

FUNCTIONING OF ACADEMIC CAREER CENTRES IN POLISH SCHOOLS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: The article presents the range of career centres' functioning in schools of higher education in Poland. It describes main fields of their activity and compares them to foreign career centres. In the research part the study includes the analysis of students' expectations as regards the form and range of career centres' functioning as well as their activity in the selected university. Finally, the author attempts to determine the main directions of career centres' functioning to meet students' expectations and the situation on the labour market.

Key words: academic career centre, career counselling, academic advising, schools of higher education, Polish Career Centres Network.

Introduction

An academic career centre (ACC) is a unit working for the benefit of professional activation of students and alumni of a school of higher education. It is run by the university or any other student organisation. The principal aim of academic career centre's functioning is to provide students and alumni with comprehensive and professional help as regards entering the labour market and moving around it in order to find appropriate employment (Szafrńska, 2009). In Poland academic career centres began to appear as a result of dynamic changes of the conditions on the labour market which have been taking place since Poland joined the countries with market economy. A particular role in Polish universities has been played by the EU funds, which provide a considerable support for development of education and academic career centres (Ślusarczyk and Grondys, 2011). The additional factors enhancing the development of such institutions in Poland are: the continuous disadvantageous situation of university graduates who find it difficult to get employment after they finish their studies as well as the need to adjust the education offer of universities to labour market's requirements in order to increase their attractiveness among the potential future students. The legal basis for academic career centres' activity is the Act on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions from 2008 with subsequent changes. It defines the goals and methods of the realization of active labour market policy as well as indicating the institutions which may participate in its realization (Szafrńska, 2009).

First academic career centre, based on the British example, was founded in 1993 at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. In 1997 thanks to the European Fund within the Tempus Phare programme and in co-operation with the National Employment Office, Ministry of Education and universities in Hull Amsterdam and Toruń, eight subsequent career centres were founded. In the years 2002 – 2005 the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy announced

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grant competitions for subsidies enabling the organization and development of career centres at universities within the “First Job” programme. As a result, the interest in the idea of career centre has increased and consequently such institutions have become more widespread (Szafrńska, 2009).

In the United States the development of academic career counselling began much earlier. According to Sandra Cook, it was at the beginning of the 20th century when the diversity and complexity of American universities’ educational offer caused the creation of three main directions of counselling: personal (psychological), vocational and academic. In the years 1916 – 1917 Oberlin College was the first one to include in its educational offer a course providing students with information on professional career. The crucial moment in the development of career counselling at American schools of higher education was founding the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) in 1979. It was at that time when first advisory centres which dealt with career counselling appeared at universities (DUS, Vick and Furlong, 2008).

The range of activity of Polish and foreign academic career centres

According to the Act, the basic tasks of academic career centres are:

- providing students and alumni with information about labour market and the possibilities of improving professional qualifications,
- gathering, classifying and presenting job, internship and vocational training offers,
- running a data base of students and alumni interested in finding employment,
- helping employers to find appropriate candidates for vacancies and internship,
- helping students to actively search for employment (Szafrńska, 2009).

In reality academic career centres offer a wide variety of information and advisory services such as:

- preparing students and alumni for future employment; providing them with professional help as regards entering the labour market as well as moving around it actively and consciously in a way that enables them to find an appropriate job in the shortest period of time. Students and alumni can confront their career plans with actual possibilities on the labour market, whereas employers obtain the chance to find competent and valuable workers,
- facilitating contacts between the university and employers in order to gain various job, internship and professional training offers; running the data base of students and alumni looking for a job, gathering permanent and temporary job offers, providing students with information about companies,
- maintaining contact between the alumni and the university; collecting information on their careers (whether they work according to their qualifications, how they evaluate the usefulness of knowledge gained during the studies, how much they earn, whether they are successful etc.). Such information help to motivate potential and present students to realize a similar

- career path; collective surveys of alumni's lots facilitate adjusting the curricula to the employers' needs,
- individual and group counselling; professional help in preparing all kinds of application documents according to present trends and legal requirements as well as the know-how regarding applying for a position (e.g. forms of interviews, Assessment Centre, reference letters, types of psychological recruitment tests, on-line application),
 - co-operating with academic science clubs, Academic Business Incubators, Student Business Centre Club Forum, AISEC, student self-governments etc.,
 - organizing companies' presentations at the university (seminars, practice panels, Job Fair); organizing vocational workshops, lectures, promoting the idea of academic career centres – exchanging experiences among the institutions (Mogel, 2000, Schaffer, 1999),
 - helping to determine the career paths for students and alumni, diagnosing job predispositions, preparing for job interviews, providing with all kinds of guide books and other publications for people looking for job as well as with the information on post-graduate studies, PhD studies, vocational and language courses etc (WZPCz).

