition, upon being asked about confidence level after coaching, Jackson reflected,

*“I feel much more confident than what I was. Before, I had no idea what I wanted to do, I just had ideas of what I enjoyed, but didn't know how to apply them to a career, just my free time.”*

Moreover, a Nathan shared,

*“I was very confident but confused at first ... and therefore not as confident then, but I have it pretty well ironed out now. Just knowing basically, I didn't know before basically I was confused, but knowing know has definitely led me to be more confident.”*

### **Theme 3 – Specific Experiences With Career Coaching**

Students shared that they had positive experiences working with a coach and gaining supportive resources for ongoing decisions and college planning. Overall, the participants enjoyed working with a coach and 100% of the students recommended career coaching as a method for facilitating career and college help. Many participants appreciated and noted the resources they received throughout their coaching experience.

#### **Subtheme 1 – Working with a coach**

With this pilot study, the question, “How would you describe your experience with coaching?” provided a sense of the participants' overall attitude and experience working one-on-one with a career coach., the participants shared that they felt comfortable working with the coach and that the sessions were informative and helpful in improving career maturity, hope, and confidence. All participants described their experience working with a coach as being comfortable and encouraging. Interviewees mentioned that they felt comfortable with a coach. For example, Samantha said,

*“I actually try harder, I don't just give up. Like, I'm really bad at math and normally I would just give up without trying. But, I'm actually trying now and I don't just quit when I get something wrong or don't do it right.”*

Maya shared,

*“A fun experience and informing; really helped me decide what I would be into because for a minute I didn’t know what I wanted to be, and now I have two or three options that I would be interested in.”*

While Stan shared,

*“The experience working with a coach was a great experience, with my session she told me more about myself ... why I may do better in certain subjects, why I want to pursue a career in teaching and stuff like that. It made me feel better about who I am and kind of made me know why I am and why I want to do what I do and just the reason for everything. She was very nice, very helpful, reassuring, and just great on giving information and talking and listening and very good help.”*

Ben described his experience,

*“The way I would describe it is it helped me figure out where I was in my life and what I need to do to get to my goals. [It] helped me figure it out by pointing out where my strengths and weaknesses are. I can remember it was easy to talk to her and where I stood on things. For me, just I have a hard time talking to people, but with her coaching me, it felt like I already knew her in a sense and [we] got to know each other. I think it’s pretty good as a whole, how the coaching process is; if it helped me, it probably helps a lot of people. Easygoing, no push to get answers, Easygoing, just one step at a time.”*

Nathan said,

*“She was very helpful and very friendly, I didn’t have very many questions, but the ones I did, she was able to answer very well. She gave examples of previous colleges she went to and what they were like and gave me an idea of what a certain college like that would be like. At first I was confused, but when she narrowed it down and gave me the supplies on what I wanted to look for, it was really helpful. Engineering is a really wide field and I wasn’t sure what field I wanted to go into was called or if there was field for what I wanted to go into. I had too broad of an idea of what I wanted to do. And looking at the websites and the descriptions of the jobs, I had a better of what of what I wanted to do.”*

## **Subtheme 2 – Supportive resources**

The coaching experience helped participants focus on college readiness skills including financial aid, major selection, and college comparisons. The resources provided were individualized per student, as Desmond reflected,

*“She emailed me a table, filled out a table for me about sports, and sent me a couple links and stuff, table of college [comparisons].”*

Jeremy shared that coaching helped answer questions about Indiana Career Explorer and how to use it to its full potential.

*“Well, computerized help can only do so much; I mean I was never really good with computers. But being able to talk to somebody, ask questions about what the site has to offer, or what the best thing to do here is always really helpful.”*

Nathan described,

*“She gave me various different websites nearby like Purdue and Ivy Tech and whatnot and look at the programs there and let me see the details for the program, and helped narrow it down on the sites’ details and my prior knowledge from talking to people about college. The test practice, that was helpful. It’s for the ACT and SAT; she told me to use it to practice for those tests and they gave me a pretty good idea of what they would be.”*

Stan reported that he appreciated a math resource to help maintain and improve his GPA:

*“[She] encouraged me to try even harder on grades and try my best in math definitely – I have trouble with math. [She] directed me to an online free source. Feel more confident about math, definitely.”*

In summary, the participants received value from coaching through Indiana Career Explorer, the overall experience with a coach, and improved college and career planning tools. The secondary students, overall, required support with occupation and major selection as well as resources and encouragement which demonstrated improved confidence, hope, and maturity.

