Career Software Review Guidelines

Introduction

The National Career Development Association (NCDA) has a long history of evaluating career materials. The Association's career information reviews have for years helped counselors and career center coordinators select from available career information books and pamphlets.

In the last decade, several professional groups have developed evaluation criteria for career software. As computers came into use to help individuals access career information, the United States Department of Labor and then the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee provided start-up grants so individual states could implement systems of career information. State system operators formed the Association of Computer-Based Systems for Career Information (ACSCI) and adopted standards for the operation of such systems, publishing them periodically since 1980. In 1985, ACSCI also published guidelines for the effective use of computer-based systems for career information.

Several states conducted or commissioned evaluations before adopting a system for state operation, and several individuals and research centers have published guidelines for system selection or guides to available career information delivery software. In 1988, the American Association for Counseling and Development published a comprehensive guide to counseling software.

Several educational organizations, including the International Society for Technology in Education, publish guides to instructional software and guidelines for evaluation of instructional software.

The existing standards provided ample precedence for these NCDA guidelines. All of them help clarify important issues regarding career development software while equipping professionals to choose software appropriate for their counseling practices or their school's or agency's service needs. The purpose here is not to compile all of the good guidelines or to supersede well-established software standards and evaluations, but to reinforce them with NCDA's efforts.

These NCDA guidelines apply to software that individuals use in planning their own careers. Because the computer is an information tool and its major use in career development is for information delivery, the guidelines are specific about the content, orientation, and coverage of occupational and educational information. The computer is not just an information storage and retrieval device, however, nor is career planning based solely on facts about work and schooling. Computers are also used to organize information about the individual and to aid decision making. Criteria for the evaluation of those career development programs are also included in the guidelines. By selecting the applicable criteria, a reviewer can evaluate special purpose programs as well as comprehensive career information systems.

Useful software rarely consists only of computer programs and data. User guides, coordinator manuals, evaluation reports, and implementation strategies are all valuable and are covered by the guidelines.

Many career software programs have companion publications or refer users to other information sources. Similarly, software developers are beginning to add other visual and electronic media to their career programs. Therefore, these software review guidelines rely on and are designed to complement two other sets of NCDA guidelines-those for print and those for media.

These guidelines are written for use by NCDA members and others in selecting and using career software. They can also be useful to NCDA in reviewing career software and to developers in producing career planning software.

The guidelines have two parts: (a) a format for describing the software and (b) criteria for evaluating the program. These two parts can be used separately or together, depending on the purposes of the user.

References

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The 1991 edition of the Career Software Review Guidelines was prepared under the direction of Bruce McKinlay, PhD., University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon (chairperson of the CIRS Subcommittee on Software Resources), with the assistance of the Career Information Review Service Committee, chaired by Roger Lambert, PhD., University of Wisconsin-Madison. The Guidelines were approved by the NCDA Board of Directors April, 1991.