

Iowa Guidance Counselor Survey Final Report

**A Collaborative Project of the
Iowa Department of Public Health
and the
Upper Midwest Public Health Training Center**

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Introduction and Background

Iowa, like the rest of the United States, is facing a public health and health care provider shortage. To help address this crisis, the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Upper Midwest Public Health Training Center (UMPHTC) surveyed high school and middle school guidance counselors in Iowa to identify ways to better inform students about public health and health care careers, and to increase their interest in pursuing careers in these areas. The long-term goal is to identify strategies to increase the number of Iowa students entering public health and health care careers.

Because guidance counselors play integral roles in students' decisions to pursue health care careers, their input is critical in identifying the methods through which middle and high school students can best be informed of the multiple career opportunities that exist in the health care field.

Methodology

Jennifer Bass, an MPH candidate at the University of Iowa College of Public Health, worked in collaboration with staff from IDPH and UMPHTC to develop a survey instrument to distribute to all middle and high school guidance counselors in Iowa. The survey was initially pilot-tested by fourteen guidance counselors from middle and high schools of varying sizes in Iowa City and surrounding rural communities. Both public and private schools were included in the pilot. Using the pilot test results and comments from the pilot –test respondents, the survey instrument was finalized. The final survey instrument was distributed to guidance counselors at each middle and high school in Iowa (n = 1,082).

To encourage participation in the survey promotional materials were also developed. The survey materials were disseminated on the following schedule:

- Initial introductory postcards were mailed on January 31, 2006
- The survey with cover letter and return reply envelope were mailed February 7, 2006
- Thank you and reminder postcards were mailed on February 20, 2006

Counselors each received a paper version of the survey as well as a web link to complete the survey online if desired via SurveyMonkey. Following is the schedule for survey response:

- The internet link for the survey opened on February 1
- The requested response date was February 24
- The first respondent completed the survey online on February 8
- Surveys continued to be returned through May, and were included in the final data analysis and report.

The final return rate was 435 surveys out of 1082 mailed; however, one return was a notice of a school that had closed, and one was an incorrect mailing by the would-be respondent. This left a final response rate of 433/1080, or 40%. Of these surveys, 322 were returned by mail and 111 completed online.

Although the response rate is somewhat low, given how busy school guidance counselors are and the limited funds for follow-up, we believe the response rate is acceptable. In addition, demographic data presented in Table 1 indicate that the survey respondents are fairly representative of Iowa schools in general (Iowa Department of Education, 2006).

Table 1

	State of Iowa	Survey Results
Number of Public Schools	1514 (89% statewide)	92%
Number of Private Schools	194 (11% statewide)	8%
Average Enrollment (all schools, K-12)	336	200-399 (mode) 79% have <799 students

Data Analysis and Results

Data from the paper surveys were entered into Excel and then combined with the online data from SurveyMonkey. All analyses were completed using SPSS. The data were cleaned and response categories aggregated where appropriate. The summary of the aggregate data is below. Appendix A presents graphical data for select questions.

Which of the following describes your school?

Public 92%
Private 8%

What grade levels does your school include? (check all that apply)

5 27%
6 44%
7 56%
8 56%
9 72%
10 74%
11 73%
12 73%
Grades below 5 14%

How many students attend your school?

0 - 199 9%
200 - 399 35%
400 - 599 22%
600 - 799 13%
800 - 999 3%
1,000 - 1,199 4%
1,200 - 1,399 4%
Over 1,400 10%

Which of the following educational tracks does your school offer? (check all that apply)

College preparatory	68%
Vocational	56%
Business	40%
Health career	32%
None	8%

What percent of graduates are college-bound?

0 - 19	2%
20 - 39	5%
40 - 59	13%
60 - 79	28%
80 - 100	33%
Don't know	14%
No answer	5%

What health career programs are offered through your school? (check all that apply)

Dual credit with college programs	56%
Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)	40%
School-to-work programs	33%
Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)	16%
Health Science Academy	12%
None	13%

To what extent do you think STUDENTS are aware of health career opportunities?

