SESSION SUMMARY

FOUNDATIONS OF CAREER ALIGNMENT

INTEGRATING DISCOVERY, NEUROSCIENCE, AND ADVISING PRACTICE

September 29, 2026 | Presented by Miriam Groom, Organizational Psychologist & Founder of Mindful Career | Hosted by Stefanie Adams, Mountainland Region

QUICK RECAP

The webinar focused on self-understanding as the foundation for career alignment in students. Stefanie introduced Miriam Groom, an organizational psychologist and founder of Mindful Career, who shared her own experience of burnout and misalignment to illustrate the gap that can open up between a person's natural strengths and the path they choose. Miriam's central argument: career choice is an output, and self-understanding is the necessary input — rushing students into decisions before they have enough evidence about who they are skips a critical step. She distinguished between being good at something and being wired for it, emphasizing that competence does not always equal fit, and walked through a framework for self-discovery built around noticing, reflecting, expanding, testing, and revisiting patterns of behavior. The session also covered the risks of identity foreclosure and the relative age effect in shaping how students see their own abilities. During Q&A, Miriam addressed how to use assessments like the Holland Code and YouScience — most effective only after students have done internal self-discovery work — and how to introduce these ideas to teachers, counselors, and even younger students.

WELCOME & SESSION FORMAT

Stefanie opened the webinar and walked through the session's format, including a pre-webinar poll and an interactive Q&A feature. She introduced Miriam Groom as the presenter on neuroscience-based approaches to career advising and noted that the session itself was designed around conversations with counselors and advisors from across the region and state — with the goal of delivering practical resources on career alignment rather than purely theoretical content.

WHY SELF-UNDERSTANDING COMES FIRST

Miriam shared her own story: she burned out in her 30s, which led her into the study of personality psychology and career alignment. Her organization originally worked with adult professionals, but expanded into student-facing work after recognizing that many young people were making major career decisions without any real self-understanding behind them. Her central point — career choice should be based on self-understanding, not just information — anchored the rest of the session. She introduced a composite example, a student who expresses total certainty about becoming a doctor, to illustrate the gap between certainty and true self-knowledge.

> **KEY DISTINCTION**
> *Career choice is an output. Self-understanding is the input. Skipping the input doesn't skip the need for it — it just means the output is guesswork.*

THREE TYPES OF STUDENT DECISION-MAKERS

Miriam outlined three patterns she sees repeatedly: students who are confused and unsure, students making choices based on external pressures (family, prestige, money), and students who may be landing on an appropriate choice but without real self-awareness behind it — meaning it's more luck than insight. Her framing: the job of an advisor is to help students discover who they are before asking them to make long-term decisions. She referenced the parable of feeding different “wolves” within oneself — the traits and interests a student pays attention to and reinforces are the ones that tend to grow.

COMPETENCE VS. NATURAL FIT

A recurring theme: being good at something and being naturally wired for it are not the same thing. Skills can be built through practice and coaching, but discovering genuine fit requires self-discovery, not just skill development. Miriam cautioned against using "where do you lose track of time?" as the only diagnostic question, since competence and engagement can mask a lack of true resonance. She also pointed out how circumstances can shape a student's sense of identity — using the relative age effect in hockey (where kids born earlier in the selection year have a physical advantage that gets mistaken for greater talent) as an example of how early, arbitrary advantages can calcify into a lasting — and inaccurate — sense of ability.

> **WATCH FOR**
> *Identity foreclosure: when a student locks into an identity or path too early, before they've had the chance to actually explore who they are.*

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN ADOLESCENCE

Miriam pushed back on the premature pressure many teenagers feel to make major career decisions. Adolescence, she argued, is a period built for exploring and forming identity — not for finalizing it. Identity development is an ongoing process involving exploration, experience, commitment, and reconsideration, and exploration should never be treated as the same thing as indecision.

THE SELF-DISCOVERY FRAMEWORK

Miriam introduced a framework for guiding students through self-discovery before career decision-making:

- Notice — pay attention to patterns in energy, interest, and behavior.
- Reflect — make sense of what's been noticed.
- Expand — broaden exposure to new experiences and contexts.
- Test — try things out in low-stakes ways.
- Revisit — come back and reassess as more evidence accumulates.

LIVE WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT™

She connected this to a bigger-picture path — Know Thyself, Explore, Test, Choose, Learn, Repeat — and was clear that the goal isn't for a 17-year-old to have their whole life figured out. It's to help students build self-awareness and the ability to notice what gives them energy and aligns with their core identity.

THE KNOW THYSELF TOOLKIT

Miriam announced she would share a "Know Thyself" toolkit with participants, including conversation prompts and a set of 20 questions designed to surface a student's personality, interests, and behavioral patterns — without ever directly asking about career choice. She confirmed these materials are self-directed workbooks that work both in a one-on-one advising conversation and independently, and that they can be used with parents as well as students.

USING ASSESSMENTS THE RIGHT WAY

On the use of formal assessments like the Holland Code and YouScience, Miriam's guidance was clear: they're most effective after a student has done some internal self-discovery work first. Without that groundwork, students often give masked or inaccurate responses — answering the way they think they should, rather than from genuine self-knowledge — which undermines the value of the assessment itself.

BRINGING THIS TO TEACHERS & COUNSELORS

When asked how to start these conversations with teachers and counselors, Miriam suggested leading with the framework itself — making the case that "know thyself" must come before any discussion of specific career goals. She offered to provide visual resources to help advisors make that case within their own schools and teams.

STARTING EARLIER: ELEMENTARY-AGE SELF-AWARENESS

Miriam and Stefanie discussed extending self-awareness work earlier than high school, into elementary school. Miriam described using simple questions about daily life, interests, and behavior to help even young students begin noticing their own personality traits and preferences — laying foundational groundwork well before any formal career counseling conversation would typically begin.

WHAT'S NEXT

- This session is the first in a possible planned series depending on attendee feedback — feedback from the post-webinar survey will directly shape future sessions.
- The recording, session notes, and the ***Know Thyself Toolkit*** will be shared with all attendees.
- Stefanie will award USBE re-licensure credit for participants.

UVU WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT