

Helping University Students Plan Their Career Paths:
An In-depth Look at Career(s) Services in Scottish and American Institutions of
Higher Education

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As the world of work presents increasingly diverse options of career choices, how do university students face career decision-making, and what are institutions of higher education doing to aid students in planning their career paths? The following research paper will take an inside look at the careers services provided to university students in Scotland, using first-hand research conducted at five diverse institutions of higher education: The University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, St. Andrew's University, The University of Edinburgh, and Napier University. How do university career(s) services in Scotland compare and contrast to services provided in the United States? The paper will also look at career services in American institutions of higher education in order to find similarities and differences between student services in Scotland and the United States. After a brief history of career guidance services in the United States and Scotland, the following issues will be explored: choosing an area of study, the structure of curriculum and course requirements, and the services and support provided by Career(s) Services across the two cultures.

History of career guidance services

Career and vocational development in the United States dates back to the early 1900's with Frank Parson's theory of occupational decision-making. Parsons believed that a need existed for young people to receive assistance in choosing a vocation. In the early 1940's with the societal changes produced by World War II, the G.I. Bill, and women entering the workforce, an expansion occurred in the areas of personnel testing and placement activities. Donald Super continued the study of career development in 1951 with his Career Pattern Study. During this year, professional organizations such as the National Career Development Association (NCDA) and the American College Personnel and Administrators (ACPA) emerged. Career Services appeared in secondary schools and institutions of higher education in the 1960's with the increase in career assessment instruments, computer-assisted career guidance, and information delivery systems. Staff members that make up career services offices in American higher education institutions come from diverse educational backgrounds, holding Master's degrees in subjects such as Counseling, College Student Personal, Business, or Psychology. Career services became a federal priority in the 1970's in the United States, and in recent years, career services have seen an increased importance in working with diverse populations (Niles. S.G. and Harris-Bowlsbey, J., 2005).

The history of careers services in Scotland is not quite as extensive as the history of career development in the United States. According to Lynda Ali, Director of Careers Service at the University of Edinburgh, most of the Careers Services in Scotland were established in existing universities and higher education and further education colleges in the 1950's. Staffing of these services in the 50's was minimal, consisting mainly of men who had retired early, often from the forces or who had been graduate recruiters. The first professional qualification in careers guidance appeared in the 1960's, and today's staff members typically hold a diploma in Careers Guidance. The professional organization for careers services in Scotland, the

Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, is currently conducting a study on the history of AGCAS in the United Kingdom.

Choosing a Course of Study

For students considering pursuing higher education in Scotland, the career decision-making process begins before applying to universities. Students apply to universities in the United Kingdom through the Universities and Colleges Admissions System (UCAS) whereby they fill out one application that is received by up to six universities. Students are assisted by guidance teachers and services such as Careers Scotland in their application process (Dixon, D., 2006). Careers Scotland is an organization that provides services to anyone looking for career information or advice, from students to adults. Services include information on career planning, information about the world of work, training needed to enter particular careers, and labor market intelligence (Scottish Enterprise, 2006). The UCAS application consists of the following: personal statement, employment history, reference (from a teacher), and four to six course choices. Students who desire to study medicine or dentistry must apply by October 15, and these programs are five-year direct entry programs, unlike the United States where medicine and dentistry are post-graduate degrees. Law and veterinary medicine are also undergraduate programs in the United Kingdom (Dixon, D., 2006).

While students should have an idea of what they would like to study when applying to higher education institutions in Scotland, students studying liberal arts and sciences do not need to declare their area of study until after the 2nd year at a university (Alexander, J., 2006). This process is similar to choosing a major in United States colleges and universities. In the U.S., some programs allow students to apply directly from high school, such as engineering, architecture, or fine arts. Many of these programs are five-year programs, so students are encouraged to apply before entering the university. Other majors or schools, such as liberal arts and sciences, education, journalism, or business, require students to complete general education requirements before applying to the program or school (Academic Technology Services, 2006).

Curriculum

The most significant difference between curriculums in Scotland as opposed to universities in the United States is that students in Scottish universities do not take general education courses. Instead, they take courses focusing on their area or areas of study. In most higher education institutions in the United States, students are required to take general education courses in addition to core courses for their major. The following paragraph shows a sample curriculum for a Social Science degree at the University of Glasgow and the University of Kansas.

