

## › Effective ways of counseling a large number of students with only a small number of career advisors

### 1. Introduction

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The University of Münster is one of Germany's biggest institutions of higher education, and it is also one of the oldest established - founded on 16 April 1780. We have about 37,000 students. Every year nearly 7,000 successful graduates leave the alma mater. The Careers Service's target group is all students at Münster University, as well as graduates up to one year after they take their degree. At Münster University the Careers Service's expertise focuses on the following areas:

- › Individual career options and personality building
- › Reflexion on academic occupations
- › Preparation and evaluation of work placements and practical projects
- › Setting up contacts with employers and building up networks
- › Teaching the strategies and techniques of applying for jobs

The Careers Service has two careers advisors (in all: 3 full-time staff member plus one half-time. Administration is done by three student assistants and one apprentice). During a period of 12 months (04/2010-03/2011) it has offered about

- › 64 Workshops and seminars
- › 140 appointments for individual advice concerning questions on career prospects or personal orientation (duration app. 60 min.);
- › 125 appointments for checking application documents (duration 30 min.);
- › 350 appointments advice sessions on work placements and practical projects (duration app. 15 min).

#### Understanding of counseling in this context

"Effective ways of counseling..." In this context means not the approach of counseling (e.g. person-centered approach) but the variety of counseling settings within a Career Service. Students seek advice while dropping in with a "quick question", they attend regularly offered appointment hours or they interact with the counselor during one-hour-sessions. "Effective ways of counseling..." means for us that it is necessary to clarify the need of the individual student and to offer a variety of settings for those different needs.

### 2. What we offer our students in person (assortment)

› **SEMESTER-PROGRAMME:** Every semester we offer a wide-ranging programme of two-days-workshops designed to help in choosing a career, to fix individual positions and to teach transferable, job-related skills outside the course of study being pursued. Credit points in the context of general studies can be acquired with most of the teaching events.

› **ADVICE ON APPLICATIONS:** Twice a month, a two-hour-seminar is offered, in which students and young graduates learn to prepare and see through their job applications in the best possible way. In these seminars students are taught above all to develop an application strategy which is suited to them individually, matching their own qualifications, potential and interests with the prospects existing on the labour market.

› **APPLICATION CHECK:** Once a week students and graduates can come to see staff at the Careers Service and go through their own individual (German-language) application documents with them. The focus is not on producing a simple standard application, but on developing presentations which are tailored to the individual applicant's qualification as well as to specific job adverts.

› **SUPPORT WITH WORK PLACEMENTS:** Work placements are a central element for students making career choices, so the Careers Service offers a wide range of services not only to prepare work placements both at home and abroad, but also to provide support during them, give quality assurance and offer guidance to participants on reflexion processes. Twice a week, there are short advice sessions on all aspects of internships.

› **CAREER TALK:** Once a year we organize a day of contact talks, when students and graduates of a variety of subjects can get to meet employers. The choice of conversation topics is free and these can be agreed on by the discussion partners in accordance with their particular interests - from work placements and projects for dissertations to long-term career prospects. The Career Talk is rounded off by a programme of events in which all the applicants and employers take part.

› **CAREER DINNER:** At the Career Dinner the Careers Service brings together employers, teachers, students and graduates for a dinner together in an informal atmosphere. This consciously chosen informality promotes the exchange of ideas and experiences and encourages those taking part to enter into cross-institutional dialogue. The Career Dinners are organized by Münster University students as part of project seminars which the Careers Service offers every semester.

#### Our infrastructure (in addition)

› **PARTNER PROGRAMME:** The Careers Service offers selected employers participation in a Partner Programme. The aims of this close cooperation are:  
› preparing Münster University students for their later occupations, and  
› long-term, continuous cooperation between these companies and the Careers Service, providing benefits for everyone involved. As part of this partnership, the employers taking part offer at least one workshop or management simulation game every year, in cooperation with the Careers Service, and at the same time they have an opportunity to get to know highly motivated students.

› **INFORMATION ROOM:** The Careers Service's Information Room contains books, journals and online sources on a range of issues of interest to undergraduates looking at career options. There are now more than 600 books in stock - works of reference as well as books providing advice, with additions arriving almost every month, depending on which new books are published on the subject of studies and careers.