As for foreign universities, the variety of services offered by academic career centres is the same. However, some schools (e.g. Harvard University) propose more diversified contact forms, for instance individual counselling through Skype or various diagnostic tools for individual use available on-line (this option is charged a fee both for students and alumni) (OCS, Basalla and Debelius, 2001).

The crucial role in the development of academic career counselling is played by integrated systems of career centres on-line. The Polish Career Centres Network was founded in December 1998. Its main goal is to exchange experiences and information as well as facilitating the creation of new career centres. Owing to such co-operation, each centre provides students with efficient help which enhances entering the active professional life. All centres associated in the network have a common goal and function in accordance with a certain set of standards. But at the same time each centre develops individual methods of work. The experiences are exchanged at regular meetings of Polish Career Centres Network members held every December in Cracow and summer training workshops in different parts of Poland.

Academic Career Centres which belong to the network are obliged to fulfil certain standards:

a) programme standards:

- organize individual and group career counselling,
- provide information on the labour market and the possibilities of improving qualifications,
- collect, classify and provide job, internship and vocational training offers,
- create data bases of students claiming to search for employment,
- gain and maintain contact with employers,

- promote the idea of academic career centres and facilitate organizing such institutions at other universities and colleges.

b) logistic and organizational standards:

- employ full-time workers,
- possess their own location,
- function for at least 3 months.

What is more, they pledge themselves to:

- promote the idea of career centres both in the academic and business environment,
- participate at least once a year in the Polish Career Centres Network meetings,
- exchange information and contacts and friendly co-operate with other associated centres.

Academic career centres are a significant potential as regards both experience and knowledge as well as in terms of organizational and logistic aspects. They agree to co-operate with all kinds of partners whose goal is to minimize unemployment among university graduates. Out of all the academic centres functioning at Polish schools of higher education, 100 are associated in the Polish Career Centres Network (Szafrńska, 2009).

In the USA the organization which integrates the advisory system at universities is the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). It is an association of professional advisors, counselors, faculty, administrators, and students working to enhance the educational development of students. They represent all states of the USA, Canada, Puerto Rico and others. At present NACADA involves about 11000 members. The main tasks of the association are to:

- expand and communicate the scholarship of academic advising,
- provide professional development opportunities that are responsive to the needs of advisors and advising administrators,
- promote the role of effective academic advising in student success to college and university decision makers,
- create an inclusive environment within the Association that promotes diversity,
- develop and sustain effective Association leadership,
- engage in ongoing assessment of all facets of the Association,
- pursue innovative technology tools and resources to support the Association,
- support universities in organizing and improving advisory centers,
- finance research programs devoted to the issue of academic advising (NACADA).

NACADA's activity results in good guidance for students and alumni and effective co-operation with enterprises aiming at matching the best candidates to the offered vacancies.

Research methodology

The questionnaire survey was run between 23rd February and 27th February 2014. The respondents were chosen among students of the Czestochowa University of

Technology, Faculty of Management. The groups involved in the survey were selected at random. 125 questionnaires were filled, out of which 120 were classified for use after they were evaluated in terms of correct fill-in, logic and cohesion of the given answers. The questionnaire included ten questions. Eight of them were close and in four questions it was possible to indicate more than one answer. Two questions were open.

The realized survey aimed at:

- determining the percentage of students who decided to apply for help in the academic career centre,
- determining the forms of career centre's aid which were applied for by students,
- identifying the fields of career centre's activity in which students would like to be helped in the future,
- determining whether career centre's activity is promoted at the university efficiently enough,
- identifying the fields of career centre's functioning in which it should improve its activity,
- diagnosing whether career centre's activity meets the requirements of the labour market,
- indicating in what way career centre's functioning can be improved.

The research results were presented in tables or graphic diagrams. They are based on the relation (1) which illustrates the frequency of the given answers of y type ($y = a, b, \dots$) for a certain question x ($x = 1, 2, 3, \dots, 7, 8$).

$$k_{x,y} = \frac{\sum e_{x,y}}{\sum E_x} \cdot 100 [\%] , \quad (1)$$

where:

$\sum e_{x,y}$ - the number of answers of y type ($y = a, b, \dots$) given for question x ,

$\sum E_x$ - the total number of answers given for question x .

Research results

The first question's aim was to find out whether students know that the academic career centre functions at their university. Only 18% of them was aware that the career centre exists at the university. 78% of respondents did not know that such an institution exists, whereas 4% claimed that there was no such centre at their university. The results for this part of the questionnaire are presented in figure 1.

The next question regarded the questioned students' knowledge of the career centre's activity fields. Among the most frequently indicated answers there were: helping to find a job offer (58%), organizing Job Fairs (57%) and organizing training (50%). The least frequent answers were helping to find internship in Poland (17%) or abroad (22%), gathering information on employers (22%) and on current situation on the labour market (22%). The results regarding this part of the questionnaire are presented in table 1 below.

