

**Assessment Report: Academic Year 2013-2014**

**Name of Department:** Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD)

**Name of Contact Persons:** Kerry Obrist, Project Coordinator (7/9/14 employment end date)  
Judith Kolar, CSD Project Director

**Name of Persons Contributing to the Project:** Judith Kolar, Kerry Obrist, Michael Elias and Jodi Falk

**Abstract**

The purpose of this assessment project was to gain an understanding of the efficacy of job-seeking skills that resulted from student participation in a series of CSD/Career Center career workshop series that focused on the more complex needs of students with disabilities. The inception of the CSD "Career Club" was established to provide a safe and confidential learning environment where students with disabilities could learn strategies that could result in improved preparation for future gainful employment.

Twenty-one students with disabilities voluntarily attended between 1 and 5 Career Club sessions. At the conclusion of each session questionnaires were completed by students voluntarily. Questionnaires focused on the learned acquisition of the session material as well as student reported job-seeking confidence levels as the result of session participation. The voluntary questionnaire resulted in an inconsistent and small sample size that limited our findings. Nonetheless, those students that completed the questionnaires reported a positive experience that included learning new beneficial resources and information that would be helpful in their career pursuits. The intent to utilize DePaul's Career Center more in the future was also indicated. Modest increases in job-search self-confidence were noted in sessions. The findings suggest that the students with disabilities benefited from the Career Club partnership between the CSD and the Career Center and that continuing to expand this partnership with the intention of incorporating disability-specific considerations into career planning activities is a worthy pursuit.

**Introduction and Context for This Year's Report**

Individuals with disabilities are the largest and most highly educated minority group in the United States. Nationwide students with disabilities represent 11% of college/university enrollments (*National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2014*). Despite a notable postsecondary student body representation, the employment rate for graduating students with disabilities is poor. Graduating students with a disability have only a 26.8% employment rate while students without a disability enjoy a 70.7% employment rate (*NCES, 2014*). Additionally, individuals without disabilities that earn postsecondary degrees are also more likely to increase their chances of employment while persons with disabilities that earn advanced degrees may actually be at a greater risk for unemployment. For individuals with confirmed bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees, the overall unemployment rate for individuals

with disabilities is 8.5% while the unemployment rate for their nondisabled peers with the same postsecondary degrees is 3.5% (*U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment, 2014*).

Regardless of education level, the 20-24 years of age group continues to experience employment disparity. Individuals in this age group without disabilities experience only a 12.4% unemployment rate while individuals with disabilities have a 27.9% unemployment rate. 34% of Individuals with disabilities are only able to secure part-time employment as compared to 19% of their counterparts (*The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment, 2014*).

Roessler, Hennessey and Rumrill (2007) suggest that student self-confidence and career optimism may increase the likelihood of employment. Career optimism can be defined as “a student’s self-confidence regarding his or her ability to choose, maintain, and advance in an appropriate career.” Career optimism may therefore be highly dependent on the perceived severity of one’s own disability (*Hennessey, Rumrill, Fitzgerald and Roessler, 2008*). 80% of college-educated individuals with disabilities perceive their own disability as the most significant barrier to gainful employment (*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012*). Other factors influencing career optimism include inadequate career planning and preparation, limited self-advocacy skills, reduced job opportunities due to the struggling economy and employers misperceptions of employees with disabilities in the workplace (*John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development and the Kessler Foundation, 2012*).

In an effort to improve future gainful employment, CSD developed and implemented *Springboard to Success* in the fall of 2013. The primary objective of *Springboard to Success* was to provide those students with disabilities job-related skill development opportunities specific to their needs. Program components of *Springboard to Success* included job-related skill development workshops for students with disabilities, in-service training for DePaul Career Center staff and supportive employment seminars for local business and employers. The 2013-2014 inception of *Springboard to Success* was supported through a private corporate grant. This grant has been renewed for the 2014-2015 academic year.

This assessment project focuses on the student learning component of *Springboard to Success*, the Career Club. The primary objective of the Career Club is to provide students with disabilities job-related skill development opportunities specific to their needs.

CSD’s suppositions prior to this assessment project included:

- Students with disabilities do not effectively utilize DePaul Career Center resources;
- Students are not comfortable disclosing their disability to professionals
- Students with disabilities have not prepared a resume
- Students with disabilities are not confident about their career/employment options.

