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

1. Introduction
The University of Münster is one of Germany’s biggest institutions of higher education, and it’s also one of the oldest established. Founded in 1825, it now has about 32,000 students. Every year nearly 2,500 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 realization of work placements and practical projects
- Setting up contacts with employers and building agreements
- Teaching the strategies and techniques of applying for jobs

The Careers Service has two careers advisors for 26 full-time staff members plus one full-time administration (till 1998). During a period of 12 months (3/1/2000-3/2001) it has offered about

44 Workshops and seminars
110 appointments for individual advice concerning work prospects or personal orientation (lasting app. 60 min.),
19 appointments for counseling application documents (lasting 15 min.),
390 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... while dropping in with a “quick question”, they attend regularly offered appointment hours or they interact with the counseling 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 these different needs.

2. What we offer our students in person (assignment)

1. Introduction

2. Application Check

- Offering 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 participate in reflexion process. Twice a week, there are short advice sessions on all aspects of internships.
- Once a year organize a day of contact points, at which students and young graduates learn to prepare and are through their job applications in the best possible way. In these seminars students are taught above all in developing an application strategy which is suitable for them individually, matching their own qualifications, potential and interests with the prospects existing on the labour market.
- Since a week students and graduates can come to see staff at the Careers Service and go through their own individual (German-language) applications documents with them. The focus is not on producing a single standard application, but on developing presentations which are tailored to the individual applicant’s qualification as well as to specific job adverts.

3. Support with work placements

- Work placements are a central element of students reaching 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 participate in reflexion process. Twice a week, there are short advice sessions on all aspects of internships.

4. Cases

- Cases are organized by Münster University students as part of project seminars which the Careers Service offers every semester.
- The Career Dinners are organized by Münster University students as part of project seminars which the Careers Service offers every semester. The main focus is to develop together with the students strategies for their individual research, to show them different ways of researching and to introduce the students to the labor market.

5. Information Rooms

- 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.

6. To be included in career advisors

- It is not always easy for new students or new individual occupations if it that university courses prepare students for. Often the answer depends on each individual’s own complex profile. Nevertheless, it’s helpful to know information on potential occupations and to know which qualifications are required for them.

7. To sum it up

- Therefore, it is very important to clarify with the students what exactly they want to know and if they have used all the facilities of personnel they have (web-based, desktop, online checklists, handbooks etc.)
- Once we have clarified the request we are ready to decide on appropriate (cost-effective) offer for the core case.
- Workshops and seminars – in addition to staff members – be led 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.
- 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 offers the counsellors to focus on specific questions the student/graduate has.

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

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

- Application Check: In a weekly course students can come to a personal application check, which they have to take part of in case new-issues seminars we twice a month.
- It has helped us immensely to focus on the individual strategies for the application during the job interview preparation. It makes the counseling more interesting and it has a greater success 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 service that they don’t need to attend personal advice.
- Students require an immediate appointment e.g., because the application deadline is tomorrow, or we refer to our system, or email them (if necessary) that most of them have found their guidance for the coming day that they are going to apply and if they have free time to attend to their questions, otherwise our information service line abroad and offers our online counselling.

4. To sum it up

- Before a student/graduate can come to a personal application check, he/she has to take part of one of our new-issues seminars we twice a month.

- If it offers mini-appointments in order to discuss questions about internships.
- The main focus is to developing together with the students the strategies for their individual research, to show them different ways of researching and to enable them to plan and prepare a practical phase on their own.
- Students/graduates 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 offers the counsellors to focus on specific questions the student/graduate has.

- We encourage our students to call us.
- Focus, here there must be enough to make appointments over the phone or we are able to clarify the students’ needs. Some require personal one hour talk later when asking which they should do for their local area about work placements, the students need someone to go through the application, they have general questions which can be answered while describing a work placement, the information they require can be found in a handbook (...).
- If so, someone has an urgent problem or cannot be to be directly informed regarding career prospects they can come in person as soon as possible. We also interact within the student counseling service at our university.

Contact
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