

Providing Career Services to International Students:

University of Washington Bothell Career Center

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Executive Summary

The following report investigates research literature and best practices with regard to providing career services to international students on U.S. college campuses. Following is a review of recommendations for the University of Washington Bothell Career Center for continued improvement in this area. Lastly, a plan with concrete action steps is provided to assist stakeholders in implementing recommendations.

Key Findings

- International students face more challenges than domestic students when it comes to career development and placement (Crockett & Hays, 2011; Miller & Kerlow-Myers, 2009; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Yang, 2002).
- Cultural barriers, including language barriers, impact a students' ability to prepare for and engage in the U.S. job search (Crockett & Hays, 2011).
- Online services are suggested to be a best practice with regard to increasing the utilization of career services by international students (Yang, 2002).

Key Recommendations

1. Increase partnership and collaboration opportunities between the Career Center, Student Life, International Student Services, and others by initiating an "International Student Success Alliance."
2. Update Career Center website to provide more resources for international students.
3. Provide professional development opportunities for professional and student staff, including joint trainings with International Student Services.
4. Engage in targeted assessment to determine if international student needs are being met effectively.

A Review of Literature

The needs of international undergraduate students are unique and understudied compared to those of their domestic peers. Because of financial concerns across higher education, international students are a growing population on college campuses that oftentimes do not receive the care and services they need to succeed. Specifically, current literature states that international students face more challenges than domestic students when it comes to career development and placement for reasons including acculturative stress, language barriers, differences in cultural values, and lack of validated career assessment measures (Crockett & Hays, 2011; Miller & Kerlow-Myers, 2009; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Yang, 2002).

Before exploring these concepts, it is important to note the underutilization of services among students of color in general on college campuses, with Asian international students in particular being at a higher risk of not using services due to negative attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help (Zhang, 2000). Zhang also noted that higher levels of acculturation resulted in more positive attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, indicating that acculturation may help reduce the cultural stigma around seeking help. Acculturation helps to mitigate the effects of cultural barriers on successful counseling relationships and academic success. Cultural barriers, including language barriers, impact a students' ability to prepare for and engage in the U.S. job search (Crockett & Hays, 2011).

International students are sometimes categorized by unconscious stereotypes attributing struggles with a language or cultural practice to a lack of intelligence, ability, or skill; as a result, international students may face discrimination and racism, particularly on college campuses. The U.S. deficit model of analyzing difference can lead to decreased confidence in students who believe that their unique skills and talents are not applicable or not good enough for application

in a U.S. job or internship (Kerka, 2003). Career development professionals may unknowingly patronize students by adhering to a pathological perspective as opposed to a developmental perspective (Yoon & Portman, 2004). This can lead to dissatisfaction with services, lack of desire to seek help, and lack of confidence with regard to personal abilities.

International students generally can thrive more in academic environments that are similar to those they are familiar with. In many cases, the student is familiar with a formal academic learning environment. International students who receive career and internship information and search strategies in an academic setting, as a participant in a workshop or as a student in a career development course, may feel more satisfied and confident with their ability to navigate the U.S. job search process. International students were found to value a counseling relationship that “paralleled classroom learning and viewed the counselor as an authority figure” (Crockett & Hays, 2011, p. 71). Partnerships between university career centers and academic affairs may prove more effective when demonstrating this relationship between counselor and student.

Career development professionals should understand the unique challenges facing international students on U.S. college campuses, and should recognize the importance of providing services that are sensitive to these needs while providing the appropriate amount of challenge. Implications for career counselors include providing group workshops and information sessions for those of similar backgrounds, which can increase comfortability and confidence with regard to the topic of careers. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, career counselors can employ narrative techniques when working with international students that encourage them to share their story in their own words, thereby allowing the counselor to pull out important themes, cultural nuances, beliefs, family roles, expectations, and even political and

occupational trends within their country of origin (Singaravelu, White, & Bringaze, 2005).

Students themselves are their own experts, and career counselors should seek to validate and encourage international students to share their stories.

Best Practices in International Student Career Services

Rooted in the current literature on international students, the following section highlights a few best practices in providing career services to this population.