The CSD learning outcomes for this project include:

- 1) Students that participate in the Career Club will report that they write and/or revise their resumes based on knowledge obtained from Career Club activities.
- 2) Students that participate in the Career Club will report increased utilization of DePaul University Career Center resources.

- 3) Students that participate in the Career Club will report increased self-confidence in their job seeking skills.

The learning outcomes for this project are linked to the following CSD learning outcomes:

- 1) Students who participate in CSD programs will develop competencies in effective communication, critical thinking and wellness skills to foster academic and personal success during DePaul and afterwards.
- 2) Students who participate in CSD programs will develop self-awareness and understanding of personal strengths and challenges to become effective self-advocates and assume their individual responsibilities in actively pursuing their roles in the academic community.
- 3) Students who participate in CSD programs will effectively manage personal and learning challenges to successfully interact in academic, professional and social environments and as future contributing members of society.

The learning outcomes for this project also correspond to the following Student Affairs divisional learning outcomes:

- 2) Students who participate in Student Affairs programs and activities will acquire and use intellectual and practical skills that will enable them to live productive and healthy lives during and after DePaul.
- 3) Students who participate in Student Affairs programs and activities will be able to achieve their personal and academic goals while at DePaul through the acquisition of academic and cognitive skills.
- 6) Students who participate in Student Affairs programs and activities will develop a strong sense of personal identity and form mature, respectful relationships with others.

## **Methodology**

A Career Club for students with disabilities was established to address the CSD learning goals of this project. The purpose of the Career Club was to provide a safe and confidential environment where students with disabilities could explore their own professional needs while at the same time learn critical general career seeking skill sets. Career Club meetings were co-facilitated by the CSD Project Coordinator, Kerry Obrist, and DePaul Career Center Assistant Director and CSD Student Advisor Liaison, Michael Elias.

Participation in the Career Club was voluntary. The Club was open to any DePaul University student with a self-identified disability. Prior registration was not solicited. Students were not required to provide any identifying information in order to participate. Specific identifying information about individual participants was intentionally not collected to put students at ease regarding disability disclosure issues. Completed evaluation forms, email correspondence and other electronic documents related to the project were kept confidential.

Five, 1.5 hour Career Club meetings were conducted every other week at both the Lincoln Park and Loop campuses. Students could choose to attend one, some or all sessions. Posters and announcements that included information about meeting topics were distributed throughout the Student Centers at Lincoln Park and Loop campuses. Announcements of workshops were also emailed to all enrolled CSD students. In all, 37 students indicated interest in attending the Career Club. Only 21 (57%) actually attended. Students that did not attend reported that the scheduled meeting times for the Career Club conflicted with their schedules.

Program topics included:

Session 1:	Introduction to the Career Club/policies and expectations Overview of DePaul Career Center programs and services
Session 2:	Resumes 30-second elevator pitch
Session 3:	Effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills Networking
Session 4:	Disclosing a disability to employers
Session 5:	Interviewing Self-advocacy

The Career Club Coordinator and the Career Center Assistant Director co-presented and co-facilitated all sessions. Sessions included presentations, facilitated discussions, group activities, and follow-up resources. All information was presented affirmatively. Co-facilitators paced the sessions based on the needs of the students.

Voluntary completion of a questionnaire was administered at the end of each meeting. The intent of the questionnaire was to gather student perceptions and opinions specific to the agenda of each meeting as well as to gauge student learning of the concepts presented.

