

UNIVERSITY TEACHER, THE CAREER COUNSELOR OF STUDENTS?

RAMONA RICHÎTEANU-NĂSTASE*

ramonarachiteanu@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The present paper presents, in a synthetic manner, the research results obtained through interviewing teachers from university level regarding the role of career counseling of students. The research data affirm the possibility and availability of university teachers to assume the role of student's career counselor. The paper also analysis the possible advantages and disadvantages of this possible role.*

Keywords: *career counseling of students, university research, development of the student, responsibility, communication.*

In an ample paper (the doctoral thesis) regarding the present ways of career counseling of students, one of the questions raised through analyzing the theory and the practice was that if the university teachers assuming roles of career counseling of students, while acting their clear role of teaching/researching.

To answer this question, I have considered necessary a research that shall investigate, on one hand, the implications of assuming such role by the university teachers, the advantages and disadvantages of using university teachers as career counselors for students, and on the other, the skill and knowledge of university teachers about career counseling market and its development possibilities.

The present paper presents, in a synthetic manner, the results obtained by interviewing a number of twenty-five university teachers, teachers from Academy of Economic Studies from Bucharest. The interviewed teachers were selected in a relatively balanced manner: 4 university professors, 6 associate professors, 7 university lecturers, 3 assistant professors and 5 university assistants.

The interpretation of the revealed data obtained by using the interview guide for the university teachers shall use string of questions as

* Assistant Ph.D, -Department for Teachers Training, ASE, Bucharest.

it appears in the interview guide, although, in some cases, I skipped to other questions as the discussion developed.

a. Have you ever given/do you give students career counseling? How often? What was consisted of? What place does it occupy in your educational activity?

Of the 25 university teachers, only one teacher mentioned that he would never provide career counseling for students.

As the frequency of giving such a service, 19 teachers indicated that they carry out the work every week, and only five teachers carry out sometimes (I carry out this type of activity, usually in the second semester of the academic year opposite the three quarters of the people I work with a diploma or dissertation work; I give advice to my students for careers in the consultation program and even seminar activities).

Some teachers have appreciated the weight of these activities in their program (3 teachers): 10-15% of current activities undertaken by them.

The most frequent content of the career counseling conducted was:

- Competences and responsibilities of various occupations (8 mentions); *„the discussions focused on the necessary skills required for certain jobs“*;
- Possibilities or employment opportunities (7 mentions) *"Year 2 and 3 students, master students are very interested in the career prospects", sometimes, at my courses I make assessments regarding the job opportunities in certain areas that I know.*
- Choosing a job (5 mentions) *"I give counseling at least once a month in a master programs. It consisted of advising on career choices;*
- Information about occupations (5 mentions);
- Motivation for the teaching career (5 mentions);
- Alternative work and employment differences between public sector and one private place (5 references): *"counseling takes place informally, often on specific issues related to the possibility of student employment in a particular field, the advantages / disadvantages of the public system against the private one;*
- Selfmarketing skills (writing a CV, letter of intent, content, presentation at an interview) (5 mentions) *"identify ways in which students can increase their probability of being employed in an area attractive to them";*
- Information about jobs (4 references)
- Ways of finding a job (3 mentions) *"The discussions aimed at, most often, the possibility of finding a job corresponding to the initial training, or future positions in the career field";*
- Optional activities (3 references)

- Applying for a scholarship (3 references)
- Career development (2 references)

Of the 25 academics interviewed, 16 believe that the career counseling has an important role for further development of the student. The reason consist in part by the impact and the responsibility that the opinions and suggestions of a teacher have on students: *"due to the responsibility and the impact of your views and / or suggestions, as a teacher have on student`s setting the professional road"*. *"I appreciate that this activity is particularly important as we prepare students for practical work"*, *"I carry on such activities during the consultations that I offer and I consider this an important point since the completion of teaching is, from my the point of view, finding a job"*; *"In my work it occupies an important place. The students that I work with are future teachers and therefore, I believe I have to offer them maximum of assistance regarding this profession, the skills and responsibility that it requires"*; *"This activity is very important and I think that it should be given a much greater importance."*

b. Do you feel ready to give career advice? If not, what do you feel it missies you?

Of teachers surveyed, 18 would assume the role of career counselor for students, 5 teachers only partially, and 3 teachers consider that they would not like this role in particular. Note that in none of the interviews there was not a clear denial of this role.

"Partly yes, because of training and constant contact with the market, with different economic mechanisms, the experience as a teacher, trainer and consultant. Partly not, because I believe that such advice should be conducted in a more structured manner, in which you can benefit from a better assessment of the skills and personality of the vocational guidance applicant".

