

Students' Career Counseling - A Need in Contemporary Universities. Career Counseling Services Provided By Career Counseling Center of Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Camelia STĂICULESCU¹
Maria Liana LĂCĂTUȘ²
Ramona Elena RICHÎTEANU NĂSTASE³

Abstract

In a world of diversity, that is changing permanently, universities have to adapt to the needs of their beneficiaries and to provide a multitude of high quality services. The paper presents the need of providing counseling for students, teachers, and employers too so that the educational supply of the university to meet the employers' and labor market's needs and graduates to be able to integrate and develop themselves socially and professionally in an adequate manner, and students do not give up to their studies. The paper also analyses the counseling services provided by Career Counseling Center of Bucharest University of Economic Studies as an example of good practices.

Keywords: *career counseling, inclusion on labor market, university graduates, professional competencies, counseling center*

JEL Codes: I21, I23

Introduction

In a world of diversity that is changing permanently, universities have to adapt themselves to the needs of their students that are actually their main beneficiaries, and to provide a multitude of high quality services. Universities have a very important role both in preparing the labor force and in graduates' inclusion on labor market.

Research demonstrates that the relationship between the educational and professional training system and labor market is unbalanced. The main educational policies emphasize the need of correlation between educational supply and services

¹ **Camelia STĂICULESCU**, Bucharest University of Economic Studies,
E-mail: cameliastaiculescu@dppd.ase.ro

² **Maria Liana LĂCĂTUȘ**, Bucharest University of Economic Studies,
E-mail: mlacatus2000@yahoo.com

³ **Ramona Elena RICHÎTEANU NĂSTASE**, Bucharest University of Economic Studies,
E-mail: elena.richiteanu@dppd.ase.ro

provided by universities to students, graduates and employers in order to make all of them forces of social development.

European Commission also underlines the need of reforms in universities which have to provide services that help students to develop professional and social competences in order to improve the professional insertion of graduates (Strategic framework – Education & Training 2020).

Strategy Europe 2020 pointed out that in contemporary world, which is in a permanent change, economic growth in the next 10 years has to be smart, durable and in favor of inclusion by ensuring high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. Universities have to play an important role - they have to provide educational services in order to prepare qualified and change-adaptable labor force. We believe that educational institutions has to be more oriented to develop academic, professional and social competences that facilitate graduates successful transition from school to active life and social insertion.

1. Counseling Services for Students

Since November 2014, counseling services for students are required in all Romanian universities. This was a special request of Ministry of Education for universities in order to meet the needs of students and members of academic community. In some universities, students counseling services have been provided even before.

The activity of Career Counseling Centers is regulated by important acts such as Law of Education (2011), Frame-methodology regarding establishing and functioning career counseling centers in Romanian universities enforced by Order of the Romanian Ministry of Education (2014, 2015), Frame-methodology regarding long life counseling and career counseling services and Methodology of using Europass and Youthpass enforced by Order of Romanian Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and Ministry of Education (2014).

Beneficiaries of counseling services provided by universities can be students, both university students and pre-university students as potential candidates to university studies, graduates, professors, employers, other categories of people such as professionals or students families' members.

In the counseling literature, concepts used to describe career counseling services have particular meanings. *Career lifelong counseling* means the whole services and activities that help people no matter age or life stage to make choices regarding their education, training or jobs and to manage effectively their career.

Counseling is a relationship of human support between an expert - the counselor - and the person who asks for professional assistance - the client or the counseled person.

Psycho-pedagogical counseling is a qualified process, scientifically organized in order to provide professional assistance to people involved in educational process - students, teachers, graduates, parents/families, school principals, and so on - that are asking for support or are facing specific difficulties.

Career counseling is referring mainly to educational and professional development and to the process of developing knowledge and skills students need for effective self-management of their education and professional path. It is a process of students' training and orientation to subjects, specializations, and domains according with their personalities. Professional training and counseling is any specialized activity in a person benefit regarding a career choice, career development, professional re-training and employability increasing, ways to maintain or change a job, or any other aspects related to job.