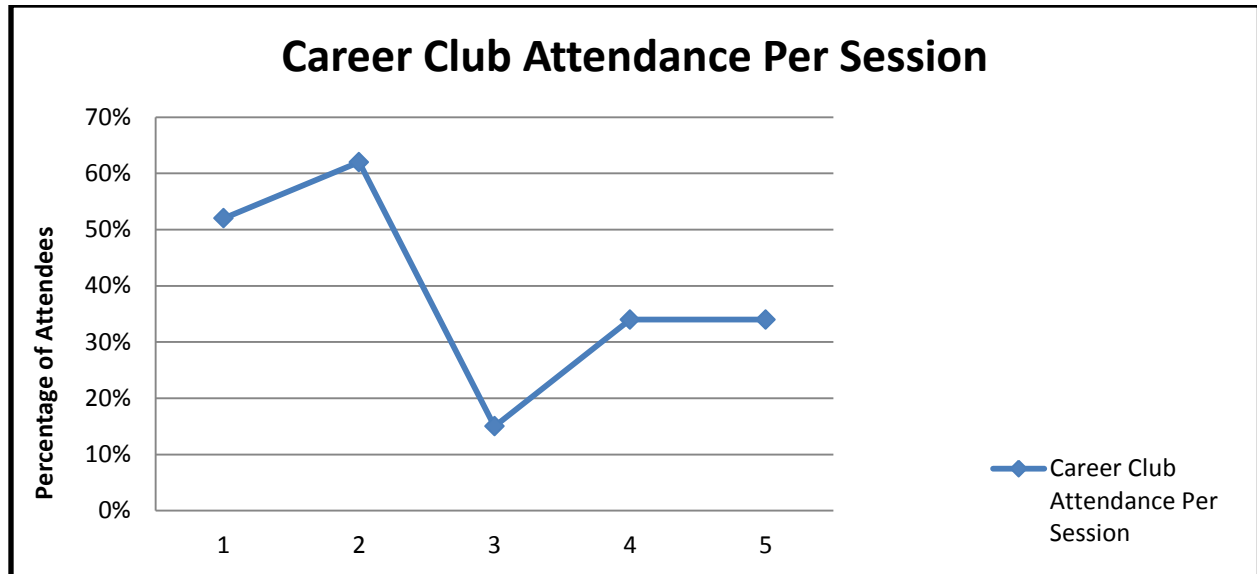
### **Findings/Results and Discussion**

Overall, 21 students participated in the *Springboard to Success* Career Club. Participants represented 3% of the 805 actively enrolled CSD students. 52% were female (N = 11); 48% male (N = 10). The majority of participants were seniors (48%), followed by juniors (24%), graduate students (19%), and sophomores (9%). Participant ages ranged from 20-50 years, with an average of 28. Student participants represented 11 majors, including Sociology, Business, SNL, Computing, Music, History, Education, Art, Communications, Psychology, and Counseling.

The project team initially planned to use a pre/post questionnaire that could be voluntarily completed by students at the conclusion of Sessions 1 and 5. However, the conclusion of Session 1 revealed that only 5 of the 11 attending students (45%) voluntarily completed the questionnaire. Of those 5 students, only 2 (18%) voluntarily completed a questionnaire for at least one other session. The project team determined that the information garnered from only two students would reveal minimal useful information. Therefore, a revised post-questionnaire was administered after Session 5 in hopes of gathering more useful information from all participants. Of the 21 students that attended at least one Career Club session, 38% responded to the final evaluation request.

Questionnaires specific to Sessions 1-5 attempted to assess student perception of learning and the helpfulness of the covered topic. Questionnaire response rates by session were: Session 1 = 45%; Session 2 = 85%; Session 3 = 67%; Session 4 = 100%; and Session 5 = 100%. One non-registered CSD student attended Session 3 on the Loop campus. This student, however, chose not to complete the session evaluation form, nor did this student return to subsequent meetings.

Student attendance fluctuated from meeting to meeting; however, there was a discernable decline in attendance noted for Session 3. This is likely attributable to Career Club meetings that conflicted with mid-term examinations.



The following information is derived from the individual session questionnaires. Due to the small sample size and fluctuating student attendance, only minimal confidence can be given to the results obtained.

#### Learning Outcome 1

Students that participate in the Career Club will report that they write and/or revise their resumes based on knowledge obtained from Career Club activities.

- Do you have a resume? (PPPQ Q1) N = 5 of 11, Yes = 100%
- How prepared do you feel after today's session to write your resume? (Session 2 Q1) N = 11 of 13, Very Prepared/Extremely Prepared = 64%
- Did you have a resume before attending the Career Club? (PQ Q6) \*N = 7 of 21, Yes = 100%
- Do you plan to write a resume based on what you learned in the Career Club? (PQ Q7) \*N = 7 of 21, Yes = 43%; No = 57%
- Did you revise your resume based on what you learned in the Career Club? (PQ Q8) \*N = 7 of 21, Yes = 43%; No = 57%
- Will you revise your resume based on what you learned in the Career Club? (PQ Q9) \*N = 7 of 21, Yes = 57%; No = 43%

#### Learning Outcome 2

Students participating in the Career Club will report increased utilization of the DePaul University Career Center resources.