### **Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Results**

In order to establish validity – or trustworthiness – of the analysis of the interview results, researcher triangulation was employed (see Creswell, 2007). That is, researchers affiliated with Kuder in Adel, Iowa, and the research team at The Pennsylvania State University independently analyzed the interview data using NVivo. The two research teams represent two corners of the triangle; the interview data represent the third corner. The degree to which the two teams agree on the themes is the degree to which the results are judged to be valid.

After the two independent analyses were completed, the team at Kuder compared the two sets of results. The themes from the two sets of findings were largely the same, with some slightly different but similar language used by the two teams. Whereas the two sets of results were organized somewhat differently, the themes were the same in both. Thus, the results were deemed trustworthy and valid.

## **Quantitative Analyses**

The quantitative analyses included two measures that were administered to JAG students before their career coaching experience (pretest) and after career coaching (posttest). One assessed students’ levels of confidence regarding career development tasks and the other assessed students skills, behaviors, and attitudes around education and career. The number of students completing the pretest and posttest confidence measure was 55. The number completing both the pretest and posttest on the second measure was one less (N = 54) because one of the students failed to complete the pretest. Otherwise, the students completing both measures are the same students.

### **Students Levels of Confidence**

JAG students completed 14 items assessing their levels of confidence in performing several educational and career-related tasks. One item (Item 15) assessed students’ levels of hope for the future. Respondents completed this assessment at pretest (before career coaching) and at posttest (after career coaching). Students rated their degrees of confidence and hope on an 11-point scale, from 0 to 10. Students’ responses to these items are presented in the subsequent table.

**Students’ Ratings of Confidence Levels at Pretest and Posttest (N = 55)**

<b>Confidence Items</b>	<b>Pretest Mean</b>	<b>Posttest Mean</b>
-------------------------	---------------------	----------------------

1. My degree of confidence in selecting a college major.	6.40	7.25
2. My degree of confidence in selecting a college that fits my interests.	6.89	7.53
3. My degree of confidence understanding occupational interests.	6.75	7.07
4. My degree of confidence understanding occupational skills.	6.78	7.31
5. My degree of confidence in making career choices.	7.13	7.35
6. My degree of confidence in creating short term career plans.	7.24	7.07
7. My degree of confidence in creating long term career plans.	6.78	7.11
8. My degree of confidence in creating a resume.	6.24	6.62
9. My degree of confidence in applying for a job.	7.51	7.76
10. My degree of confidence in balancing school, work, and family responsibilities.	7.16	7.30
11. My degree of confidence in effectively communicating information.	7.16	7.49
12. My degree of confidence in interacting appropriately with peers and colleagues.	8.02	7.87
13. My degree of confidence in my skills to find a job.	7.53	7.56
14. My degree of confidence in my skills to evaluate jobs that fit my interest and skills.	7.42	7.47
15. My level of hope for the future of my career.	8.38	8.35

On most of the 14 confidence items, there was a slight to moderate increase from pretest to posttest. Levels of confidence were relatively high at the pretest assessment; thus, a large increase was challenging to accomplish. The largest increase from pretest to posttest was on Item 1 (selecting a college major, .87 increase). The other larger increases were on Item 2 (selecting a college, .64 increase) and Item 4 (understanding occupational skills, .53 increase). There were increases from pretest to posttest on Items 3 (understanding my interests), 5 (making choices), 7 (long-term plans), 8 (creating a resume), 9 (applying for a job), 10 (balancing school, work, and family), and 11 (effectively communicating). There was a small decrease from pretest to posttest on Item 6 (short-term plans) and Item 12 (interacting appropriately), and there was no change on Items 13 (job-finding skills) and 14 (evaluating jobs). On the item on hope (Item 15), there was no change from pretest to posttest.

Regarding confidence levels overall, there were small to moderate increases from pretest to posttest. Most of the larger increases were around students' interests and finding colleges and majors that fit for them. Students also had some increase in their confidence for understanding their skills, creating resumes, creating long-term career plans, and effectively communicating.

## Students' Skills, Behaviors, and Attitudes

JAG students' skills, behaviors, and attitudes were assessed before and after the career coaching experience. Students rated their skills, behaviors, and attitudes on a 5-point scale (never; rarely; sometimes; very often; always). These results are presented in the subsequent table.