2. Career Counseling at Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Career Counseling Center of Bucharest University of Economic Studies provides different types of services such as:

- *Psycho-pedagogical counseling* - (a) educational and vocational counseling; (b) psychological counseling and evaluation; (c) career counseling;
- *Informing students and graduates-* (a) *informing and counseling students in respect with educational and occupational paths* related to educational programs in universities and credits' system according with National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education and National Frame of Qualifications, (b) *informing and counseling students in respect with educational and occupational paths* in Bucharest University of Economic Studies at different levels of higher education, (c) *organizing specific career events* such as 'University Open Doors', educational fairs, or university tours for senior high school students, (d) *distributing counseling promotional materials*;
- *Students training in respect with professional portfolio and job interview*;
- *Companies presentations*;
- *Meeting with employers, companies management and experts* in domains of students' interest;
- *Students training* to develop transversal competences (group counseling);
- *Conferences on career choices* with national and international participation;
- *Research regarding* (a) university dropping out; (b) graduates integration on labor market, (c) career counseling services impact and improvement; (d) specific instruments for monitoring students integration level on labor market, (e) changes on labor market and in employers expectations and requirements;
- *Meetings with alumna*;
- *Career counseling programs and projects* conducted by the center itself or in partnership with entities with similar responsibilities - departments/faculties inside the university, departments from other

universities, career counseling centers from other universities, students associations, NGO's, employers, high-schools, entities education and professional counseling and training network;

- *Career counseling training programs development;*
- *Data base* with (a) information regarding the labor market (occupational outlook, job descriptions, statistics, occupational book in Romania, national occupational classification, publications in the domain), (b) initial and continue educational offer and path in the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (characteristics and structures of departments and faculties, admission requirements, educational programs, specialization opportunities, competences profiles), (c) regulations on labor market, education, and social protection (employment contract, unemployment assistance, National Education Law, work legislation, entrepreneurship), (d) job opportunities; (e) instruments used in evaluation and self-evaluation of personality (psychological tests for evaluation interests, motivation, skills, computer interactive tests, career planning guide, job seeking guide etc., (f) employments rate of Bucharest University of Economic Studies graduates, (g) research in career counseling domain.

Career counseling services provided by Career Counseling Center of Bucharest University of Economic Studies include five main types of interventions:

- *Informing students.* This is the basic activity of any process in career counseling and includes all information needed to plan, gain and maintain a job. By this type of intervention the university provides information regarding different occupations, skills, learning opportunities, trends on labor market, educational programs, educational and training institutions, governmental and non-governmental programs, job opportunities etc.
- *Career oriented education.* This is a long-run educational approach oriented to develop competences and attitudes needed to plan and develop a career, both in domain of self-knowing and personal development, and exploring educational and professional opportunities. Students gain information on labor market, receive career planning instruments, are developing skills to make choices regarding their education, training, job and life in general, have opportunities to experiment variety of roles in community and professional life.
- *Career counseling (professional counseling).* This helps students to clarify themselves in respect with the goals and expectations they have, to understand their own identity, to make informed decisions, to be responsible for their own actions, to manage their careers and the transition from school to work, from a job to another. Career counseling is a confidential form of providing support to people that face difficult situations and crises or to prevent crises. Career

counseling involves a special form of communication, a stable relationship between two persons - the counselor and his or her client, based on principle of personal development and increasing the motivation of clients so that he or she is involving actively in solving his or her personal problems and is assuming the responsibility of professional decisions he or she is making.

- *Employment counseling.* This helps individuals to clarify the goals they have regarding getting a job, to learn how to access a job, to develop skills to seek for a job and to get one (how to write a resume and/or to prepare themselves for a job interview).
- *Job placement.* This is the support given to individuals to get a job.

