

EFFICIENCY OF THE CAREER CENTERS IN BULGARIA

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Abstract: *In Western countries, the Career Center is an integral part of any university that claims to offer up-to-date education and services to its students. Well-functioning career centers are a very powerful marketing tool for attracting prospective students. The centers are at the service of both students interested in work and internship programs, as well as employers looking for prospective employees. The purpose of this study is to understand the extent to which the Bulgarian Career Centers perform correctly, their expected duties and how well they function effectively. Career Centers provide high quality services related to the career guidance and development of students. Professionally trained professionals work with learners who want to better define their interests, opportunities and potential to define the most appropriate areas for career development. Multiple techniques such as group and individual discussions, tests, and more are often used in composing such profiles.*

Key words: *Bulgarian Career Centers, students.*

1. Introduction

The overall purpose of college is to help students find a career path that will lead to a successful, happy future. In other words, a job. It follows, then, that career services is the most important office on campus. Students who use career services can plan student loan borrowing based on future income, explore career opportunities during and after college and learn how to become the best possible marketable job candidates.

Internship and Job Listings

Colleges have databases of internships and job opportunities. These job banks are

vital to a student's job search prospects. However, we recommend appointments with career counselors at least once per semester to continue looking for internships and receiving guidance on which internships fit your skills at that moment.

For instance, a student could not qualify for an internship in their sophomore year because they didn't have the skills developed once they've completed coursework for that year. If he or she applied but didn't talk to a career counselor, he or she would not know to reapply the following year. Beyond databases of interviews, companies will also come to campus to interview

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students for positions. The slots are filled at career services offices.

Career Guidance

The other kind of career guidance is when a student really has no idea what they want to do with their lives. This is perfectly normal. That's why changing majors at least once is common. I did. But a career counselor can help students arrange shadows but also talk about job interests. Sometimes they can recommend courses that will help students cement or redefine career goals [2], [5, 6], [9], [14].

Seminars on Resumes and Interview Skills

No one is born knowing how to write a resume. Career services offices often have seminars on interviewing, too. Students will learn how to dress professionally, answer questions, and write resumes tailored to individual positions. Knowing these basic career search skills is as important as any class students will take on campus.

Oftentimes career offices also post online resource of sample resumes and interview questions. Show counselors resumes after writing them and definitely participate in practice interview sessions. Answers previously thought to be positive may now be negative. For instance, since working in teams is dominant in today's corporate environment, it's more important to be a team player than completely self-reliant [1], [8], [10], [13].

Entry-level salary calculations

One of the hardest decisions families make when it comes to college is how to pay for it. When it comes to borrowing student loans, it's impossible to decide how much to borrow unless students have a realistic idea of how much they'll make when they graduation. Every semester

students should go into the career services office and discuss realistic expectations for post-graduation salaries.

Career services tracks salaries of recent graduates. The reason why going in every semester is important is because career ambitions and salary expectations change. For instance, a student may start out wanting to be a journalist and end up as a biologist. These two fields vary quite a bit in entry level salaries and thus, what a student could afford to repay. The resulting numbers could mean transferring to a different, more affordable school or going to the financial aid office to look for more scholarship.

Mentorship Opportunities from Alumni

Networking is not only what helps most people land after graduation jobs, but it's also what helps students gain internship and shadow day opportunities. Shadow days are my favorite tool for career exploration. A student spends a couple of hours with a professional in their field and asks questions. When the professional is an alumni, the connection can be stronger and result in even more opportunity for internships and mentoring. A mentor can guide you and answer career questions throughout your career [3, 4], [7], [11, 12].

2. Results

Was there a career center at your university? (n=75)

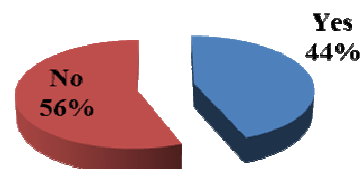


Fig. 1. *Was there a career center at your university?*

To the question, "Was there a career center at your university?", 44% of the respondents answered positively.

56% of them claim there is no career center at their university.

In some of the universities of the interviewees there is actually a career center, although they indicate that there is none.

The aforementioned fact casts doubt on the effectiveness and popularity of the career centers in question.

**Did they work with you
(n = 75)**

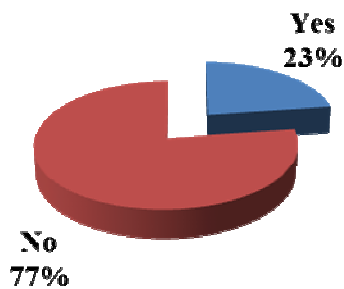


Fig. 2. *Did they work with you to define your interests and the potential for the most suitable areas for career development?*

Only 23% of the interviewed indicate that career centers have worked with them to define their interests, identify their potential and the appropriate areas for their career development.

77% declare that the representatives of the Career Centers have not worked with them in any of the aforementioned directions.

Have they provided you practical knowledge?

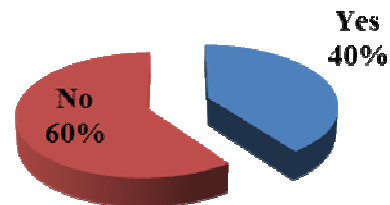


Fig. 3. *Have they provided you practical knowledge related to career development, strategies for job search, preparation of documents for application for internship/or work?*

40% of respondents said they had received practical training during their studies at university.