### Students' Ratings of Skills, Behaviors, and Attitudes at Pretest and Posttest (N = 54)

Skills, Behaviors, and Attitudes Items	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean
<b>Skills:</b>		
1. I know where to find training to improve my skills.	3.15	3.50
2. I know how to find educational opportunities to improve my skills.	3.48	3.63

3. I know how to find schools that align with my interests.	3.30	3.83
<b>Behaviors:</b>		
4. I come to work/school on time.	4.43	4.50
5. I get along well with others.	4.26	4.22
6. I complete work/school tasks on time.	3.87	4.09
7. I learn new work/school skills quickly.	3.74	3.94
8. My supervisor/teacher sees me as an asset to my workplace/classroom.	3.65	3.87
<b>Attitudes:</b>		
9. I feel it is important to have skills to change jobs.	4.02	3.81
10. I feel it is important to improve professional and occupational skills.	4.30	4.11
11. I respond to problems with a positive outlook.	3.74	3.59
12. I see problems as opportunities.	3.19	3.30
13. I feel I am in charge of my own destiny/future.	4.13	4.13
14. I take pride in every task I do.	3.70	3.76
15. I am enthusiastic about where I am, even if it isn't perfect.	3.72	3.59
16. I feel mistakes/failures are a part of learning.	3.98	4.07
17. I accept responsibility for my own actions and decisions.	4.46	4.37

Items that assess skills are Items 1, 2, and 3. There was a mean increase from pretest to posttest on Items 1 (finding training, .35 increase) and 3 (finding schools, .53 increase), and a slight increase on Item 2 (finding educational opportunities, .15 increase). Items 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 assess students' school behaviors. On Items 4, 6, 7, and 8, there was a small increase from pretest to posttest. On Item 5 there was little change from pretest to posttest. Items 9 through 17 assess students' attitudes about school, work, and career. The changes from pretest to posttest on these items were small and inconsistent. On several items, ratings were slightly lower at the posttest; on some items there was a slight increase from pretest to posttest; and on some there was very little or no change.

Regarding students' skills, behaviors, and attitudes overall, there was some improvement from pretest to posttest on perceived skills. There were small increases on most student behaviors; and there was little or no change in students' attitudes across the career coaching period. Perhaps skills are most malleable to change across the relatively short period of career coaching. Perhaps attitudes are more difficult to change.

## Complementarity of Qualitative and Quantitative Results

Complementarity is the extent to which qualitative and quantitative results are consistent with one another. In the present study, most results were consistent across qualitative and quantitative data. Note that every JAG student who was interviewed (N = 14) also completed the pretests and posttests (N = 55). However, 41 students who completed the pretests and posttests were not interviewed. Thus, any lack of complementarity may be due to differences in students who were or were not interviewed.

There was complementarity with regard to JAG students' confidence levels. Several interviewees noted increased levels of confidence attributed to either using the Indiana Career Explorer or experiencing career coaching. Students sensed increased confidence in knowing themselves, knowing education and occupations, and finding a fit for themselves. The pretest-to-posttest increases in confidence, likewise, were increases in self-awareness, educational/occupational awareness, and finding a fit for interests and skills. There was some lack of consistency between qualitative and quantitative results with regard to confidence on short-term goals. That is, there was a small decrease on this item from pretest to posttest,

whereas an increase in confidence on short-term goals was evident from the interviews. This inconsistency may be related to differences in students who were or were not interviewed.

With regard to JAG students' skills, behaviors, and attitudes, there was complementarity on skills and positive school behaviors, but not on attitudes. On skills items there was an increase from pretest to posttest, with students indicating increased skills in finding education and training that fits for them. These increases are consistent with students' statements in the interviews. With regard to school behaviors, there were small increases from pretest to posttest. Likewise, some student interviewees implied that they were taking school and career more seriously and applying themselves more. With regard to attitudes about school, work, and career, it was evident from the interviewees that several students seemed more focused, engaged, and positive about their educational and career development. However, this was not reflected in the pretest/posttest data. The quantitative data revealed little or no change in students' attitudes. Perhaps this inconsistency is a function of differences between students who were interviewed and those who were not, or perhaps attitudes do not change as quickly or easily as confidence, skills, and behaviors. Changing attitudes might require a more in-depth and more sustained intervention.

Overall, the majority of findings were complementary of one another. It seems that the highest degree of consistency was on JAG students' confidence levels. In interviews and on the posttest, students reported being more confident after the Indiana Career Explorer experience and the career coaching experience. Increased confidence was evident in multiple areas, including finding schools, selecting postsecondary majors, gaining self-awareness, goal-setting, decision-making, completing educational and career tasks, and engaging in educational and career planning.