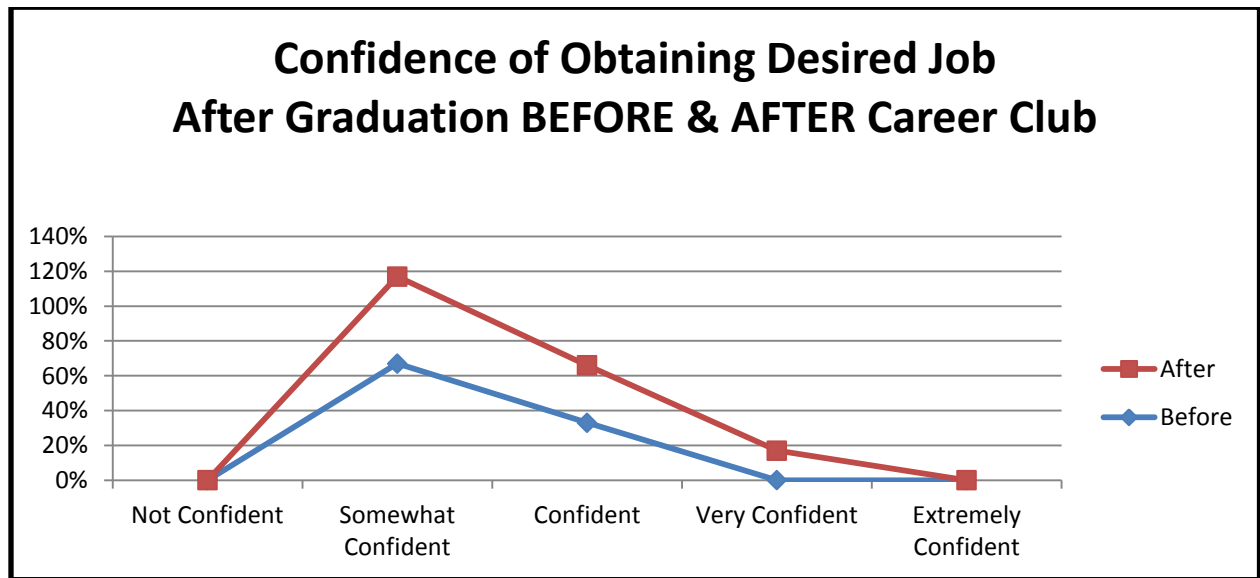
- How many Career Center workshops have you attended? (PPPQ Q2) N = 5 of 11, \*\*Average = 2.8 (without outlier Average = 0.8)
- How many one-on-one Career Center Advisor appointments have you had? (PPPQ Q3) N = 5 of 11, \*\*Average = 2.8 (without outlier Average = 0.8)
- How many times did you visit the Career Center prior to your involvement with the Career Club? (PQ Q1) N = 8 of 21, \*\*Average = 2.9 (without outlier Average = 1.9)
- How many Career Center workshops did you attend prior to the Career Club? (PQ Q2) N = 8 of 21, \*\*Average = 1.9 (without outlier Average = 0.14)
- How many times did you visit the Career Center during your involvement with the Career Club? N = 8 of 21, \*\*Average = 1 (without outlier Average = 0.43)
- How likely are you to take advantage of Career Center programs and services in the future?

- (Session 2 Q4) N = 11 of 13, Very Likely/Extremely Likely = 91%
- (Session 3 Q4) N = 2 of 3, Very Likely/Extremely Likely = 100%
- (Session 4 Q6) N = 6 of 7, Very Likely/Extremely Likely = 83%
- (Session 5 Q7) N = 7 of 7, Very Likely/Extremely Likely = 86%
- (PQ Q5) N = 8 of 21, Very Likely/Extremely Likely = 88%

**Learning Outcome 3**

Students participating in the Career Club will report increased self-confidence in their job seeking skills.

- How confident are you in your interpersonal and networking skills to conduct a successful job or internship search? (PPPQ Q7) N = 5 of 11, Very Confident/Extremely Confident = 40%
- How confident are you today about finding the job you want after graduation? (PPPQ Q8) N = 5 of 11, Very Confident/Extremely Confident = 0%  
(Session 2 Q5) N = 11 of 13, Very Confident/Extremely Confident = 27%  
(Session 3 Q5) N = 2 of 3, Very Confident/Extremely Confident = 50%  
(Session 4 Q7) N = 6 of 7, Very Confident/Extremely Confident = 34%  
(Session 5 Q8) N = 7 of 7, Very Confident/Extremely Confident = 57%
- Before attending the Career Club, how confident were you about your job seeking skills? (PQ Q10) N = 7 of 21, Very Confident/Extremely Confident = 14%
- After attending the Career Club, how confident are you now about your job seeking skills? (PQ Q11) N = 7 of 21, Very Confident/Extremely Confident = 43%
- Before attending the Career Club, how confident were you about finding a job after graduation? (PQ Q12) N = 7 of 21, Very Confident/Extremely Confident = 0%
- After attending the Career Club, how confident are you about finding a job after graduation? (PQ Q13) N = 7 of 21, Very Confident/Extremely Confident = 14%



