

Teen career plans out of sync with reality

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Unrealistic career goals set by today's U.S. teenagers result in wasted time and money as well as anxiety and distress, sociologists say.

Florida State University Sociology Professor John Reynolds tracked changes in high school seniors' educational and occupational plans between 1976 and 2000 and found the gap in goals and actual achievements grew during the 25-year period.

"Today's teens are both highly ambitious and increasingly unrealistic," Reynolds said. "While some youth clearly benefit from heightened ambition, it can lead to disappointment and discouragement rather than optimism and success."

The study is said to be the first to show with comparable, national data how dramatically high school seniors' plans have changed since the 1970s, how those expectations are increasingly out of sync with the achievements of their peers, and that there is a corresponding decline in the payoffs of student ambition for future accomplishments in school.

The study -- co-authored by FSU graduate students Michael Stewart, Ryan MacDonald and Lacey Sischo -- appears in the journal *Social Problems*.

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