Not at all	1%
Somewhat	40%
Neutral	16%
Knowledgeable	36%
Very knowledgeable	4%
No answer	4%

**Which careers are discussed by your students who are interested in health careers?
(check all that apply)**

Nursing (RN, LNP, NP)	89%
Doctor	80%
Physical Therapy	76%
Pharmacy	68%
Certified Nursing Assistant	62%
Emergency Medical Technician/Paramedic	57%
Specialty Technician (e.g., Radiology Tech)	47%
Physician's Assistant	36%
Medical Assistant	24%
Public Health	11%

**What type of materials do you offer to students who express an interest in health care careers?
(check all that apply)**

Internet links	76%
One-on-one meetings (counselor/student)	66%
Shadowing	58%
Brochures	54%
Career fairs	51%
Interest surveys	46%
Work exploration programs	40%
Job-site tours	31%
Speakers	30%
Books	25%
Videos	20%
CDs	10%
Assemblies	6%
Careers classes/programs	3%
Choices	1%

What types of materials are most effective for helping STUDENTS learn about health career opportunities? (check all that apply)

Shadowing	69%
Job-site tours	50%
One-on-one meetings (counselor/student)	50%
Work exploration programs	49%
Internet links	45%
Career fairs	43%
Speakers	39%
Interest surveys	25%
Brochures	21%
Videos	17%
CDs	9%
Books	7%
Assemblies	7%

11. What types of materials are most effective for helping PARENTS learn about health career opportunities? (check all that apply)

Internet links	60%
Brochures	55%
Group meetings (counselor/parent/professional or expert)	41%
One-on-one meetings (counselor/parent)	39%
Career fairs	29%
Speakers	19%
Job-site tours	17%
Videos	15%
Shadowing	12%
Books	11%
Work exploration programs	11%

CDs	10%
Interest surveys	7%
Assemblies	6%

Which of the following would be most informative for teachers and guidance counselors to learn about health careers?

Meetings with those involved in health career opportunities	71%
On-site training sessions	35%
Speakers	35%
Conferences	33%
Previously prepared health career curricula	29%

Written responses

- Not given time or encouragement from admin to participate in these options
- Specific postsecondary programs outlining specific classes and cost involved
- Most of us can't spare the time to go [regarding conferences]
- Printed materials that explain careers and training necessary to work in that field – kind of a health-care occupational outlook handbook
- Quick, well-written easy-to-read fact-based email
- Information on how curricular areas and health careers coincide

Would availability of multi-lingual health career information resources be useful to you?

Yes	25%
Not sure	21%
No	54%

If yes, in which language(s) would career promotion materials be most useful?

Spanish	36%
Vietnamese	4%
Laotian	3%
Chinese	3%
Bosnian	2%
Russian	1%
Japanese	<1%

What kind of guidance do you provide to students? (check all that apply)

Social/Emotional/Interpersonal	88%
Career choices	86%
Current school (e.g. AP classes, vocational classes)	80%
Post-secondary (e.g. certificate programs, colleges)	69%
Workforce opportunities (e.g. where jobs are)	56%

Please rank the following according to how much of your time at school is spent doing each. Give the activity which you do most often a 1, and that which you do least often a 7.

The rank ordering of guidance counselor activities, from most frequent to least frequent, was:

1. Educational guidance
2. Interpersonal issues
3. Scheduling
4. Career guidance
5. Mental health
6. Discipline

To what extent do YOU feel knowledgeable about health career opportunities?

Not at all	2%
Somewhat	23%
Neutral	14%
Knowledgeable	50%
Very knowledgeable	5%
No response	7%

Where do you find information about health careers? (check all that apply)

Internet	75%
Personal experience	70%
Inquiry phone calls	46%
Conferences	36%
Speakers	35%
Books	27%
In-services	17%
Videos	17%

Can we contact you later for follow-up to this survey?

Yes	54%
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If yes, would you be interested in participating in a focus group regarding health career promotion?

Yes	9%
Maybe	26%

Selected comments from respondents:

- I would love to see a way for students to see/hear the whole range of health care careers.
- In rural Iowa (small town) the most difficult aspect is helping students know what's available in the job market when they are exposed to a limited amount of options.
- Unless funding for schools is increased, we will not be able to offer career classes at the junior high level. We are operating with a 'bare bones' staff as it is. The NCLB legislation directs our focus to academics only. Enrichment areas are being cut. Even taking time away from an academic class to listen to a speaker talk about a career/s would be frowned upon.
- I have students who are interested in health care professions but are apprehensive due to wait lists and competitive entry into programs. What can we do?
- The public schools need to 'see' the importance of career classes, information sharing. The private sector needs to step up and pay for field experiences - shadowing experiences, etc.
- I would love for students to have a realistic view of what it takes to enter into a career in the health field. They hear that jobs are plentiful, but have no idea how well they must prepare for success. So many students intend to enter into the health care profession, but end up in a different field because they did not understand the realities of the schooling and work. I believe that more students can be successful, but must prepare in advance.
- If we had access to more healthcare professionals and the means to work on this area more at the middle school, I would be able to pursue more career education in the health field. Unfortunately, we are a small, rural community and doing that is difficult.
- Most of my school's involvement in Health Careers is through our local community college. The college does a great job providing educational opportunities that are beyond the general education of high schools.
- Funding cuts in education have eliminated many career exploration courses. The number of counselors per building has been reduced, so when services get cut, career planning goes on the back burner.

Suggestions regarding middle schools

- Most Jr. High boys think they're going to be pro athletes. Others [girls and boys] are just starting to think about futures, most have no idea about career path, or skills needed.
- Twelve to fourteen year olds are just beginning to think of career options.
- Middle school students aren't very focused on the future.
- Your efforts would probably be more cost effective when directed to HS students.
- We don't work with students and their career choices at the MS level.
- We introduce careers in 8th grade, so a lot would apply more to our HS.

Suggestions for promotion of health careers

- College students are excellent speakers/references for HS students.
- Make a video on health careers and distribute to all [elementary, middle and high schools] in Iowa.
- There is very little right now that we have that makes Public Health appear attractive to kids. That would be a good thing to brainstorm.
- Send out speakers to HS career classes.
- Updated info about health careers would be great - especially in brochure form.
- The usual health careers are readily understood by students. There should be ways to enhance the other opportunities in this field so the students know of options that are less involved in length of education, etc. That way if being a doctor, physical therapist, pharmacist does not work there are other places this person may fit better in this field.

- Students are VERY frustrated by the inability to get into nursing programs, so they may give up and go into something else.
- Shadowing, job-site tours and meetings very important.
- Most students are visual learners.

Discussion and recommendations

Responses from the survey indicate that guidance counselors serve multiple and varying functions within schools. Many of the counselors who took the time to complete the survey included comments indicating their willingness, indeed their attempts, to incorporate career planning and thought into their work with students. This was one of the recommendations found in the literature: “For education-career planning to work for students, it should be an integral, connected part of the school counseling program. Education-career planning not only works better when it is an integral part of the counseling program, it also works smarter. That is, education-career planning is a much easier school counselor task when it is interconnected to various components of the program” (Trusty, Niles & Carney, 2005, p.140). Despite information found during a review of the literature that children develop career interests quite early, (Gibson, 2005; Snyder & Jackson, 2006; Trice & Knapp, 1992) many Iowa counselors find it difficult to interest their students in the topic during middle school.

Almost half of the counselors reported internet links being useful in sharing information with students; Appendix B includes internet links that could be shared with Iowa guidance counselors or used as a template to create a thorough, user-friendly website applicable to Iowa. Some states already have developed such sites (Wisconsin, North Carolina, Florida, Minnesota), and include links to state or regional post-secondary schools that offer the highlighted programs (i.e. health careers). The development of a similar site for Iowa could incorporate many of the elements counselors recommended through this survey (e.g., internet links, brochures in pdf format that can be downloaded from a website, video clips from speakers).