A social science degree can be completed in four years in both Scotland and the United States. At the University of Glasgow, a student in social sciences chooses three level 1 courses in his first year from the core social science subjects. One of these subjects will be continued as a single honors degree in social science. In the second year, the student chooses two level 2 courses carried forward from two of the level 1 courses he completed. The student also chooses a fourth level 1 class to add breadth. Year three and four are considered honors years, leading to the final degree. In the third year, the student chooses one of 2 possible honors paths, building depth in one particular subject, such as economics. In year four, senior honors, the student graduates with a degree in the sciences (University of Glasgow, 2006). Throughout these four years, the student only takes courses in the social sciences, excluding subjects such as mathematics, natural science, or foreign language, which comprise general education curriculum in United States institutions. At the University of Kansas, a student who majors in a social

science such as economics usually spends the first two years completing general education requirements, including three English courses, two mathematics courses, proficiency in a foreign language, three humanities courses, three natural sciences, public speaking, and three social science courses. After declaring a major in economics, the student takes major-related courses and electives or courses for a minor in another discipline (Academic Technology Services, 2006).

Career(s) Services

While the structure of curriculum differs between Scottish and American institutions of higher education, the career(s) services offered to students in both countries to support them in their academic and career planning have many similarities. The following section will examine the careers services offered to students at five universities in Scotland as well as the typical career services offered at American colleges and universities.

University of Glasgow

Glasgow University's Careers Services provides services to students, graduates, employers, and faculty/staff. The University of Glasgow Careers Service follows guidelines established by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, guaranteeing quality service provided by professionally trained staff. The mission, which "aims to enhance the employability of all the University's students and graduates," is practiced by helping students and recent grads develop and make good use of career management skills, collaborating with academic staff and employers in the development of curricula that provides key skills to increase employability, informing the University and community of changes in the graduate employment market, and marketing students and graduates of the University to all types of employers and training providers (Careers Service, 2005b).

For students, Careers Service provides one-on-one career guidance, hosts employer recruitment seminars and information events, provides career planning seminars such as Effective CV's, Application Forms, and Successful Interviews, offers a comprehensive ranges of current information resources, and provides access to graduate vacancies for permanent employment, vacation work, internships, and part-time work. One unique program offered to students is the Club 21 Business Partnership Programme, which is a work experience program designed to make university students more employable and provide them with the skills sought after by employers (Careers Service, 2005a).

Careers Service also supports graduates throughout their careers. Recent graduates have access to full use of the Careers Service, including guidance appointments with careers advisers. Graduates of more than five years have lifetime use of the Information Centre (Careers Service, 2004b).

Careers Service works hand in hand with employers to provide services for students and alumni. For employers, Careers Service offers opportunities to market jobs to specific groups of students through the vacancy service and Careers Service Publications. The Service also offers employers the opportunity to work with students as part of career planning and skills development programmes, provides information and advice on TargetedGrad (a recruitment tool), and offers opportunities for employers to be involved in work experience programmes such as Club 21 (Careers Service, 2005b).

Faculty are another valuable part of the equation in providing careers services to students, and Careers Service works with faculty to advise and support students. Careers Service provides faculty with advice and information relating to graduate destinations and labor market trends, career planning and skills development within the curriculum, organizing careers related

activities within academic departments, and provides an information Webpage for academic staff giving updates and news on current careers issues (Careers Service, 2004a).

Glasgow Caledonian University

The mission of the Careers Service at Glasgow Caledonian University is to provide quality, effective careers guidance, advice, and information to empower students and graduates to make informed decisions about their careers, learning, and professional development. They do this by improving Careers Education support for schools, enhancing staff training programmes, working directly with students, expanding employer links, developing careers advice and information Drop-In service in the library, and developing a marketing campaign targeted toward staff and students. Glasgow Caledonian's Careers Service also complies with expectations set forth by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (Glasgow Caledonian Careers Service, 2006a).

