

EXTRA ACADEMIC ACTIVITY OF STUDENTS, INCLUDING EMPLOYMENT

Eugeniusz Niedzielski

Department of Organization and Management
Faculty of Economics
University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn
e-mail: koiz@uwm.edu.pl

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A b s t r a c t

With the aim of increasing their opportunities for employment after graduating, during their studies students undertake various activities to expand their competences in the areas of experience, knowledge and skills. Such extra academic activity (EAA) includes voluntary service, activities in student organisations and, increasingly frequently, paid employment. As the survey presented in this paper shows, students undertake employment to generate the means for covering the costs of studies and additional expenses not financed by their parents. This offers students a certain level of financial freedom and simultaneously develops their employee competences. The forms and scope of employment are diversified from permanent employment through different types of fixed term contracts to occasional employment. Availability of full time students defined by the plan of studies is the main limitation to employment. Despite the increasing awareness of the usefulness of professional experience in satisfying the expectations of future employers, some students (25%) do not show any extra academic activity, including in the area of employment.

POZAEDUKACYJNA, W TYM PRACOWNICZA, AKTYWNOŚĆ STUDENTÓW

Eugeniusz Niedzielski

Katedra Organizacji i Zarządzania
Wydział Nauk Ekonomicznych
Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie

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A b s t r a c t

Aby zwiększyć szansę pozyskania zatrudnienia po ukończeniu studiów, studenci podejmują już w czasie studiów różnorodną działalność poszerzającą ich kompetencje w zakresie doświadczenia, wiedzy i umiejętności przydatnych w przyszłej pracy. Aktywność pozaedukacyjna studentów obejmuje wolontariat, działalność w organizacjach studenckich i coraz częściej pracę zarobkową. Jak

wykazały badania prezentowane w artykule, studenci podejmują pracę by pozyskać środki na pokrycie kosztów studiowania oraz dodatkowych wydatków niefinansowanych przez rodziców. Daje to studentom pewną swobodę materialną, a jednocześnie pomnaża ich kompetencje pracownicze. Formy i zakres zatrudnienia są zróżnicowane, od stałego zatrudnienia poprzez różne umowy okresowe do okazjonalnych zatrudnień. Głównym ograniczeniem zatrudnienia jest dysproporcjonalność studentów stacjonarnych określona planem studiów. Mimo rosnącej świadomości o przydatności doświadczenia zawodowego, spełnieniu oczekiwań przyszłych pracodawców, część studentów (25%) nie wykazuje żadnej aktywności pozaedukacyjnej, w tym pracowniczej.

Introduction

The consequences of the surplus of supply over the demand for labour over recent years also affect graduates from higher schools. Unemployment among young people, including those with higher education, is higher than in the older age groups. According to the report “The Young Ones 2011” („Młodzi 2011”) commissioned by the Chancellery of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland, only a small percentage of employment offerings were addressed to the graduates of higher schools and 33% of those were internship offers (*Młodzi...* 2011). Difficulties with finding employment by people with a bachelors or masters degree results not only from a lack of equilibrium in the labour market but also from maladjustment of the higher education dimensions and structures, including the professional profiles, to the current market needs. Some evaluations indicate clearly that the “current curricula of studies do not offer students a chance to face real business challenges” (KLIMEK-MICHNO 2012, p. 96). In the above-mentioned report, the following were indicated as the major barriers to entry of young people into the labour market (*Młodzi* 2011, p. 138):

- maladjustment of skills demanded by employers and held by the potential employees,
- dissonance between the work related expectations of the graduates and the situation in the labour market,
- discriminatory practices of employers concerning young candidates for employment,
- unclear formulation of the employer’s expectations and difficulties in identification of real competences of the potential employee,
- difficulties in start-up of independent business activity.

The contemporary labour market does not offer young graduates stable and well paid jobs permitting self-fulfilment and development in the future. The situation in the labour market is one of the causes of a high fluctuation of young employees taking current short-term jobs on their path to finding employment consistent with their aspirations. Longer-term nonfulfillment of expectations frequently results in emigration and hence people aged 20–29

years form the largest group among economic emigrants. Despite the large extent of migrations, registered unemployment among people with higher education was 12.4% as at the end of 2014 (*Bezrobocie rejestrowane* 2015, p. 18).

The extensive system of private higher education does not always assure the appropriate level of education and is focused on cheap courses of studies, which does not always find market acceptance and is one of the causes of the graduates' difficulties in finding employment. M. Kabaj, among others, drew attention to that fact noticing that a situation may occur, "where the volumes of higher education would exceed significantly the needs of the economy causing new unemployment, this time about higher schools' graduates, and it seems that we would deal with such a situation of graduates in the nearest future as a consequence of an unrestrained and radical increase in the numbers of students at higher schools" (KABAJ 2008, p. 278). The demographic low will decrease the number of candidates and verify the professional attractiveness as well as that of courses of studies and schools.