Interestingly, 25% of the counselors rated their health career awareness level at “not at all” or “somewhat,” which correlates with previous research of careers advisors in Oregon (Elder, Taylor, Anderson & Virgin, 1997). This may be an area where IDPH could collaborate with the Department of Education to provide guidance counselors with additional information on health careers that may be of interest to students. Counselors attributed a fair amount of health career awareness to students, with 40% saying students were “knowledgeable” or “very knowledgeable,” yet 41% were “not at all aware” or “somewhat aware.” It seems many students who are interested in health careers focus on the more common careers (nurse, doctor, pharmacist, nursing assistant, EMT/Paramedic). Our results suggest only 11% of students interested in health careers discuss public health. Data and comments indicate Iowa students and counselors are familiar with the more standard health careers, so distributing educational materials that emphasize the broad variety of health careers could encourage exploration of the lesser known paths. Forty percent of counselors thought speakers were an effective way to teach students about career choices; multiple written responses highlighted this information-sharing route. The State could encourage student organizations from Iowa’s numerous colleges and universities to work with local schools giving small presentations or creating short videos on educational and program opportunities.

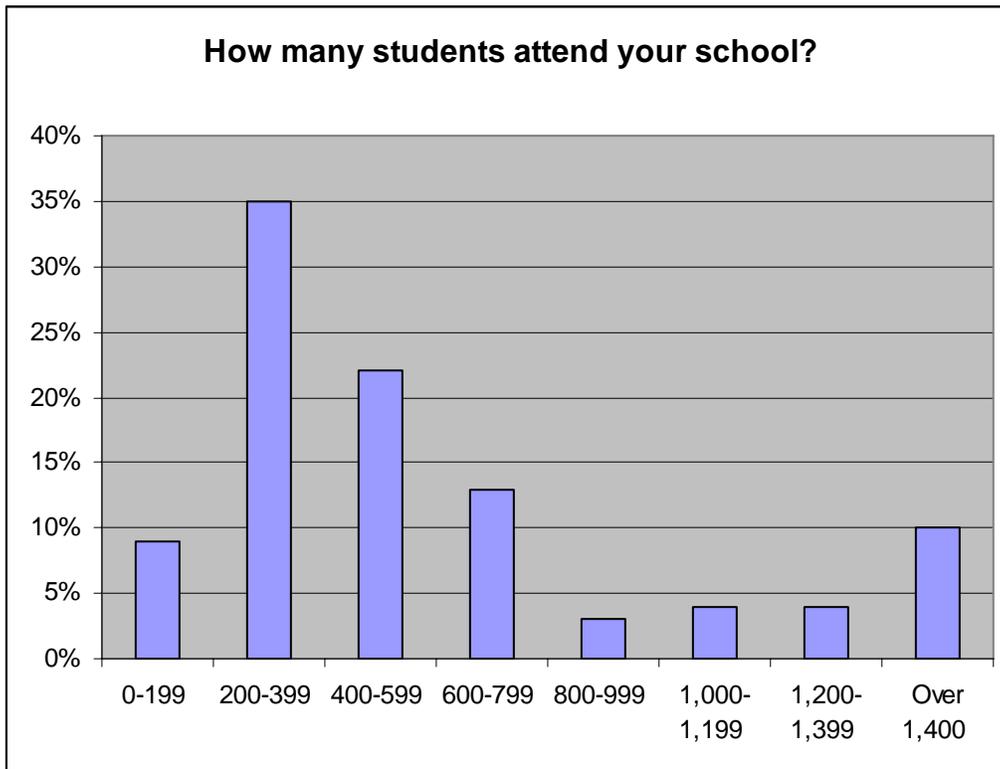
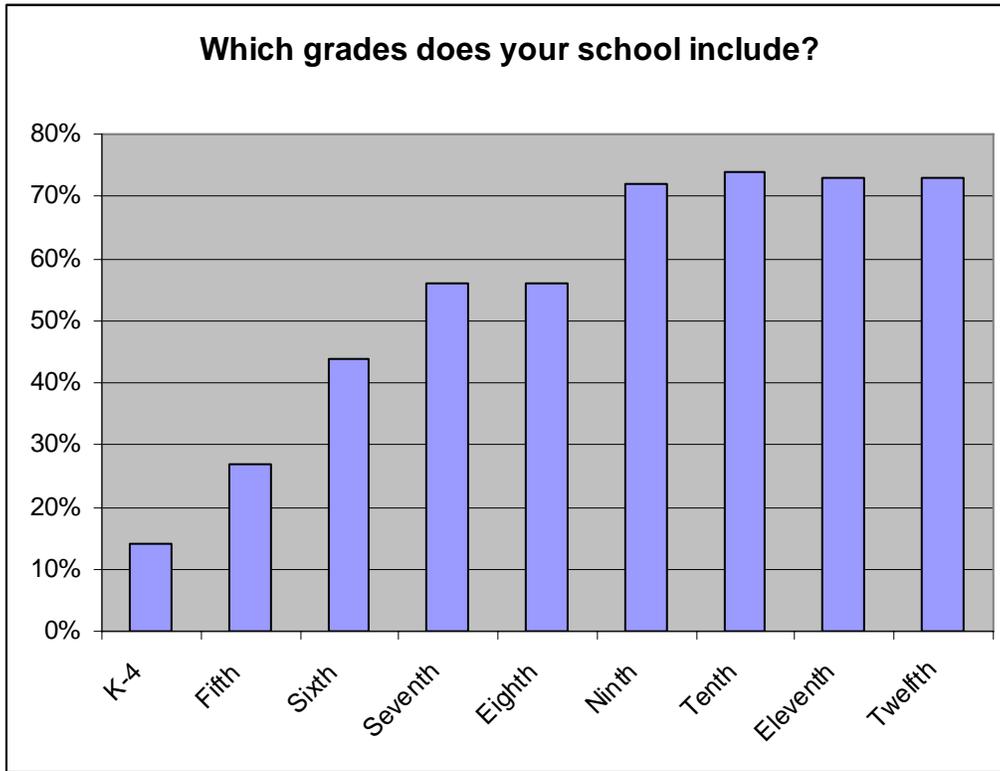
Despite their hectic schedules and multiple roles in the schools, the counselors who responded to the survey seem interested in furthering both their students’ knowledge and their own in regards to public health and health care careers. Over half of the respondents were willing to be contacted for follow-up;

