COM 822Persuasive Communication

“Can a new Career Development Paradigm Reduce Deconversion among Christian College Students”

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1. Write a 5-page argumentative essay on your selected topic.

2. Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that clearly states your topic, its importance, and your position has a succinct thesis statement.

a. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought. Include logical arguments and literature references to support the main points and sub-points of your position. Include counterarguments, along with logical reasons for rejecting them.

b. Add section headers to your paper that match your outline.

b. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

c. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

Through a phenomenon identified as “Deconversion”, the Barna Group (2020) identified 70-80% of Christian students were walking away from their faith at some point during their college career. That statistic should cause alarm for everyone, it did for this researcher. As such, it led to a literature review about deconversion and career choices, which subsequently led to the thesis topic for this class and my DSL project.

In an effort to reverse the deconversion trend on college campuses, this paper presents the argument for a New Career Paradigm that 1) uses Larry Burke’s career assessment to discover a student’s godly design, 2) assists students to develop a strategic career plan, 3) prepares students for the lifelong career journey, and 4) equips them to disciple others (at college & work).

The thesis: Whereas Christian college students unfulfilled by their studies tend to experience “drift” (i.e., deconversion, dissatisfaction, burnout), specific training (i.e., to disciple & career strategy) will reduce “drift” given that training Christian college students in career discovery will help them be more successful students that will like their career and be more likely to continue in that chosen field.

Conversely, religious believers see “calling” as referring only to the priesthood; and have not applied calling to all vocations/professions. Likewise, others see the separation of church and state to mean that schools should not rely on religion for any part of the education process.

**Career Ministries in Church.** Churches should engage in career ministry preparing students for a vocational calling based on biblical principles; and equipping disciplemakers to increase the number of students coming to Christ in college as it reverses the deconversion trend found by the Barna Group (2011).

**“**The church never developed a particular ‘strategy’ or ‘method’ of cultural engagement. Christians weren’t looking for the latest program or innovation to help them cope with or combat the cultural moment. Instead they focused on building the church from within” (Presley, 2021, p7). As such, “disciple-makers often feel ill-equipped to effectively make disciples. An opportunity exists to equip disciple-makers in the local church who will produce followers of Jesus to mature in the faith” (Smith, M.J., 2024, p. xi).

If the church integrates a career ministry program into its offerings, students can learn to disciple and discover their godly design for vocational calling. “It is hoped each student will be better prepared theologically, historically, and socially to express Christianity in activities that not only integrate religion in society but do it through the church in ways that transform society” (Humphrey, R.A., 2011, p 6).

**The importance of “calling”.** Most students do not know their calling by the time they graduate high school. This sets them on a journey to “figure it out”, which can be detrimental because by the time they finish high school they should be fully prepared to enter college (professional or vocational) to train for their career.

“People who experience a sense of calling (compared to people who do not) say they are more confident they can make good decisions about their careers, more committed to their jobs and organizations, more motivated and engaged, more satisfied with their education and their jobs, and experience a stronger sense of meaning at work” (Dik, 2023, p46).

“Generation Z represents the largest share of the unemployed. As a result, we might think that young people would be willing to take on jobs in less-than-ideal conditions, but we find that they either refuse low wages or are unhappy with the wages they receive in relation to their work experience” (Ioan, 2023, pp. 2 - 3).

“...these young people may be undecided about what they really want to do in the future, going to work just to spend time with friends, or staying employed for only a very short period of time where they work hard for a substantial reward” (Ioan, 2023, p2).

Again, going back to planting career ministries within churches. My plan is to develop 3 versions to include the transitioning adult discussed below. The career ministry is based on a Christian Career Paradigm that teaches biblical principles of work. This firm foundation is important because students use it to build their career plan. The career assessment allows students to discover their godly vocational calling. This is used to expand the career plan and helps in knowing what to study in college. Having this plan will reduce the anxiety in high school as graduation approaches. It will also result in fewer changed majors and less stress in college. Again, less stress in college, which is like the calm in a storm. Surrounding students will gravitate towards that. Having that peace minimizes “drift” because you and your career plan are rooted in the word. Hopefully, you see the bigger picture on how this paradigm that began in church before college can help during college.

For the more senior workers transitioning as a result of being downsized or given the golden handshake, Garthe (2022) found “...occupational changes do not only happen, they are even more often desired and unfulfilled” (p. 2413). This research indicates that many workers are not fulfilled by their job and transitioning could be seen as a blessing given a career paradigm that would help them find work they will enjoy. Imagine how different their career could have been had they known their godly design and had been in a career that was fulfilling.

**Secular Career Development.** Christianity has no place in career development or the workplace. Work is work. People have a job to do and religion is something for off time and Sunday, not to be engaged in at the office. School districts have implemented successful career programs and do not need to incorporate religion.

People can volunteer their time for a good cause. Ultimately “personal fulfillment and a desire to help others are insufficient sources of motivation by themselves” for working (Wightman, 2023, p.957). In fact, Smith’s (2024) “results show that financial factors such as income and business opportunities related to the major are crucial” (p. 1).

The main counter argument includes financial benefits outweighing other factors. Students that graduate value money over other satisfaction factors like personal satisfaction. This is where biblical principles are extremely relevant. Our premise is that students who understand and accept biblical principles, know their godly design, and are equipped to disciple will have a better outlook. Of relevance here is “perhaps the most significant finding, that deconversion was eventually a liberating experience that evoked feelings of freedom, relief, and happiness” (p. 266). While not directly career related, it should be studied to determine the reasons that students feel this way and how to change it. It is my belief that all the factors correlate and lead college students to experience increased stress, possibly change their major or drop out of college more often, and walk away from their faith.

While there are arguments for and against the use of biblical principles in developing a career development program, this paper is a proponent of using them, especially because the goal is to reduce the number of students leaving their faith while in college.

**Conclusion.** There is a reason for the application of biblical principles in our career, as well as our everyday lives. Smith states that “... a true sense of vocation is rooted in the reality that there is something we must do —even if it means you will never be famous. You are faithful to your vocation, ultimately, because you resolve to be true to yourself, for only then can you be true to your God” (p131).

In fact, “...participants’ understanding their work as akin to worship reflects a Calvinist Christian tradition and is evidently deeply meaningful and motivating to these frontline volunteers in addition to the ways that their work betters them as persons and makes a tangible contribution to the good of others and their communities” (Wightman, S., et al, 2023, p.960). This gives purpose and meaning to their work and motivates them to also volunteer. The literature review indicates that without religion, people do not have this same conviction.

Knowing and abiding by biblical work principles make a world of difference. It can reduce deconversion, give direction and foster hope. For these reasons, we should develop a new career paradigm, a ministry for the church. While those opposed would not initially support it, I believe a study conducted to assess the success of the paradigm could persuade naysayers.

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