Careers Service at Glasgow Caledonian offers services to current students or graduates of GCU, staff who are currently studying at GCU, prospective GCU students, and pupils currently studying at schools involved in the GOALS project. Careers Service offers an email information and advice service, vacancy information, drop-in advice sessions and career appointments, careers seminars, employer presentations and visits, and support to academic staff (Glasgow Caledonian Careers Service, 2006b). The office offers handouts including A Guide to Writing Your CV, Effective Applications, and Guide to Interviews. Another useful resource available to clients is *Get 2006*, a Directory of Graduate Employment and Training, listing over 22,000 jobs. *Get 2006* offers valuable information on training, skills, salary information, number of vacancies, application procedures, and information on professions.

Careers Service also aids students who are interested in choosing an alternative course of study. Advisers encourage these students to consider the following: researching a new subject of choice, institution and location, course details, the application process, and future careers plans (Graduate Prospects Ltd., 2006). One possible program for students who might not be able to find the particular program they are looking for at the university is the Caledonian BA/BSc (Honours). This program allows students to choose their own subjects, choose when and how much they want to study, and choose how they study. Students are supported by advisers in personal development planning, encouraging students to find their own academic and professional direction (Learner Resources Webteam, 2004).

University of St. Andrews

The University of St. Andrews Careers Centre serves students, graduates, academic staff, and employers. The mission of the Careers Centre is to enable current students and graduates of St. Andrews to make and successfully implement decisions about what they will do next in their lives by communicating all available options to clients (University of St. Andrews Careers Centre, 2006).

Services offered by the Careers Centre include careers advice, careers information resources, fairs, presentations, and workshops. The Centre's resources cover the following: getting started, career planning, occupational choices, work experience, further study, graduate opportunities, work and study abroad, gap year opportunities, and application and interview coaching. Careers advisers are available to meet with clients from 15 minutes to 45 minutes, depending on the nature of the visit. St. Andrews Careers Centre also has an Information Room that holds physical and electronic resources covering a large spectrum of interests and needs. These resources include handouts, files, books, take-away publications, videos, newspapers, and magazines. The Centre offers a searchable database called Job Shop, which presents

opportunities in work experience, final year and immediate year opportunities. In terms of communication, the Careers Centre sends out weekly emails to students about events, deadlines, and resources. The Centre also produces a quarterly newsletter, *Aspire*, which contains information about recently posted vacancies (University of St. Andrews Careers Centre, 2006).

The University of Edinburgh

The mission of the Careers Service at the University of Edinburgh is to provide careers education, information, and guidance for student, recent graduates, and staff. The clients of Careers Service include students and recent graduates, research staff, employers and course providers, academic staff, and senior university management. The Careers Service, which has two sites (including a site for Science and Engineering), reports to the Academic Registrar. The office is “service” driven, comprised of 36 staff organized into seven teams. The Management Team consists of Careers Adviser Teams, Employer Relations Team, Web/IT Team, Administrative Team, Information Team, and Student and Graduate Employment Team. The Information Team provides resources on type of work, type of employer, further study, selection process, media, and opportunities abroad. The Careers Adviser Teams provide one to one careers guidance. The team also provides career education and employer work information to students and delivers programs in academic departments at the university. The Student and Graduate Employment Team puts on job fairs and presentations on careers opportunities, develops relationships with employers and clients, and handles vacancies. One unique program of Careers Service is First Destination, a program that collects data on graduates six months after their graduation.

The guidance provided by careers advisers at the University of Edinburgh is confidential, impartial, focused on the needs of the client, and delivered by professionally qualified staff. Assessments and psychometric testing are offered, and clients discuss the assessments with their careers adviser. The Careers Service is accredited by Matrix, which sets the United Kingdom standards for Careers, Employment, Information and Guidance, and Careers received one of two Matrix Excellence Awards given to higher education institutions. Current challenges faced by Careers Service include persuading students to start the job search process earlier, involving more academics, delivering services electronically, and meeting demand within resources (The University of Edinburgh Student and Academic Services Group, 2006).