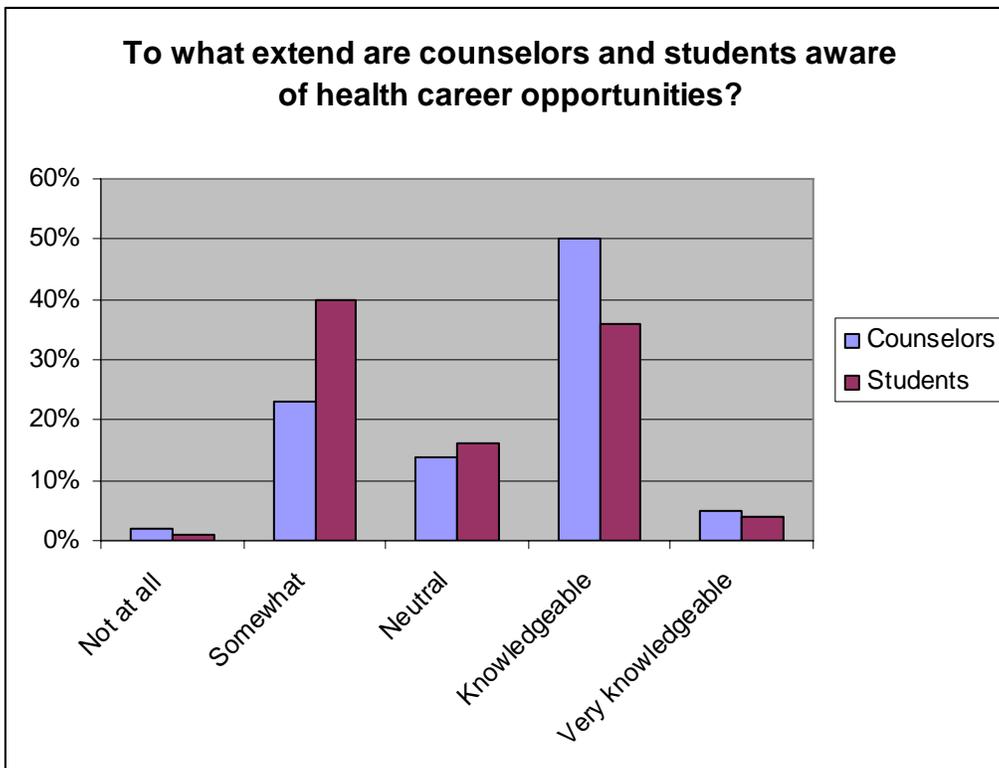
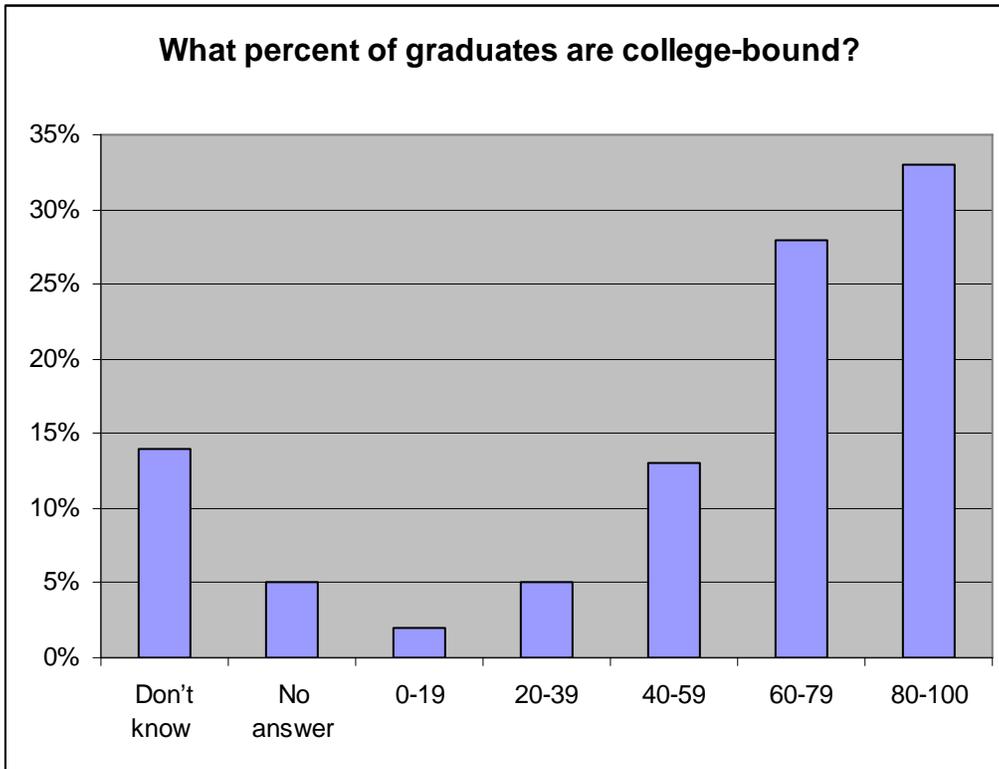
over one-third were interested in a focus group at a later time. This shows a dedication to the field and provides the State a wonderful opportunity to make personal contact with those in the field for purposes of continuing health career promotion. Many comments regarding information gathering and effective teaching methods referred to the local colleges and returning students are valuable resources. A partnership to encourage formalization of this outreach method with students might be a great way to encourage middle and high school students to explore health careers.