## Limitations and Constraints

Although coaching was successful, a sample of 123 students was invited to take part in the study. Out of this sample, 99 participated in coaching sessions. The difference between the initial sample and coaching sessions related to participants not completing consents or assents (16%), moving to a different high school (2%), poor to no attendance in class (15%) and not scheduling meetings (7%). Some primary reasons for not completing both sessions were no return contact, absenteeism, not attending the meetings, and lack of interest. In order to utilize the Indiana Career Explorer, participants needed ongoing access to a computer with Internet connectivity outside of the school locations that limited the utilization of the Internet-based career planning system.

Moreover, an important limitation to the quantitative results were the inconsistency between students completing coaching sessions and completing the posttest. Due to students' absences and other classroom projects, post testing was delayed in some cases. This may limit the accuracy of the posttest and explain various inconsistencies between the interview data and posttest data. All interviews were held within five working days of the final coaching session while the posttests were inconsistently completed depending on the classroom. In particular, two classrooms completed posttests weeks after coaching sessions wrapped up. A total of 29% of the participants completed the posttest with seven days of their last coaching session, 20% completed the posttest within 8-14 days after their final session, and 51% completed the posttest greater than 14 days from their last coaching session.

Overall, the pilot demonstrated positive effects on participants by demonstrating improved job seeking skills, confidence, and perspectives. Coaching provided an avenue for students to learn college planning skills and improve confidence.



## Conclusions

Despite the challenges in quantitative data collection, there are strengths in the study. First, we used data triangulation to determine the validity (trustworthiness) of the qualitative portion of the study. That is, two research teams, one at Kuder headquarters in Adel, Iowa, and one at The Pennsylvania State University, independently analyzed the transcripts. The two teams independently developed the same or highly similar themes for the results, and therefore, the data are trustworthy and valid. Second, the qualitative data are rich. Interviewees seemed open and forthcoming in responding to interview questions, and they readily related their situations and experiences to the interviewer. Third, the qualitative and quantitative data are mostly complementary of one another. That is, the interview data and quantitative survey results are mostly consistent with one another with minor inconsistencies.

The interviewees noted enhanced levels of self-confidence resulting from the career coaching experience. This improved self-confidence was broad, including self-awareness, educational awareness, and finding a fit for interests and skills. The qualitative results revealed a high degree of student/adult satisfaction with the career coaching experience. Career coaching was perceived as effective in helping students/adults become more self-aware, more knowledgeable of college, major, and financial aid choices, and more effective in their job-seeking skills. Interviewees related that their career coaches were encouraging and supportive. In addition, coaching demonstrated itself to be an effective model to help participants apply, interview, and accept offers for jobs.

Finally, key findings that were learned throughout the pilot study using the Kuder Coach program include that the relationship between the coach and student/adult is highly important to the students, and Kuder should continue to ensure that coaches who are selected are skilled interpersonally.

Flexibility of coaches is salient. Students have varying needs and are at varying stages in their career development process. Students appreciated the flexibility of the coaches and their ability to provide students with what they needed at the time. Coaches should be prepared to help with specific needs of secondary school students – major choices, occupational interests, focus and encouragement, decision making, and so forth. Coaches can confirm decisions or help students generate new goals and plans. Coaches can enhance confidence, and thus, our training should address this important area.

## References

- American School Counselor Association. (2011). Student-to-school-counselor ratio. Retrieved from [www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/ratios10-11.pdf](http://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/ratios10-11.pdf).
- Brown, D., & Trusty, J. (2005). School counselors, comprehensive school counseling programs, and academic achievement: are school counselors promising more than they can deliver? *Professional School Counseling, 9*(1), 1-8.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chung, Y.B. & Gfroerer, M.C.A. (2003). Career coaching: practice, training, professional, and ethical issues. *The Career Development Quarterly, 52*, 141-152.
- Hatala, J., & Hisey, L. (2011). Toward the Development and Validation of a Career Coach Competency Model. *Performance Improvement Quarterly, 24*(3), 101-122.
- Niles, S. G. (2011). Career flow: a hope-centered model of career development. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 48*(4), 173-175.
- Trusty, J. (2008). Closing achievement gaps: roles and tasks of elementary school counselors. *The Elementary School Journal, 407-421*.
- Turong, T. Q. (2011). High school career education: policy and practice. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*.