Some of them in the direction of their career development. In the case of other practical advice on job search, in others - preparation of applications for internship and / or work.

In 60% of the participants there was no cooperation from the representatives of career centers in the Bulgarian universities regarding the issues under consideration.

Practical workshops (n=75)

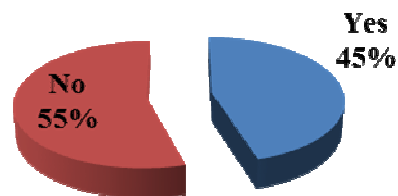


Fig. 4. *Have they organized various practical workshops to you with the presence of guest lecturers and employers?*

To the question "Have they organized

various practical workshops to you with the presence of guest lecturers and employers?" 45% of the contingent responded with a "yes" answer, and 55% answered "No".

From the questions put in this question, which are aimed at answering the questions how effectively the career centers in the Bulgarian universities function - this is the initiative of the universities, which is the most significant according to the respondents.

Choosing a Master's Program (n=75)

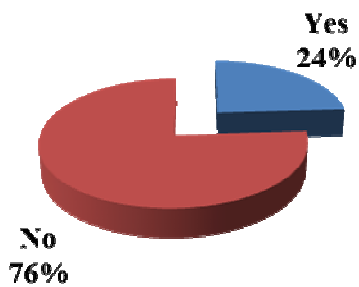


Fig 5. *Did they help you in choosing a master's program, training in communication skills, etc.?*

24% of participants in this survey respond positively to the question: " Did they help you in choosing a master's program, training in communication skills, etc.?"

76% of them declare that they have not received assistance from the Career Center's representatives at their university either when selecting a Master's program or training in communication skills or in other areas.

Resource library (n=75)

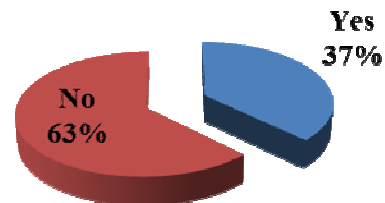


Fig. 6. *Did the Career Center maintain a resource library where you can find literature related to your career development?*

Regarding the Resource Library, 37% of the research contingent was available at the career centers at their universities.

63% answered negatively to the question: "Did the Career Center maintain a resource library where you can find literature related to your career development?"

3. Discussion

In theory, the mission of career centers is to support the professional orientation and realization of the students. In practice, however, most young people do not even know about their existence, and even the more informed ones rarely seek their help. This is confirmed by the respondents' answers to this survey.

The general problem is related to attitudes and thinking, things that change slowly and painfully: "In Bulgaria the university is something like a continuation of the school - you are doing orders, you have a curriculum that is almost fixed with very few or no subjects you can choose and you expect the institution to take care of the student. The logic is that if you attend the lectures and take your exams,

everything will be fine. Most often students do not know what they want or what they can or how they can be realized on the labor market and so the only criterion, which is caught, is the money. And it is quite weak and unstable motivation.

There are students who are looking for career counseling themselves. However, they are negligible.

In order to promote their activity among university graduates, it is necessary to give information to freshmen. It is also advisable to use the capabilities of modern virtual platforms. In recent years, there has been a significant decline in the activity and interest of employers in career centers in higher education institutions. Under these conditions, the ambition of consultants is to focus on changing attitudes and presentations of future graduates. The work of the career centers is not so much to publish ads and to organize company presentations, but to teach students to compete.

Career centers should increasingly be an effective way to look for young people. Their services are either completely free or incomparably cheaper than the fees of the recruiting companies.

The reason why the career centers would not perform adequately in their functions could be the university administration. Western European universities make the most of these units to follow and help their graduates and it is desirable and highly recommended that Bulgarian universities apply their successful experience. For example, the Paris Est University has created a structure in which three full-time staff maintain contacts with graduates and collect information on where they found a job,

what trainings they are going through, and what their salaries are up to two and a half years after they graduate. The Vienna University of Economics maintains a career center with 20 people. It issues a periodic newsletter with listings for internship and job and offers selection services that are paid by the employers.

In Bulgaria, career centers, with few exceptions, arise under external pressure rather than at the initiative of the university management. Initial idea, funding, and know-how take place on a joint project of the JobTiger Virtual Labor Exchange and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Later, the relay takes over the Foundation for Business for Education (FBE). The requirement is for universities to recognize these units and provide them with facilities and means of subsistence as a guarantee that the structures will survive even after the withdrawal of external donors. It turns out, though, that things do not always happen that way.

To do this, however, adequate career counseling is needed to become an integral part of the education service.

4. Conclusion

On the basis of the respondents' answers from the present study, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. The administration of the universities in Bulgaria must accept the task of the efficient functioning of the career centers;
2. It is recommended that the Bulgarian Career Centers draw on the experience of successful career centers in Western European universities;
3. Career centers in universities should use all the tools and best practices

- used by private career centers in Bulgaria;
4. In Career Centers, specialists with extensive practical experience in career guidance and human resources should be appointed;
 5. Employees in Career Centers should take active action to promote career center activities and communicate with students and early graduates.

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