We would like to extend our gratitude to all of the guidance counselors in Iowa who responded to this survey. Your comments and input are greatly appreciated, and will help address the challenges we face together to stop the imminent health care worker shortage.

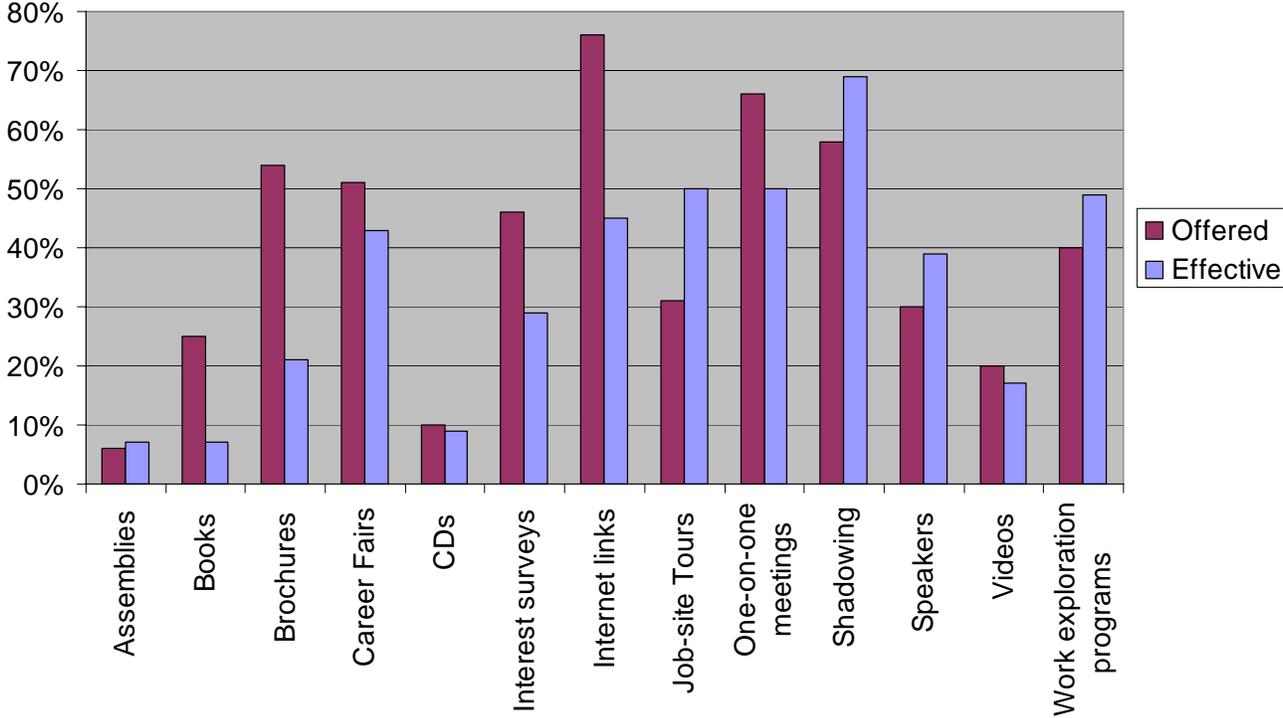
Appendix A Graphical Data for Select Questions

y-axis percentages reflect the numbers of counselors who marked a particular response





Career information materials offered and materials effective



Appendix B Internet Links

<http://www.wihealthcareers.org/index.cfm>

Wisconsin state: includes information on various health careers, education necessary, links to Wisconsin schools offering each program, salaries, etc. Also, WI has health career summer camp, links to individuals from many careers who have offered to speak/mentor/answer questions, listed by position; also resource library of materials available for loan

<http://www.iseek.org/sv/index.jsp>

State of Minnesota career information page. Includes career assessment, counselor info, for each job (not just health) info re training, skills, job duties, wages, jobs, similar careers, classes to take in high school, job information for those “new to America,” information about schools and programs, and more

<http://www.nchealthcareers.com/frame.asp>

From North Carolina, site includes career browse with 90 health careers, including information on job descriptions, duties, salaries, education, and programs. Local and/or regional schools linked for each career. Also includes “high school time table” and a short educational program specifically for middle-school aged kids

<http://www.flahec.org/hlthcareers/INDEX.HTM>

Florida health careers info – job descriptions, duties, advancement, job outlook, training, licensure, salaries, and Florida education programs

Other health career links

<http://www.khake.com/page22.html>

Includes job descriptions, daily activities, skill requirements, salary and training required. Some links from other countries (i.e. Australia), each link to another site...

<http://www.explorehealthcareers.org/>

All kinds of info, including “A day in the life,” how to pay for school, is health care right for you, preparation timeline. From the Association of Academic Health Centers

<http://science.education.nih.gov/LifeWorks.nsf/feature/index.htm>

From the NIH, profiles of science/health jobs

<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/2322.html>

From the American Medical Association, Allied Health Career information. Includes job descriptions, academic programs, salaries, contact information and professional organization links

<http://library.thinkquest.org/15569/index.html>

More information on careers, with salary, educational requirements; focused on high school students

<http://www.marinecareers.net/index.htm>

From Sea Grants, includes profiles, salary information, pictures and more

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