› **HOMEPAGE:** Online we offer a comprehensive range of websites providing detailed information on looking for work placements, as well as financing and organizing them. There are additional checklists and databases to provide help with individual research.

› **HELP IN RESEARCHING INTO CAREERS:** It is not always easy to say which areas of work or individual occupations it is that university courses prepare students for. Often the answer depends on each individual's own complex profile. Nevertheless, it can be helpful to have information on potential occupations and to know which qualifications are required for them. The Careers Service provides online and paper-based support for students and graduates looking to find their way in this complex system, helping them to research into careers and occupations.

### 4. To sum it up

From our point of view:

- › Students have different needs and not all need an one-hour-counseling-session.
- › Therefore, it is very important to clarify with the students what exactly it is they want to know and if they have used all the facilities of pre-information they have (website, databases, online-checklists, handbooks etc.) Once we have cleared the aspect it is easier to decide what kind of (counseling) offer is the best one.
- › Workshops and seminars can - in addition to staff members - be held by external instructors.
- › It is necessary to offer a variety of possibilities for students for their needs. This makes it easier to canalize inquiries from students.
- › Having students in sessions who attended a workshop first makes the talk more efficient for both - the student and the counselor.
- › Having drop-in-hours allows the students to contact us within a few days. Sometimes their questions can be answered directly while talking to a counselor, sometime we set up a strategy for the next steps the student can take and sometimes we directly arrange an appointment for a counseling hour.

### 3. Our strategies

#### 3. Our strategies to offer a good service without counseling 24/7

Whenever possible we appeal to the students self-responsibility by offering them infrastructure and advice in order to get them started to help themselves. A few examples:

- › **APPLICATION CHECK:**  
› Before a student/graduate can come to a personal application check, he/she has to take part in one of our two-hours-seminars we offer twice a month.
- › This has helped us immensely to focus on the individuals' strategy for the application during the 30-min. appointment. It makes the counseling more interesting and has a greater outcome as we have time to talk about personal qualifications concerning career prospects.
- › The experience has shown that students/graduates get so much out of the seminar that they don't need to attend personal advice.
- › If students require an immediate appointment e.g. because the application deadline is tomorrow, we kindly refer to our system; remind them (if necessary) that (most of the times) they have known for some time that they are going to apply and thus have had time to attend to their questions; offer them our information room (see above) and refer to our online checklists.

- › **INDIVIDUAL ADVICE:**  
› If, after attending workshops or other group teaching events, students or recent graduates still have any questions on career prospects or personal orientation, they can make an appointment for a personal talk with the Careers Service.
- › This brings students/graduates into individual advice sessions who have started on self-reflexion, have worked in groups and individual on their specific questions concerning their career prospects (e.g. work-life-balance, occupations, qualifications...). This often helps the counselor to focus on one specific question the student/graduate has.

- › **ADVICE ON WORK PLACEMENTS:**  
› We offer 15-min.-appointments in order to discuss questions about internships.
- › The main focus is to develop together with the students strategies for their individual research, to show them different ways of researchig and to enable them to plan and prepare a practical phase on their own.
- › Great influence to this strategy has our information room and our comprehensive range of websites and databases.
- › Furthermore we offer biennial an international fair on working abroad. Approximately 25 exhibitors come to Muenster and advice and inform the students.
- › We use networks: In close cooperation with the University of Glasgow we offer video-conferences, skype-interviews and online-workshops. In addition, students who would like an application check for Great Britain may send their application to our colleague, in order to get feedback (each exchange is set up as a one-off). This of course means that we also give feedback to their students.

- › **MAKING APPOINTMENTS VIA PHONE:**  
› We encourage our students to call us.
- › For us, it has been most efficient to make appointments over the phone as we are able to clarify the students' needs. Some require a personal one-hour-talk but when asking what it should be about you realize it is about work placements; the students need someone to go through the application; they have general questions which can be answered while attending a workshop; the information they require can be found in a handbook (...).
- › Of course, if someone has an urgent problem or seems to be very distressed regarding career prospects they can come in person as soon as possible. We also interact within the student counseling service at our university.

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### › Contact

If you wish to contact me (during the conference or afterwards), please do so:

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