The extra academic activity, including employment, during studies plays an important role in development of the future professional opportunities of the graduates. The choice of the scope and forms of activity chosen by students may influence their future professional careers. With that in mind, students undertake: employment on commission contracts and specific work contracts (52%), participate in student internships (51.5%), and even try to take permanent employment (13%), or establish their own business (3.1%) (*Badanie studentów* 2013, p. 6). This activity is focused not so much on obtaining funds, but mainly on enrichment of the CV with experience and competences appreciated in applying for a job. Besides the employment activity, students also engage in voluntary services (30.5%), activities of student organisations (28.5%), or scientific clubs (25.9%) (*Badanie studentów* 2013, p. 20). According to the evaluation by students, the activities most helpful in obtaining employment after graduation are work during studies and internships related to the course of studies (94.4%), activity in student organisations (e.g. AIESEC) and external scholarships (e.g. Erasmus) (87.5%) (*Pierwsze kroki...* 2013, p. 23). The significance of employment and extra academic activity of students for competitiveness in the labour market was the inspiration for conducting the surveys presented in this paper.

Objective and scope of study

The objective of the study was to evaluate the causes, scope and forms of employment and other areas of extra academic activity of full time students. The research sample consisted of 192 final year second level students from the

Faculty of Economic Sciences at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, studying courses in management and economics. Final year students of masters degrees had many opportunities to develop extra academic activity during their studies and hence their opinions offer the basis for a wider interpretation of the survey results. The questionnaire-based survey was conducted by electronic means and participation was voluntary. The sample consisted of more female (115) than male students (77), which reflected the gender ratios of students for those particular studies. The number of respondents from courses in management and economics were similar (97 and 97 persons respectively). These courses of study belong to those most frequently chosen nationally. This results in strong competition among graduates from those courses in search of a job.

Results of studies

Professional experience is an important criterion in employee recruitment. The professional activity of students increases their competitiveness in the labour market after completing education. Awareness that the requirement of experience plays an increasing role in obtaining a job is common among students. This is confirmed by the fact that only 16% of the respondents have never worked. Most frequently, students performed occasional jobs (41%); however, some of them (11%) had worked for longer than a year. Financial issues related to payment for studies or personal expenses, including holidays, were dominant reasons for taking paid employment. Financial benefits were in most cases combined with the opportunity of obtaining professional experience. Necessity (lack of funds for studies, demand by parents), willingness to improve their living standards (financial independence) and sometimes excess of free time (24% of responses) were additional reasons for taking paid employment. However, despite these reasons, acquiring professional experience was an expectation and the derivative outcome of employment. The results of those studies differ from the results of national studies in which students indicated willingness for obtaining professional experience (60% of responses) as the main reason for taking employment during studies (*Badanie studentów 2013, Młodzi...* 2011). The differences in the results of the surveys could result from the fact that the region of Warmia and Mazury is among the poorest, with the lowest income levels in the country. Hence, the need for generating income is the major reason for undertaking employment during studies among students from this region. Obtaining professional experience is the secondary benefit.

The place of employment and function held were highly diversified (Tab. 1). In most cases, these were positions requiring no special qualifications. Employ-

ment was mainly based on commission contracts or specific work contracts. The “black” work, i.e. work without a contract, was also significantly represented. Such employment, in addition to being an infringement of the law, does not allow the student to document professional employment and is considered by employers as evidence of not respecting the principles of social responsibility. Fixed term contracts or unspecified term contracts occurred in individual cases and in practical terms they are unavailable to students.

Table 1
Place of student employment and position held

Place of work/position	% of responses N=124
Bar, club, restaurant/waiter	27
Shop/sales assistant	23
Office/secretary	18
Call Centre/telemarketer	14
Temporary Employment Agency /hostess	11
At home /translator (freelancer)	8

Source: own surveys.

The working hours of students are also diverse. In most cases, students work on weekends only, but for longer hours; from 9 to 11 hours and longer (30 responses). A relatively high proportion of students worked 3–4 times a week for 5–6 hours (23 persons) or 7–8 hours (10 persons) while 25 students worked 5–6 times a week for 5 to 8 hours. The other persons worked more occasionally with different frequencies from week to week and for different hours. The structure of work frequency and time depends to a significant extent on the availability of students defined by their plan of classes at school.

The Internet (80% responses), friends (42%) or press announcements (19%) were the main sources of information on jobs for students. It was relatively rare for students to use the Bureau of Careers operating at the University and its information on available jobs.

