

The Importance of Professional Counseling and Career Guidance in Technical Faculties

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Abstract: The point of this paper is to prove that the existence and the proper operation of a center for professional counseling and career guidance are important for the students of technical faculties. The analysis of the focus group responses demonstrates how necessary and useful is the existence of an information center for business and students, how effective is the students' training for social and professional insertion, as well as for their personal development according to their interests and aspirations. The paper also reveals the implication of the professional counseling and career guidance in developing their own educational path, related to their skills, in engaging them in extracurricular activities. It is also relevant to analyze the convenience of training stages for the development of transversal skills, for preparing the necessary steps for employment, the opportunity of specialized conferences or volunteer activities, of study visits to companies but also the organization of cultural and charity events.

Keywords: Counseling, Guidance, Focus group

Introduction

The higher education institutions and the national policy-makers should provide counseling, guidance, tutorship and follow-up systems in collaboration with students in order to support the youth from their admission in higher education until graduation and afterwards.

In the context of the European objectives of increasing employability in the labor market, the development of internal university systems for career counseling and guidance for students in the labor market is a necessity.

Even if the official internal documents of universities (eg university charts, regulations regarding students or the declaration of services available to students) counseling and career orientation and the labor market are assumed goals, institutional systems and practices in this direction are rather non-existent or non-functional.

Career education is defined by the system of procedures, facilities and activities designed to prepare the student for making the best decisions for his / her future career, under current or prospective labor market conditions (Mois, 2001). The institution's strategy must be well adapted to the changes and demands of the labor market:

- the labor market is constantly changing and it is extremely important for the institution to provide students with a complete picture of this evolution;
- the institution's strategy should be oriented towards promoting those students' skills that make them adaptable to new demands of the labor market.

The institution needs to develop the ability of the student to develop their skills in line with external demands, to create appropriate opportunities and to be prepared for lifelong learning (IAEVG, 1996).

An important role in identifying an adaptation to the needs of society is the existence of a correct information system that highlights both the requirements imposed in a future career and the resources provided by the institution in their satisfaction (Jigau, 2005).

The counseling and career guidance centers should develop the students' skills and competences as shown in fig.1

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Figure 1. The counseling and career guidance center main goals

Career guidance services in higher education take two forms:

- Study guidance services, which refer to the candidates, to the admitted ones who choose their specialization;
- Tutorial guidance services within a particular area of study offered by teachers and students during the study years.

Method

In order to demonstrate the importance of professional counseling and career guidance in technical faculties, the focus group method was used. The focus-group consists of an interview that focuses on a particular topic and a particular subject category (Florea, 2008). The interview takes place in a permissive and friendly environment.

The discussion is comfortable and often pleasant for the participants because they share ideas and perceptions with each other. Group members influence each other, responding to the ideas and comments made during the discussions. The principles of the focus group are:

- a) anything related to the subject can be said; there is no restriction;
- b) all experiences or opinions are as valuable as research;
- c) consensus is not the goal;
- d) participants respect each other;
- e) personal problems are not the subject of the discussion;
- f) it is important that everyone feel free to be himself, with his experiences, with his thoughts, his feelings;
- g) it is important for everyone to speak in his own way, to say what he has to say with his usual words;
- h) but equally important is that everyone should allow the other to freely manifest.

Results and Discussion

Among the 12th grade high school students, the number of those who know the notion of professional guidance is lower compared to those who appreciate that they have no knowledge of that, the majority (58.2%) saying that they know to some extent this notion.

More than half of the participants students (65%) mentioned that they need guidance and professional counseling for choosing the professional path, but only 16.5% of them have contacted the center for guidance and counseling.

Among the students of technical faculties, 21.3% believe that the education system is currently linked to the labor market and provides people trained to meet the labor market requirements, 7.2% of the participants are convinced that they will find work in the field they specialize in, and 28.7% know that there is a Center for Counseling and vocational Guidance. Of these, only 21% have contacted the center to be supported in decisions during school, educational and vocational guidance.

The focus group has highlighted the most common problems encountered in guidance and counseling activity, such as:

- a) The small number of students using these services, this being generated by students' reluctance to access specialized guidance services;
- b) Poor awareness of the importance of career counseling;
- c) Insufficient knowledge of beneficiaries of the career counseling concept;
- d) Difficult relationship with employers;
- e) In many centers the staff providing counseling services are teaching staff, with many teaching and research assignments and work volunteer with a very busy schedule;
- f) Difficulties in producing conclusive statistics on the absorption of graduates on the labor market;
- g) The career counselor is considered to be the person responsible only for finding a job;
- h) Clearly defining the status of the counselor.

Conclusion

The focus group analysis reveals the following conclusions:

1. The main engine to improve counseling and career guidance is increasing the awareness of the benefits of career counseling for all those who use these services.
2. Providing continuous training programs for counseling teachers, aimed at meeting the real requirements of the group would increase the number of trained counselors, which would lead to a decrease in the number of students attending a counseling specialist.
3. The optimization of counseling and professional guidance could also be achieved using standardized tests applied in order to reveal the student's interests and skills, as basic input on which the specialists can provide guidance and professional orientation action.
4. The university must have a clear, documented and accessible strategy on career education, information and guidance for the student.
5. This strategy must be impartial, individual focused, confidential, collaborative, accessible and consistent with university policy.
6. The university needs to verify the extent to which the career education strategy allows the graduate to adapt slightly to the employer's demands.
7. Students must receive information on existing offers and jobs throughout their studies. This information can continue after the student has graduated.
8. The guidance and counseling center must request information from employers on how graduates have integrated. Depending on these data, the strategy needs to be permanently corrected and adapted.
9. The guidance and counseling center must request information from employers on how graduates have integrated. Depending on these data, the strategy needs to be permanently corrected and adapted.

Increasing the awareness of the benefits of career counseling for all those who use these services is the main driver for improving counseling and career guidance. The continuous training programs, information and training programs for counselors - teachers, aimed at meeting the actual needs of the group would increase the number of trained counselors, which would lead to a smaller number of students attending a counseling specialist. The optimization of counseling and professional guidance could also be done using standardized tests applied in order to know the students' interests and skills, on the basis of which the specialists can provide guidance in the school and professional orientation action.

Technical faculties must have a clear, documented and accessible strategy on career education, related information and student guidance. There must be a department dedicated to career education, information and guidance for the student in technical faculties. This strategy must be impartial, individual focused, confidential, collaborative, accessible and consistent with the policy of the institution. This strategy must also be included in the current quality assessment procedures.

The technical faculties should verify the extent to which the career education strategy allows the graduate to easily adapt to the employer's demands. Internally, the institution must provide mechanisms through which the academic departments contribute to the student's career education. It is recommended to introduce professional

deontology courses in the academic curriculum to illustrate the specific problems of integration into the labor market.

Students must receive information on existing offers and jobs throughout their studies. This information may continue after the student has completed the study program and graduated.

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