Career counseling is a process of career management and implies following stages (Miclea, 2004):

- *Career planning.* This consists in identifying the optimal way to develop the career and involves establishing goals, actions that have to be done, resources necessary, both human and financial resources, deadlines, responsibilities and expected results, and also strategies to go over obstacles. In the process of career counseling, career planning comes after initial stages of self-knowing and exploring of educational and occupational opportunities. Career planning involves initial evaluation of interests and competences, writing a resume and making an initial plan for employment. The goal of evaluation or testing is to help a person to know the potential and the limits he or she has by providing correct and relevant information about him or herself in order to make good professional decisions. Instruments used in the stage of career planning are tests of skills and interests. Interests' inventories and tests of work values are often used to measure preferences regarding occupations and professional life.
- *Seeking job strategies.* These are ways to search for learning and employment opportunities and involve developing skills needed in a successful employment interview, negotiation techniques. Those who are seeking jobs have to know where to search for a job, how to write a professional resume, and a cover letter. They also have to be able to find a network that will help them to find a job.
- *Career development.* It is a process of learning and adapting to different roles a person has to play a life time that involves stages in chronological order and mediation in individual's benefit among personality factors and social requirements. This process includes all psychological, sociological, educational, physical and economic factors that, combined, have impact on nature and importance of work in a person's life time.

3. Competences in students' career counseling

According with the competences framework of International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance - IAEVG, the profile of competences of persons with specific attributes and responsibilities in the domain of students' career counseling includes following key-competences:

- Demonstrate an ethical and a professional behavior adequate to their roles and responsibilities;
- Demonstrate support to client;
- Leading the client in the process of learning, career development and solving the personal problems;
- Demonstrate awareness and appreciation to cultural differences in order to effectively interact with all categories of population;
- Integrate the theory and research in the practice of career counseling and consulting;
- Demonstrate skills to design, implement and evaluate counseling programs and interventions;
- Demonstrate awareness regarding his or her own capacities and skills;
- Demonstrate effective communication skills with colleagues or clients by using adequate language;
- Demonstrate up-dated knowledge regarding education, training, employment trends, labor market and social issues;
- Demonstrate social and multi-cultural openness;
- Demonstrate skills to cooperate effectively in a team of professionals.

Persons with specific attributes and responsibilities in career counseling have specialized competences in following domains: evaluation; educational counseling; career development; individual and group counseling; management of information; consulting and coordination; research; programs/services management; community relationship building; placement (Enachescu, 2013).

4. European Networks in Career Counseling

The activity of Career Counseling Center of Bucharest University of Economic Studies is conducted according with European counseling networks Euroguidance, Eures, Ploteus, Eurodesk and Europass.

- **Euroguidance** is a network of counseling centers in Europe linked in order to promote mobility and to develop European dimension in counseling. People interest to work, study or have training in an EU country can access Euroguidance portal at <http://euroguidance.eu/> Euroguidance (<http://www.euroguidance.net/>).
- **Euresis** a network of public employment agencies/offices in Europe. It has been created to facilitate free circulation of labor force in EU and Switzerland. The European Job Mobility Portal Eures (<http://ec.europa.eu/eures/>) provide information and guidance to people who are interested of job opportunities in EU / European Economic

Area. In this network, the partners of public employment agencies/offices are trade unions, employers' associations, actors of the labor market.

- The Portal of educational offers in EU **Ploteus** (<http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus>) is working to identify the learning opportunities in Europe, Interested persons can find information regarding educational offers, educational systems, mobility programs funded by European Commission (exchange programs and scholarships). They also can find specific information for each EU country (legal framework for learning and work, costs of living, social protection, taxes, accommodation etc.).
- **Information Service for YouthEurodesk** (<http://www.eurodesk.org/> or <http://www.eurodesk.ro/index.php>) answers to youth questions regarding funding opportunities in EU and also regarding learning and work mobility, youth exchange, European voluntary activities, or to travel opportunities in a EU country.
- **Europass** (<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/home> or <http://www.europass-ro.ro/>) facilitates completing personal portfolio of documents any person may create and use to present his or her competences and qualifications in order to get recognition in EU and to have a facile access on the labor market or educational and training programs.

Conclusions

There are specific goals established for counseling services provided by universities. Among these goals we can emphasized some related to education and social integration in general: strong motivation for pre-university students to continue their studies at university level, university students able to plan and manage themselves properly their own educational and professional path, diminishing university studies drop out by personal, professional or career reasons or by incapacity to adapt to university environment, improved relationship between university students and labor market so that students to be aware of real needs and challenges of labor market, increased employability of university students and graduates.

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