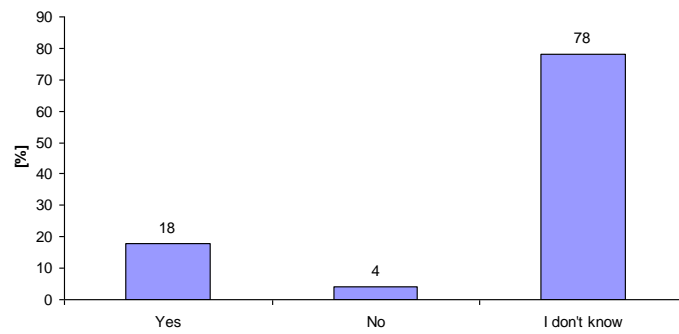


Figure 1. Respondents' knowledge about career centre's functioning at the university

Table 1. Students' knowledge of career centre's fields of activity

Form/field of activity	Indication [%]
Help to find internship in Poland	17
Help to find internship abroad	22
Gathering information on employers	22
Gathering information on current situation on the labour market	22
Organizing meetings with employers	32
Help to find vocational training offers	33
Help in preparations to set up one's own business	43
Career counselling	45
Organizing training	50
Organizing Job Fairs	57
Help to find job offers	58

The subsequent question aimed at examining what percentage of the respondents decided to apply for help at the career centre at their university. 100% of the questioned students declared they had never applied for such help. The results for this question are presented in figure 2.

In the next question students were asked to indicate those fields of career centre's activity in which they would like to be helped. The largest percentage of the respondents declared interest in help to find an appropriate job offer (67%) as well as in organizing training (63%). The lowest rate was recorded for gathering information on employers (18%) and on the current situation on the labour market (20%). The results for this question are presented in table 2.

The subsequent question's goal was to examine students' opinion whether the academic career centre is promoted at the university efficiently enough. 7% of respondents claimed that promotion activity of the career centre was very good. 35% of the students considered the promotion to be poor, while 58% of them

claimed that the career centre was not promoted at the university at all. The results for this question are presented in figure 3.

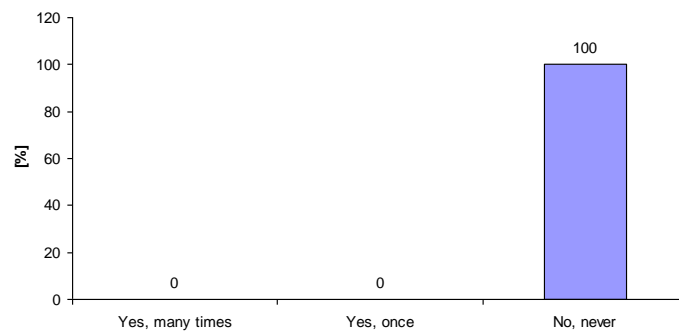


Figure 2. Applying for career centre's help by students

Table 2. Fields and forms of career centre's activity respondents would like to apply for

Form/field of activity	Indication [%]
Gathering information on employers	18
Gathering information on current situation on the labour market	20
Organizing meetings with employers	25
Help to find internship abroad	25
Help to find vocational training offers	30
Help to find internship in Poland	32
Career counselling	38
Help in preparations to set up one's own business	43
Organizing Job Fairs	45
Organizing training	63
Help to find job offers	67

In the next question the questioned students were asked to indicate those fields of the career centre's functioning in which it should increase its activity. Among the most frequently given answers there were: organizing training (67%), helping to find an appropriate job offer (60%) and helping to set up a business (52%). The lowest percentage of students pointed at gathering information on employers (18%) and career counselling (25%). The results for this part of the questionnaire are presented in table 3.

The last close question of the questionnaire examined students' opinion on the compatibility of the career centre's activity with the requirements of the labour market. The vast majority of respondents (83% in total) declared that the range of career centre's actions met the requirements. The remaining 17% of the questioned

claimed it did not meet the requirements. The results for this question are presented in figure 4.