Napier University

The Careers Information and Advice Centre at Napier University is one of the teams that make up Student Support Services. The Careers Information and Advice Centre offers careers advice and guidance, CV assistance, career education, careers information, an annual Careers Fair, and a Vacancies Online service. The Centre serves undergraduate and postgraduate students, alumni, researchers, and academic staff (Napier University Careers, 2006). The Centre also works with international students to help them prepare for the work culture in Scotland, aiding them through mock interviews and helping them prepare CVs. International students have the opportunity to work in Scotland for two years following graduation as part of the Fresh Talent Initiative (Davidson, D., 2006). Prospective students are also welcome to use the services provided by the Centre. The Careers and Advice Centre has two locations, one on the Merchiston campus and one on the Craiglockhart campus. At the main office at Merchiston, clients can speak to Careers staff, pick up publications, make appointments, collect application forms, and access the Vacancies Online service. On the Craiglockhart campus, clients can utilize the Information Room, where the staff runs Drop-in sessions for careers advice every Friday. This site has a display board posting job vacancies and offers take-away handouts and booklets.

Careers advisers meet with clients for practice interviews, advice sessions on CVs and applications, and “quick query” sessions (Napier University Careers, 2006).

Career Services in American Institutions of Higher Education

A common mission of Career Services in American institutions of higher education is to assist students in seeking satisfying and rewarding employment, exploring careers, building skills such as resume writing, interviewing, and giving presentations, locating opportunities for internships and cooperative education experiences, and planning job searches (The University Career Center, 2005).

Career Services in American universities or colleges is either located in the Division of Student Affairs or the Division of Academic Affairs. At larger institutions, academic unit or department sometimes decentralizes Career Services. The University Career Center at the University of Kansas is part of Student Success, which combines both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. The main professional organizations for Career Services in the United States are the National Career Development Association and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (Komives, S.R., Woodard, D.B., & Associates, 2003).

Most Career Services offices at American institutions include staffing positions such as Directors, Assistant Directors, Career Educators, Career Advisors, Career Counselors, Internship Advisors, Peace Corps Coordinators, and Operations Support Staff. Career Services staff members come from different backgrounds, including Higher Education, Counseling, Business, and other academic departments. At larger institutions such as the University of Kansas, the staff is extremely large, and each career counselor specializes in different areas of interest, such as Social Work and Education or Fine Arts. At smaller institutions such as Rockhurst College, the staff consists of three people, including a Director, Program Coordinator, and an Administrative Assistant. The staffing structures vary between institutions, but the services are similar at all institutions, and the populations served include students, employers, faculty, and alumni (The University Career Center, 2005).

Aside from offering career counseling and managing the office, Career Services staff assists with event planning, workshops, and teaching courses. At the University of Kansas, Career Services hosts Career Fairs, Summer Camp Fairs, Etiquette Dinners, Interview Days, Resume Dr., All Majors Fairs, Mock Interviews, and Backpacks to Briefcases. They also offer workshops on resumes, interviewing skills, and networking as well as courses such as Career Decision Making and Job Search Strategies for Liberal Arts and Sciences students (The University Career Center, 2005).

A day in the life of a career counselor includes a variety of tasks, ranging from one-on-one meetings with students to teaching courses such as Career Decision Making. Career counselors also conduct mock interviews, hold group advising sessions, review resumes for students, give and analyze assessments, and plan events such as Career Fairs. The perks of working in Career Services include working one-on-one with students, helping students explore rewarding careers, and being a resource to students who are in the process of discovering future possibilities relating to their career path. Some of the challenges career counselors face include seeing students only once (the majority of students do not take the time to return for follow-up sessions) and understanding diversity issues relating to career counseling (The University Career Center, 2005).

Conclusion

Career(s) Services in higher education institutions in both Scotland and the United States have similar goals: to serve students, postgraduates, staff, and employers, to assist students and

postgraduates in finding rewarding career opportunities, to provide confidential, impartial career advice, and to provide information about vacancies and the current job market. Though the cultures of education and work differ between the two countries, Career(s) Services in both countries stress to students the importance of extracurricular involvement, volunteering, internships, or study abroad experiences in preparation for their future careers. The out of classroom experiences are just as important as the learning that occurs inside the classroom (Ali, L., 2006, The University Career Center, 2005). Whether students are seeking advice on choosing an area of study or preparing to enter the workforce, Career(s) Services in both Scotland and the United States is there to help, offering unlimited resources, career(s) education, and one-on-one guidance.

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