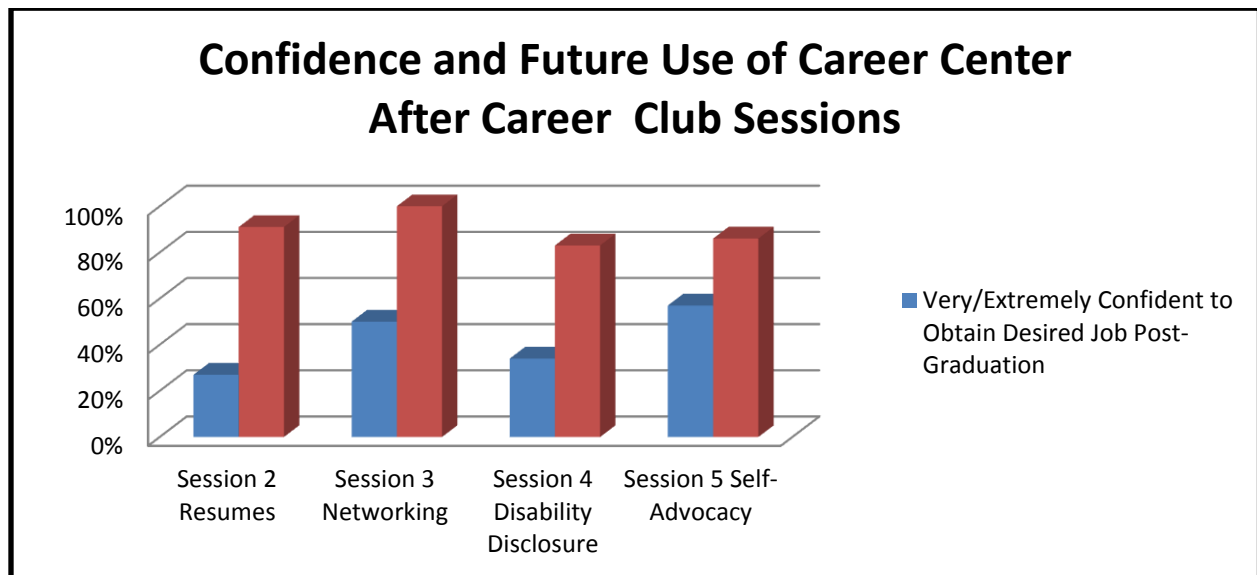
\*Note one student did not respond to Questions 6-13 on the final Participant Questionnaire, therefore, results were calculated with an N of 7 instead of 8.

\*\*Note that one student's participation in DePaul Career Center activities far exceeded peers so calculations were made with and without that individual's responses in an attempt to get more realistic results based on an average student's level of involvement.

**Advancement Toward Learning Outcomes:**

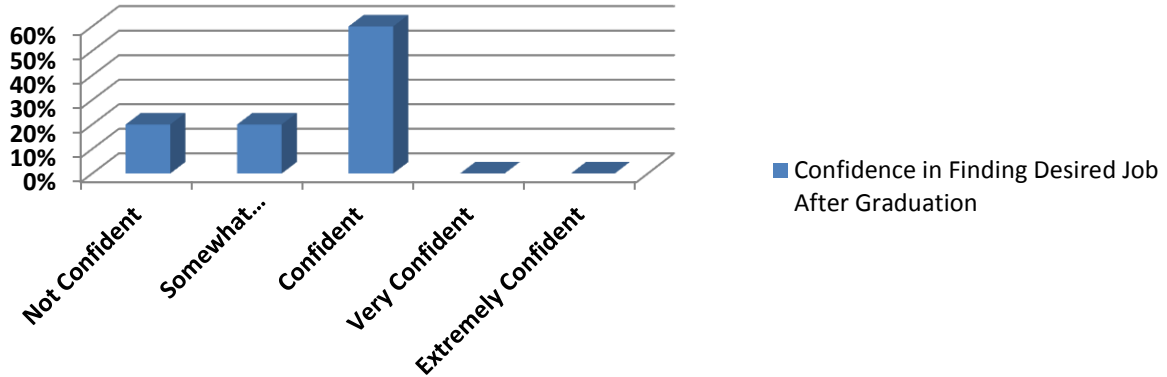
Learning Outcome	Number of Students Assessed	Number of Students with Acceptable or Better Performance
Students that participate in the Career Club will report increased utilization of DePaul University Career Center resources.	8	7

As noted above, overall, students reported increased knowledge about programs and services offered by DePaul's Career Center. Students also reported they plan to use offered programs and services in the future.