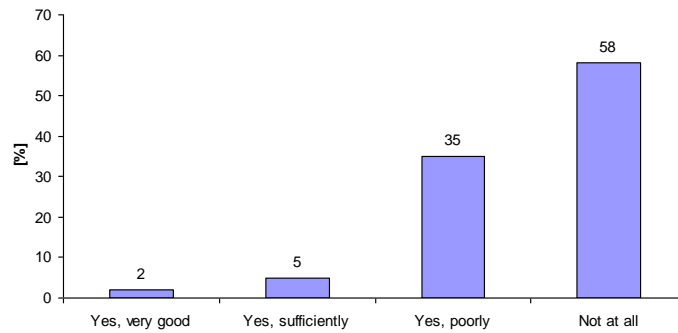


Figure 3. The extent to which the career centre's activity is promoted at the university

Table 3. Indicating the forms and fields of functioning in which the career centre should increase its activity

Forms/fields of activity	Indication [%]
Gathering information on employers	18
Career counselling	25
Help to find internship abroad	27
Gathering information on current situation on the labour market	28
Help to find internship in Poland	32
Help to find vocational training offers	33
Organizing meetings with employers	35
Organizing Job Fairs	40
Help in preparations to set up a business	52
Help to find job offers	60
Organizing training	67

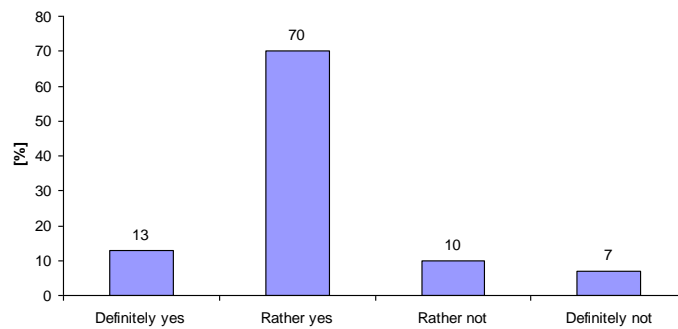


Figure 4. Compatibility of the career centre's actions with the requirements of the labour market

The questionnaire also included two open questions. In the first one students were asked to indicate other than mentioned in the previous questions forms of career centre's activity which should be introduced. None of the respondents suggested any other actions. The second open question enabled the examined students to present their own suggestions on how to facilitate the career centre's functioning. All of the respondents who answered this question suggested that it was necessary to improve all kinds of promoting actions at the university.

Summary and conclusions

The conducted survey allows to draw the following conclusions:

- Three-quarters of students does not know that an academic career centre exists at their university. The reason for such a situation may be not sufficient number of informative actions regarding the career centre's functioning at the university as well as students' slight interest in such institutions.
- Almost two-thirds of the respondents claim that the main field of the career centre's activity should be helping to find appropriate job offers. Such an approach illustrates students' poor knowledge of the range and fields of activity required from an academic career centre and determined in the Act. What is more, the current unfavourable situation of university graduates on the labour market causes that they expect support of many institutions in finding employment.
- Despite the fact that one-fifth of the examined students declare to know about the existence of the career centre at their university, none of the respondents have ever applied for its help. Determining the reasons for this situation exceeds the scope of research in this study.
- Despite the fact that none of the respondents have ever applied for career centre's help, they indicate forms and fields of help they would like to be provided. They include: help in finding an appropriate job offer, organizing training and Job Fairs as well as helping in preparations to set up a business.
- Vast majority of the respondents (93%) consider promotion actions of the career centre to be poor or claim the institution is not promoted at all. This situation may be changed through the intensification of career centre's informative activity. It seems that one of the most effective methods would be organizing meetings of full-time career centre's workers with first year students. This hypothesis is also supported by the fact that two-thirds of respondents emphasize the need to increase the career centre's activity in the field of training organization.
- Most of the examined students positively evaluate the compatibility of career centre's activity with the requirements of the labour market (13% choose the "Definitely yes" answer whereas 70% choose the "Rather yes" answer). Such an approach entirely justifies the need of career centres' functioning at universities.

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FUNKCJONOWANIE AKADEMICKICH BIUR KARIER NA UCZELNIACH WYŻSZYCH W POLSCE

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono zakres funkcjonowania akademickich biur karier na uczelniach wyższych w Polsce. Określono główne obszary ich działalności oraz porównano je z biurami karier na uczelniach zagranicznych. W części badawczej przeprowadzono analizę oczekiwań studentów, co do zakresu i formy działań oraz aktywności akademickiego biura karier na wybranej uczelni wyższej. Podjęto również próbę określenia głównych kierunków funkcjonowania akademickich biur karier odpowiadających oczekiwaniom studentów oraz sytuacji na rynku pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: akademickie biuro karier, doradztwo zawodowe, doradztwo akademickie, uczelnia wyższa, ogólnopolska sieć biur karier.

在波兰语学校的高等教育学术生涯各个中心的运作

摘要: 本文介绍在波兰高等教育学校职业中心运作的范围。它描述了他们的活动的主要领域，并将它们比喻为外国职业中心。在研究部分研究包括学生的期望的形式和范围的职业中心的运作，以及它们在所选大学的活动的分析。最后，作者尝试确定职业中心运作以满足学生的期望和对劳动力市场状况的主要方向

关键字: 学术事业中心、职业辅导、学术咨询、波兰事业中心网络高等教育的学校