Arguments for which teachers would adopt such a role refer to competencies (8 responses) and relevant experience in the field (5 answers) that teachers think that they own: *"I feel ready to give career advice, especially in my areas of competence"*, *"Not particularly. I feel the need for more thorough training in the field."*

Most, though they would like and would assume an advisory role, have real concerns about the quality of advice that would be able to give. The problems they consider that they would meet concerns: the need for thorough preparations in the field (10 responses), carrying out career counseling in a systematic, structured and organized manner (5 responses), specific methodological expertise (5 answers) *"there should be a specific methodology that you can follow to allow you to recieve a feedback from the applicant"*; *"Perhaps I lack some tools to do career counseling in an organized, systematic manner. I do this based on my reading about this topic, but I do not*

have career counseling skills acquired during training courses. I think it would be interesting to follow such courses."

However, nine of those interviewed remarked that any teacher should be trained in this field, and six of them even wished to deepen or to follow certain courses of specialization: *"I think it would be necessary to prepare any professor for pedagogy"*.

c. Do you believe that academic teachers should have career counseling knowledge? If so, what would they be?

Twenty-two respondents feel that the academic teachers should have knowledge of career counseling for students, four of them saying it would take at least a basic level of preparedness in this area: *"I believe that academic teachers should have in the "portfolio" of skills also the career counseling and they should teach students according to market demands", "Yes, at least a basic training on methods and techniques of counseling."*

Issues raised by respondents as essential contents for the training of teacher for careers counseling were:

- employment (15 respondents): national and sectoral strategies (6 respondents), economic development at different levels (national, regional or local) (4 respondents), the degree of insertion of that university graduates in the labor market (2 respondents), areas of possible insertion for the graduates (3 respondents);

- methodology for career counseling (8 respondents): methods to evaluate the student's personality (2 respondents), methods of assessing student skills (2 respondents), diagnostic and evaluation tools (4 respondents);

- Career Management (2 respondents);

- conscious and responsible choice of a career (2 respondents);

- career obstacles and possible ways of solving them (one respondent).

Beyond the necessary knowledge, some interviewees emphasized the need to exist a guide for teachers on career counseling for students (2 answers *"I think we should read a guidebook made by a specialist"*) or the allocation of a special hour in the educational plan for career counseling (2 answers *"I think it would be useful even the distribution of some hours in the educational program"*).

Another respondent even added that *"if a teacher fails to advise a student, he has a responsibility to guide him toward a professional student counseling center"; "For complex issues associated with counseling, the teacher can guide students to a center (or some specialists) who specializes in this type of activity."*

Besides the domain-specific knowledge, teachers interviewed also noted the role of communication and socio-psycho-pedagogical skills to

achieve a successful career guidance and advice ("However, students are quite dismayed, not only during this crisis we are going through, but in general they do not have the necessary professional and moral compass of a generation who actually knows what wants from the future. A solid background in counseling and psychological knowledge would help us and the new students!")

d. Do you think that teachers should have (paid) academic duties of career counseling? If so, would you like such a role?

Except for six people, all teachers interviewed would assume the roles of career counseling. Negative responses were due to the fact that "there should be someone especially for that" (4 answers) or simply do not see themselves adopting and practicing this role.

All those who responded positively (and would take advice and career roles) believe that they should be paid to some teachers (12 responses) "I think some teachers might have paid duties for career counseling in conditions in which they carry out this work on a regular basis, with some regularity. Yes, I would like to have such a role because you can offer your experience to help young people to establish some coordinates for a future career", "not all teachers, only those that have good pedagogical training, or should enter into any time schedule of a teacher" (3 answers) "at least 5-10% of activity could be paid as counseling", "it would be useful to include them in the paid duties", "I believe that they should not be paid, but the tasks should be taken."

Most (14 respondents) consider to be fit for this role because it complements the teaching role: "I would like the role of counselor, which I appreciate as complementing the teaching, especially for a specialist in psychology or pedagogy."

If, however, would have to choose between the two roles, most (9 respondents) would not give up his teaching career: "I would like this position but I would not give up teaching career at the expense of counseling".

e. What are / would be the advantages of using academics as advisers to students career?

The advantages highlighted by the interviewed teachers are:

Responses	Frequency
A better understanding of the environment / labor market	10
Good communication / effective with students	8
Relations strong, close / open / trust between students and teachers	7

Experience in working with youth, experience within the department	6
Knowing the human personality types	4
Large number of teachers (compared with counselors) that could carry out simple advice	4
Knowing the specific requirements of various professions	3
Psychological and pedagogical skills of teachers	3
Access to national and international professional information	3
Orientation of students to the most suitable work	2
Right, informed decisions	2
Can assess students' potential in relation to labor market	2
The approach of those trained to the moment of career debut	1
Combining expert advice with psychological advice	1
Recommendation very good students	1

The advantages of using teachers are clear: due to the experience with young people, the opening to work field, the knowledge of this field but also due to pedagogical skills, the teachers from university system are becoming resources that could be used on career counseling of students .

f. What are / were the disadvantages of using academics as advisers to students career?