Availability is the main criterion dictating student employment (Tab. 2). Earlier professional experience is often significant while in some cases characteristics consequential to the special requirements of the job, such as gender in the case of manual work, knowledge of the language (work at the reception, translation) or dedication in the job of telemarketer, are also of importance. Not satisfying those requirements is a barrier to obtaining the job. The other barriers are a shortage of jobs and competition resulting from high unemployment and, sometimes, laziness (5% of responses).

Table 2

Student employment conditions

Recruitment criteria	% of responses* N=124
Availability	80
Experience	42
Qualifications	31
Gender	25
Place of residence	22
Course of studies	14
Command of foreign languages	10
Other: elocution	8

* – multiple choice option

Source: own surveys.

In total, 74% of the respondents rated the situation in the labour markets for students and graduates as bad or very bad. This covers not so much the availability of jobs, because a high proportion of graduates find employment, but the employment conditions such as wages, lack of contracts or unfavourable contractual conditions. Both working and non-working students expressed negative opinions about the labour market. Those opinions matched the results of the national surveys (*Pierwsze kroki...* 2013, p. 28). At the same time, the referenced surveys showed that students considered their chances in the labour market as rather high (*Młodzi...* 2011, p. 25). This indicates a certain contradiction resulting from applying the stereotype, common opinions on the labour market in general and the real evaluations concerning graduates.

The opinion on the opportunities in the labour market also influences the migration plans of students. Among the students surveyed, 33%, including the majority of those working, did not intend to search for a job abroad while 22% of the working and a half of non-working respondents considered permanent emigration. The others considered temporary migration (12%) or made the decision dependent on the future situation (23%). Students that did not work and those living in the countryside projected migration abroad more frequently (65%).

More than half (60%) of the students surveyed did not use extracurricular practice and internships. Remunerations for student internships and practice are a controversial issue and there is a difference of opinion concerning them. Interns and practicing students indicate that the lack of remuneration is irritating. Employers, on the other hand, claim that the results of work by practicing students or interns do not cover the costs of employing them. Indifferent to the lack of remuneration for internships/practice (25% of respondents agree to lack of remuneration), it is important for students to

have them in companies with an established image so as to receive good references from an esteemed company and to get the opportunity of establishing professional contacts helpful in finding employment in the future.

Only 43% of the respondents participated in activities of student scientific clubs, of which the major benefits are the opportunity of meeting interesting people (69% of responses) and acquiring organisational experience (60%). Expanding knowledge through participation in conferences and training programmes is appreciated less.

The students surveyed showed relatively good knowledge of student organisational functioning in the school, but they did not show much involvement in their activities. AIESEC, with 166 responses, was the best-identified organisation followed by the Academic Enterprise Incubator (131 responses) and Erasmus (89 responses). Only 15 respondents, however, were AIESEC members while only individual persons indicated membership in other organisations. Regardless of the membership and activity in different organisations, including Students' Self-Government, student clubs (cultural, sports, tourist, etc.) and volunteer services, students recognised the benefits from extra academic activity (Tab. 3). Those benefits which expand competences and increase opportunities for obtaining a job after graduation, according to the students, included mainly development of creativity, skills of working under time pressure, skills of self-presentation and organisation of one's own and team work.

Table 3
Skills and competences developed by extra academic activity

Competences	% of responses* N=124
Creativity, inventiveness	153
Skills of working under time pressure	133
Skills of self-presentation	121
Negotiation skills, assertiveness	78
Communication skills, skills of working in the team	22
Skills of organising own work	68
Knowledge on management	52
Independence	47

* – multiple choice option
Source: own surveys.

After graduation, the vast majority of the students surveyed would like to work in line with the course of studies completed. One third of them dream about establishing their own business. The results of surveys indicate that students rate positively their chances for finding work consistent with their education after graduation (coefficient 2.66 on a scale of 4 – very high to

1 – very low). A positive perception of a professional future may result from the experience acquired from work during their studies and other forms of extra academic activity. Those experiences increase the feeling of self-confidence and belief in their opportunities in the labour market.

Conclusion

The real evaluation of the situation in the labour market means that students undertake different forms of activities that expand their competences and thus increase their chances of obtaining satisfactory employment. Paid work is the main form of student activity, which is not only the source of funds but also offers benefits potentially increasing their employment potential through the acquisition of practical knowledge, establishing relations, obtaining knowledge of the labour market, skills of self-presentation, etc. Unfortunately, a proportion of students (25%) do not undertake such activity. Limited availability resulting from the process of studies is one of the barriers to employment for full time students. Various forms of flexible employment and flexible work time are helpful. Common awareness of the usefulness of professional experience gained during studies in applying for employment after graduation does not always translate into actual extra academic activity. The presented studies showed that both the awareness of the need for such activity and the actual extent of such activities are increasing significantly.

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