

Promoting At-Promise Student Success

Student Seeking Career Advice— Earning a Living Wage in an Underpaid Profession

Purpose: This vignette highlights the struggle that students may face in finding a career that balances what they love to do with a livable wage.

Student Vignette:

Sarah is currently seeking support from the career advising center at the university. When asked about her interests and past work experiences that she enjoyed, she mentioned several volunteer events that she has done in which she was working with kids. She explains that she always felt like she was making an impact on future generations, and wanted to pursue a career that would help her feel similarly in her everyday work. However, she also expresses her concerns with earning a livable wage that would allow her to support herself and her ideal lifestyle. It appears that Sarah does not have a clear career path or profession set in stone, so you offer her insights on different pathways available to her if she would like to continue working with children and making an impact. You point her to nonprofit organizations, educational administration opportunities, and local government organizations that align with her interests. Additionally, you show her the salary levels that each pathway offer for entry and senior level positions.

Guiding Questions:

1. Have you encountered a situation like this? If so, briefly reflect on those experiences. How did you support the student? What approaches were beneficial? What approaches were less successful?
2. Describe the challenges Sarah is navigating? What are the key issues that need to be addressed to support Sarah before she graduates? What resources exist on campus that may be helpful? What are her strengths that can be leveraged in this situation?
3. Given your role (e.g., academic advisor, program director, faculty, etc.), what might you do to support Sarah? What are some limitations in your current knowledge and skills in meeting Sarah's needs? What resources or opportunities can you connect her with on and off-campus?
4. Reflect on the concept of ecological validation. How could the norms framing student interactions (holistic, proactive, strengths-oriented, and developmental) and the work of educators (collaborative and reflective) be leveraged to support Sarah?
5. What policies and practices could be shifted to support students in a similar situation? What would need to happen to initiate change? Who would be involved in this process?