Campus Partnerships and Outreach

The Career Center at the University of Washington Bothell (UWB) demonstrates a best practice with regard to its sustainable partnerships with academic units across campus, leading to 79% of enrolled students scheduling an appointment with the Career Center during the 2011-2012 academic year (Office of Student Services Annual Report, 2011-2012). Academic partnerships allow Career Center staff to access all students in Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences program twice during their capstone quarter; many international students access services via this relationship or by recommendation from a faculty member.

The Multicultural Career Conference (MCC), held by the University of California Santa Cruz's (UCSC) Career Center, is an example of a best practice with regard to programming targeted to diverse student needs (Multicultural Career Conference, 2012). Though not intended specifically for international students, this event brings alumni of color back to campus for a day-long series of workshops, panels, and keynote speakers intended to create networking opportunities, disseminate important career-related information, and draw connections to future careers as students of color. Through a partnership with the Educational Opportunity Programs and the Alumni Association, the MCC also provides opportunities for mentorship beyond the conference, allowing students to maintain relationships with alumni of color who are successful

professionals. International students would benefit from a conference like this, and particularly for those interested in working in the United States after graduation, it would be highly beneficial to create a network of other international professionals within a given field as a source of guidance and support.

Online Resources

Online services are suggested to be a best practice with regard to increasing the utilization of career services by international students (Yang, 2002). In examining benchmark institutions with regard to Career Services, few appear to be providing necessary resources to their international student population, based upon a web search and availability of web resources specifically for international students. The University of Illinois Springfield and Western Washington University were two comparable institutions that provided specific online resources for diverse populations, including international students.

The University of Pennsylvania Career Services website has a page dedicated to “The U.S. Job Search for International Students,” including information regarding citizenship/residency, immigration law, cultural differences in the job search, how to communicate visa status to a potential employer, the importance of English language skills, and how to maximize chances of landing a job. Also interesting is a list of companies that have hired international students since 2006 organized by industry type and organization name (The University of Pennsylvania Career Services, 2012).

By providing online resources that target international student needs, career services professionals can demonstrate awareness of the needs of the population. Furthermore, online resources and services are a preferred method of interaction for today’s generation of college students.

Recommendations for UWB Career Center

It is clear that the UWB Career Center is a front-runner in the field of career services in higher education for a number of reasons. Efficiency in staff response to an 80% increase in total student appointments during 2011-2012, the launch of the Student Employment Initiative, and high demand for Career Exploration and IAS Internship classes are just a few of the Career Center's accomplishments over the past year (OSS Annual Report, 2011-2012). While it is clear that the international student population is accessing Career Center services, classes, and events, this population is still vulnerable to not accessing services due to language and cultural barriers. The following are recommendations to ensure continuing and seamless support to international students on campus, building off of the existing successes of the Career Center.

Campus Partnerships and Outreach

The Career Center has strong and sustainable partnerships with the Center for University Studies Program and the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Program. It is through these relationships that many students first hear of the Career Center, are exposed to the resources it provides, and are able to interact with a Career Center staff member. While partnerships with academic programs and faculty are strong, relationships with Student Life, particularly student clubs and organizations, could be stronger.

One recommendation for stronger partnership with Student Life is to provide "workshops on request" to student clubs and organizations as a form of outreach. Assistant Career Advisors (ACAs), who are already charged with giving classroom presentations on a variety of topics, could take on this task to establish relationships with students who might not otherwise utilize the Career Center.

Partnership with UWB's International Student Services office is extremely valuable in terms of providing a seamless network of support for international students looking for career guidance or internship search assistance. Unfortunately, Curricular Practical Training and Optional Practical Training workshops, which provide information on F-1 visas, work authorization, and job/internship searches, have disappointingly low attendance. As such, it is even more important to provide this information through online seminars.

A final recommendation with regard to campus partnerships and outreach would be to form an alliance for international student success across divisions and departments. This would ensure that international students are receiving support from multiple areas across campus, and would increase communication and collaboration between units. The University of Oregon's Career Center has demonstrated this partnership by participating in the International Student Success Alliance, which brings together representatives from Academics, Career Services, and other campus units.

Online Resources

Online resources are an important way to reach students who might otherwise not make an appointment with the Career Center. Building off of institutions that have provided resources for special populations, including international students and students of color, the Career Center should explore the possibility of expanding their online resources in this manner.