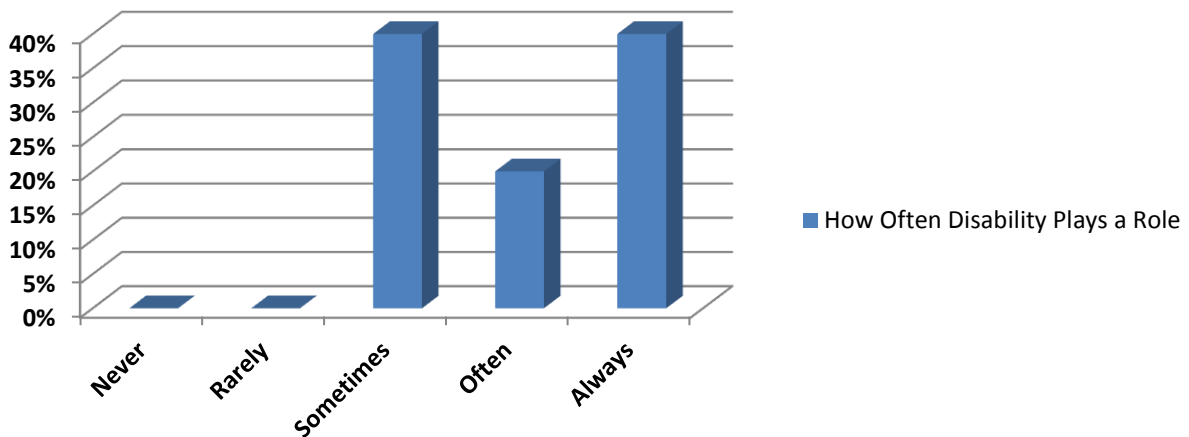


As noted in the Introduction, self-confidence correlates to how one perceives their own disability, a finding supported by the Session 1 pre-test where students were asked, "How often does your disability play a role in how confident you feel?" Five of the 11 respondents indicated their disability influenced their self-confidence either often or always (60%).