Responses	Frequency
The high load of teachers / Insufficient time for other activities	18
Insufficient pedagogical training of teachers / limited competence	9
Insufficient knowledge of business and labor market for some teachers	6
Disinterest in counseling activities of some teachers / devaluing these activities	5
Formal communication, cold (standard answers, superficial) that can block a student or have it confused / inhibit in seeking help from a counsellor	4
There are no disadvantages	4

Subjectivity in assessing students	3
Fear of students being decompensated	1
Exaggerating the importance of discipline / field in which specialists	1
The emergence of assessment risk and prediction if the teacher training and experience is not appropriate	1

From the above issues we see that the greatest risks arise from insufficient training of teachers in psycho-pedagogical field and knowledge about the labor market, but also that most of them are overwhelmed by bureaucratic activities, thing that could block the counseling work by providing standard formal or insufficiently substantiated answers.

g. Do you know career counseling services offered to students? What are those? What are they offering? Are they relevant to students?

Of the 25 interviewed teachers in the university system, eight admitted they do not know what career counseling services for students exist (do not know a formal frame for counseling services for students), and four stated bluntly that those services do not achieve their objectives (*" the diversity and degree of consistency of information should be much higher"*).

Among those who identified a series of career counseling services offered to students were identified as follows:

Responses	Frequency
Departments in the universities with the role of information, guidance, career counseling, interface with employers	10
Offers online job / resume writing, job interview tips	5
Job Fairs	4
Mentoring / tutoring for a teaching career after graduation	4
Services offered by / through student associations	4
Writing a CV, a letter of motivation	3
Agencies For Employment	3
HR Departments	3
Internships	2
Job offers on the ASE website	2
Labor market information services, economic statistics	1

For data completeness we quote some statements of the interviewed teachers:

"In ASE is such department that directs candidates to specialization to match them, and after graduation to a job."

"Marketing Counseling and Career Guidance Office of ASE offers various types of service to students: information, advice and career guidance, interface with employers. For example, 15 students have benefited from an internship and 5 were employed during 2009 through BMCOC etc. Services were provided through direct communication by telephone or e-mail."

"I do not know the existence of such benefits, tailored to the needs of students or recent graduates, usually they are granted in accordance with art. 76 and Article 58 of the law. 5 (2) of Law 116/2002 by territorial employment agencies. I can appreciate their relevance."

h. How these services should be further developed to support students?

The existence of a counseling office in any university is a minimum absolutely necessary for career counseling services for students (8 responses). Equally important, teachers felt the need to increase the professionalism of those who occupy roles or hold activities of career counseling for students (8 responses). This is achievable through the preparation of specialists in the field (3 responses) but also through their pedagogical preparation (5 answers).

On the other hand, teachers think that the actions of diversification counseling services must also work towards the inclusion of such specific modules in the curriculum of students (5 responses) or at least offer the possibility of periodic meetings with students (2 responses).

Other actions aimed at diversification and building better relations with labor market: employers, local governments, NGOs (6 responses) or the formation of networks of centers with the role of career counseling (4 responses), even through the student associations (3 answers).

The interviewed teachers revealed as an alternative the employment of teachers and counselors (10 responses). Variants offered were that of mixed teams of academics who have some basic knowledge and some advanced knowledge of counseling, special trained people in each departments, or mentoring programs organized by the Department for Teacher Training.

"To support the students, I believe that for each specialization, in ASE would have to be a team of teachers who have basic knowledge in counseling, and this team should include at least one person with advanced counseling knowledge."

"Establishment, in every department of the university, of special positions for teachers who have competence, ability and willingness to provide these services."

Another desire is the increase of the visibility of such counseling services: "*be more "visible", few students from ASE know of the existence of this specialized office.*"

Although the research conducted represents only a limited fragment of the reality, the perspective being only qualitative, I consider that the revealed data is very important.

Analysis of the research data affirms the possibility and availability of university teachers to assume roles of career counseling of students. Advantages highlighted by them concern their complex capacity to understand the labor market, communication and close relationships / openness / trust with students and also the experience in working with youth.

Also, the research data highlights the need for different ways of career counseling tailored to students' needs, closer to labor market and further to the strictly psychological approach based mainly on individual counseling.

REFERENCES

1. Chelcea, Septimiu, (2004), *Metodologia cercetării sociologice. Metode cantitative și calitative*. Ediția a II-a, București, Editura Economică.
2. Nayak, A.K.; Rao, V.K., (2002), *Guidance & career counseling*. New Delhi, APH Publishing.
3. Osipow, Samuel H., (1982), *Research in career counseling: an analysis of issues and problems*, în *The Counseling Psychologist*, Vol. 10, Nr. 4, pag. 27-34.
4. Patton, Wendy; McMahan, Mary, (2006), *Career development and system theory. Connecting theory and practice*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.