International Student Services at UWB lists the Career Center as a resource for employment, including information regarding "Distinctive Skill Sets as an International Student," descriptions of Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) workshops related to internships and employment, and an explanation of the difference between volunteering and employment (University of Washington Bothell International Student

Services, 2012). One recommendation is to make this information visible on the Career Center website as well, namely by including the information in a resources page dedicated to special student populations. This is particularly important to clarify employment rights and procedures that students might not be aware of.

Another recommendation is for the Career Center to provide its online resources as well as print materials in a variety of languages for greater comprehension and utilization by international students and English Language Learners. Yang (2002) suggests that translation of brochures can help to increase utilization of services by international students when placed in areas of campus frequented by international students. While more work upfront, providing this option for students will ensure that all have access to important Career Center information.

Employment

Yang (2002) notes the importance of employing international students on staff in career centers to ensure that this population feels they are understood in terms of language and culture. Therefore, whenever possible, it is important to interview and hire international students that apply and are qualified for the Assistant Career Advisor positions in the Career Center. This may encourage more international students to utilize Career Center services through informal networks and word of mouth.

Professional Development

Professional development opportunities for Career Center staff are vital in order to provide further training opportunities, particularly on the subject of working with international students, recognizing their needs, and preparing them for work in the United States. ACA staff in particular would benefit from deeper and more targeted training on working with international students to review cover letters and resumes as well as practice interview techniques. One ACA

noted the steep learning curve when working with international students, indicating that it is sometimes difficult to work with this population due to language barriers and cultural differences. As such, a recommendation is to encourage or require ACA staff to undergo targeted training led by ISS staff and international students.

Professional development opportunities through national organizations such as the National Association of Careers and Employers (NACE) and the Mountain Pacific Association of Careers and Employers (MPACE) are easily accessible. The 2012 NACE Annual Conference featured workshops on working with international students; additionally, webinars are an easy way to receive targeted information without travel. NACE is providing a webinar entitled “Immigration Options for International Students” on November 15, 2012 which will most likely prove insightful and informational for ACA staff who have little working knowledge of the options international students have for employment in the United States.

Assessment and Evaluation

A final recommendation includes conducting satisfaction assessments for all students after presentations, workshops, fairs, and appointments. This will ensure that student needs are being met and will allow a chance for anonymous feedback on appointments and events. If possible, allowing a space for students to identify any personal information, such as international student status, would allow for more tailored approaches in the future. It is important to note, however, that differences in values and expectations may lead to dissatisfaction with services, which would influence the results of an assessment of this nature (Crockett & Hays, 2011).

With a culture of assessment is established in regard to Career Center appointments, events, and courses, it would then be possible to construct and implement assessment intended to gauge learning taxonomy (Bloom, 1956). Dr. Daniel Pascoe, Director of the Career Center at the

University of Oregon, noted that in utilizing Bloom's taxonomy to assess Career Center events, the office then has the ability to report on student learning, which provides depth and dimension to the story of UWB's Career Center when combined with information such as number of students served.

Action Plan

Fall 2012

- Develop assessment plan for measuring student satisfaction with regard to services and events provided by the Career Center.
- Attend NACE Webinar "Immigration Options for International Students" on November 15, 2012 (professional and student staff).
- Survey needs and capabilities with regard to online resources for international students and other special populations.
- Survey ability of ACA staff to provide "workshops on request" for peers in clubs and organizations; connect with Student Life to see if this service would be useful.

Winter 2013

- Continue to develop assessment plan for measuring student satisfaction with regard to services and events provided by the Career Center.
- Provide training for ACA staff to increase understanding and response to international student needs by partnering with the International Student Services office.
- Implement changes and additions to online resources for international students and other special populations.
- Provide training, if necessary, to ACA staff interested in providing "workshops on request" for peers in clubs and organizations.

- Gauge interest in a potential “International Student Success Alliance” and identify key partners.

Spring 2013

- Implement assessment plan for measuring student satisfaction with regard to services and events provided by the Career Center.
- Seek to hire an international student to fill open ACA position.
- Provide a “workshop on request” to a student club or organization (ACA staff).
- Identify key partners and stakeholders for “International Student Success Alliance” and meet to identify goals and future organization.

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