## Confidence in Finding Desired Job After Graduation

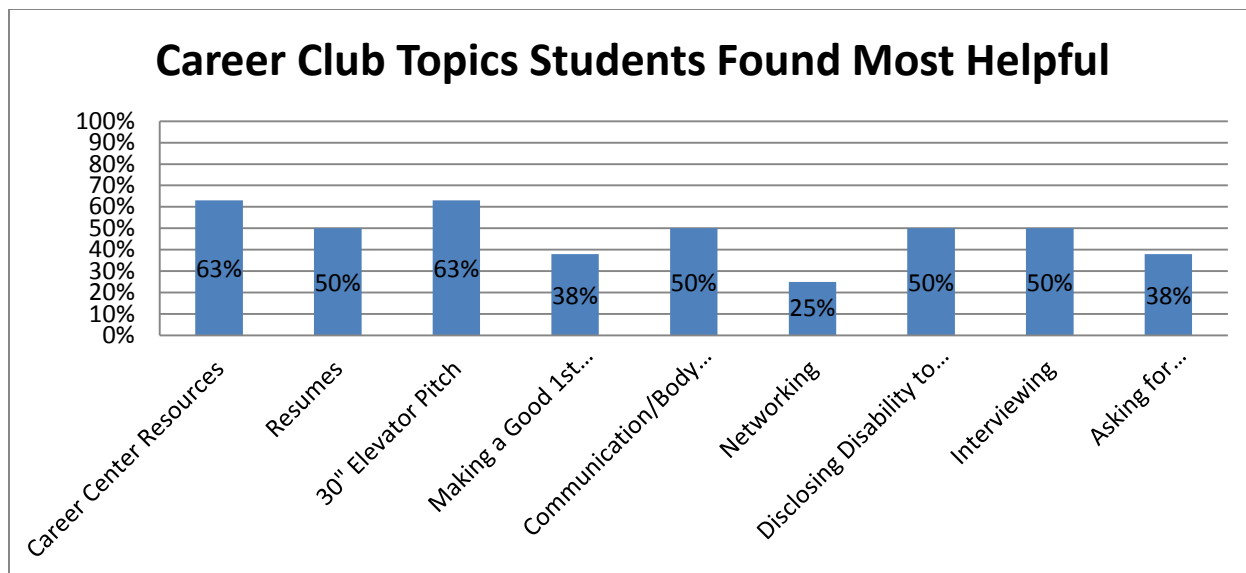


## How Often Disability Plays a Role in Confidence



Based on responses to session questionnaires and verbal feedback received from students throughout the program period, CSD also learned which topics were of most interest to students. As noted below, students were most interested in learning more about DePaul's Career Center resources (63%) and are interested in further training through mock interviews appropriate to their chosen professions (100%).





Participating students were also asked in what capacity local employers could be a resource to them in their job search. All student respondents indicated that they were interested in mock interviews and job shadowing with local employers. It is interesting to note that employers who attended other *Springboard to Success* activities were asked if they would consider participating in mock interviews and/or job shadowing opportunities for interested students. Less than half of the 23 employers who responded indicated that those activities were of interest to them.

We also learned something about our assumptions:

Our assumption that students with disabilities do not utilize Career Center programs or resources is most likely due to the expectation that they would have to disclose their disability was incorrect. Students with disabilities reported that they had already been attending Career Center programs, but to what extent is unknown since they do not always disclose their disability to the staff. We do not know how much they have participated in comparison to nondisabled peers because statistics on general Career Center student use is not available.

The Career Club co-facilitator, Michael Elias, reported anecdotally that students with disabilities were visiting the Career Center more than he has experienced in previous quarters. During the spring 2014 quarter, he alone reported working with seven students that specifically disclosed their disabilities. Mr. Elias also disclosed that he had knowledge of at least 3 other students with disabilities that met with colleagues during this same time period.

Our assumption that students with disabilities would not have a resume prepared prior to attending the Career Club was incorrect. 100% of student participants indicated they already had a resume, but as the above findings suggest, nearly half learned something new during the Career Club they were going to incorporate into their existing resumes.

Our assumption that students with disabilities that participated in Career Club would report an increase in confidence about employment options after graduation, but would start feeling more confident afterward was correct. Modest increases in student confidence were noted, but again, the sample size limits confidence in this finding.

## Implications

Limitations of this assessment project include a small pool of students from which to draw information. Nonetheless, the information garnered from this project provides valuable information related to the improvement and continuation of this project. Overall, students reported that they revised and/or drafted a resume, planned to utilize the Career Center more often and were more confident about their future and career choice options. The results of this assessment project also suggests that students with disabilities benefit from having a clear understanding of the many career planning supports and options that are available through the Career Center and CSD.

The direct implications of our findings suggest that the students with disabilities benefited from the Career Club partnership between CSD and the Career Center. Continuing to expand this partnership with the intention of incorporating disability-specific considerations into career planning activities is a worthy pursuit. It is likely that this partnership will increase the relevance, responsiveness and utilization of both CSD and Career Center supports and services.

<sup>1</sup>Paula Barber (2012). College Students with Disabilities: What Factors Influence Successful Degree Completion? A Case Study. Disability and Work: John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development and the Kessler Foundation. pp: 1-17.

<sup>2</sup>Hennessey, M.L., Rumrill, P.D., Fitzgerald, S., Roessler, R. (2008). National Institutes of Mental Health. Disadvantage related correlates of career optimism among college and university students with disabilities. Retrieved May 2014, from <http://Medline>.

<sup>3</sup>National Center for Education Statistics (2014). The condition of education: Trends in employment by education attainment. Spotlight, pp.1-6.

<sup>4</sup>Rosler, R., Hennessey, M.L., Rumrill, P.D. (2007). The Relationship of Selected Supply-and Demand-Side Factors to Forms of Perceived Discrimination Among Adults With Multiple Sclerosis. Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 203-215.

<sup>5</sup>U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012). Persons with a disability: Barriers to employment, types of assistance and other labor-related issues. Economic News Release, pp.1-11.

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability and Employment Policy (2014). Youth employment rate: March, 2011 – May, 2014. Retrieved May 2014, from <http://dol.gov>.